

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions

### Phases of Faith

I HAVE had a very hard week-end—unexpectedly away from home from Thursday evening until Monday night—and must ask my readers to be content this week with detached notes instead of the usual formal essay. Not that notes on some recent phases of faith may not be as interesting and as informative as a regular article. I think they may well be; for the happenings in the religious world are all, more or less, illustrative of the religious mind and of the religious temper. It is, indeed, only when we take religious ideas in their relation to the modern environment that their true nature can be realized. In its primitive surroundings religion has an air of naturalness, of inevitableness that it loses altogether with the growth of civilization. I do not think an enlightened person sees anything laughable in a savage offering adoration to a carved representation of his ju-ju. But when we see in a modern city a man dressed in the style of to-day, speaking the language of to-day, holding a great many ideas of the life of to-day, enter a church and solemnly offer adoration to *his* ju-ju, there is supplied that element of incongruity that belongs to the humorous. And when the same individual solemnly gives a contribution to a society which aims at supplanting the ju-ju of the savage with the ju-ju of the “civilized” man, the humour becomes almost grotesque. A history of humour which would describe its nature, its beginnings, and its interactions with the various stages of civilization would make an important and interesting work. So far as I know the task has never been attempted. If it is ever done, I hope the writer will have the courage to pay special attention to religion. It is a rich field.

\* \* \*

### A Vicar on God

A memorial service was held the other day at St. Andrew's Church, Grimsby, for the crew of the trawler *Jeria*, drowned off the coast of Iceland. The

Vicar, the Rev. T. R. Warrilow, delivered himself as follows:—

I am not a Grimsby man, nor was I born in a port town, but it astonishes me more than I can say to think that with succeeding terrible losses afflicting this town, and which may afflict it in future, the average member of the population is so untouched and unmoved to repentance and prayer. In the Midlands such a tragedy would have changed numbers of people, and brought them to their knees in penitence.

What had the Vicar in mind when he preached thus? Why, because the crew of a trawler was drowned, not in doing something shameful, but in trying to earn food, clothing and shelter for themselves and those dependent upon them, should the people at home be brought to Church in repentance and prayer? Did the Vicar mean that God had drowned these people because they had offended him? In that case they were the ones who should have repented and prayed, but in drowning them he had not given them the chance to do so. Did he mean that God was offended with the people at home, and so had drowned those to whom they were related? In that case one ought to congratulate the people at home for their manliness in ignoring a God who can murder some members of a family because other members have offended him. If God had no hand in drowning these people, what had the Grimsby folk to repent about and pray for? Things seem a bit lazy. On the Vicar's showing what the people of Grimsby ought to have done is to have held a town's meeting, denounced the God who could have saved these men, but did not, or who was so vindictive as to punish the people at sea because he was offended with the people at home.

But perhaps the root of the whole matter is that, being in the praying business himself, the Vicar is only using the drowning of the crew of the *Jeria* to advertise his business, and so promote the interests of the association to which he belongs.

\* \* \*

### The Value of Prayer

In the Ulster Court of Appeal there has just been heard a case which is unique of its kind. An architect sued Canon Murphy, and others for the sum of £1,105 3s. for services in connexion with the building of a convent at Ballycastle. The defendants denied liability, in cash, but said that the architect had agreed to receive in payment the sum of £200, and the balance in prayers and masses for himself and his family. Prayers were to be offered up for the plaintiff and his family in every Church of the order for ever and ever. The judge, in the first trial, had declined to enter judgment on either side, and the appeal was either for judgment or a new trial. Now Freethinkers and others have often asked, “What

is the Use of Prayer?" Some years ago we wrote a pamphlet under that very title. Of course, we said that prayer was not worth anything at all. But we must say that the valuation of prayers, by Canon Murphy and those with him, seems incredibly small. Prayers in every Church in the order for ever and ever! And for every member of the family! Place the number of the family at a moderate figure, calculate the number of Churches of the order that exists, and give "for ever" the most reasonable of limited meanings, and the price per prayer seems extraordinary low, probably not more than a shilling per prayer. We can, of course, understand the Canon believing that the architect has the best of the bargain. It is the Canon's business to sell prayers, and he is not likely to depreciate the value of his stock. But it is the architect who has to buy, and he naturally wishes to get what he buys at the lowest market price. If this sort of thing were common we might soon expect to see market quotations in the Stock Exchange columns, giving the quotations for prayers per hundred in terms of commodities from cabbages to cathedrals.

But this case occurs in the year 1935 within the United Kingdom, just as we are beginning to see the first spate of books and articles explaining how much civilization owes to our having George the Fifth as King! Perhaps we may take this case as one of the instances of the progress that has been made. At all events we are surprised that the Canon has not made the case the subject of prayer. He might have asked God or some of the saints, so to move the heart of the architect that he would cheerfully accept the prayers for ever and ever as more than adequate payment for his work. Or the saints might have moved the heart of the Judge to give this decision. In this way the laughter of the unbelieving would have been prevented and the hearts of the godly set rejoicing.

\* \* \*

#### Man, God and Evolution

Another instance illustrating the incongruity of religious beliefs with civilized life is found in that curious body, the Evolution Protest Movement. The title of this mixture of parsons and left-overs from an almost pre-scientific age, led by the pathetic figure of a very old electrician, who has become an "eminent scientist," only because his conception of science is so hopelessly out of date, follows fittingly the other examples I have noted. The other evening this belated body managed to fill a hall holding some six or seven hundred people, and the speeches were on the level one would expect. None of the speakers seemed to know the difference between a disbelief in Natural Selection as an explanation of evolution and the general theory of evolution. The first is an open question with all capable scientists, the latter is not questioned by anyone worth bothering about. Even the jokes at this gathering of these Bridgewater Treatise survivals were very ancient. And the philosophy was hopeless. Sir Ambrose Fleming revived the war propagandist lie that Germany owed its militarism to the prevalence of the evolutionary teaching that force was the dominant factor in human affairs. This is not even true of Darwinism, and is certainly not true concerning any known conception of evolution. Sir Ambrose had better keep to electricity, he appears to have a very poor understanding of other matters.

Another speaker, a parson, headmaster of Seaford College, said that Bishop Barnes was at liberty to look for his relations at the Zoo, but he (the parson) objected to go there for his relatives. If the learning of Seaford College is equal to the wit of its leader,

God help the students! Some investigators have claimed that apes have a language of a kind, and claim also to have learned to converse with them. If this be true, and the opinion of an intelligent ape taken, he would probably be found to be of opinion that the small amount of mental development in some of his distant relatives made it look as though the degree of development attained was a case of much labour for very poor results.

But why object to a relationship between man and the ape family? It seems to me that it follows from the belief of Sir Ambrose Fleming as well as from that of the evolutionist. Sir Ambrose Fleming does not believe in evolution, neither in the case of man nor in that of the animals. He believes that God made man, but he also believes that God made the ape, and the crocodile, and the serpent, and the fish, and the guat, and the headmaster of Seaford College. But he does not believe that God made these so that one form of life developed from another; he made them all at once, just as they are. There were no crocodiles, but they suddenly came into being, there were no elephants, but they suddenly came into existence from nowhere. There were no men, and they appeared, without ancestry. So on throughout the whole world of animated nature. There need be no end to the process of production because "nothing" defies exhaustion. When a man has nothing at the bank he might just as well draw a check for a million as for a sovereign.

But I do not see how this does away with our relationship to the animal world. The evolutionist says that we are distant relatives of the animal world. The believer in miraculous creation indignantly denies the distant relationship, and affirms that we are brothers and sisters to the apes and to the other animals. For God made the lot. He is the Father of all because he is responsible for the origin of all. He is also the father of the ape and the kangaroo and the rest because he made them. But the progeny of the same father stands in an identical relationship to each other. So when the head of Seaford College goes to the Zoo he might explain to the denizens of the monkey-house that he is not their distant cousin, he is their brother. His father is their father. And I suggest that he leaves the monkey-house before he is able to listen to the comments of its inmates. The remarks may not be framed in the polite language of an Essex Hall meeting.

I find I have quite a number of other items—some from Australia and Africa and the United States, bearing upon my opening paragraph, but I must stop here. There is, as I have often said, only one theory of animal development thinkable and possible—that of evolution. But when one reads hundreds of comments of the kind dealt with, one cannot help sometimes thinking, "Was it worth while?"

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Since angels are men, and live together in society like men on earth, therefore they have garments, houses and other things familiar to those which exist on earth, but, of course, infinitely more beautiful and perfect. The garments of the angels correspond to their intelligence. The garments of some glitter as with flame, and those of others are resplendent as with light; others are of various colours, and some white and opaque. The angels of the inmost heaven are naked, because they are in innocence and nakedness corresponds to innocence. It is because garments represents states of wisdom that they are so much spoken of in the Word, in relation to the Church and good men.

Swedenborg.

## The Missionary Mirage

"Missionaries (Livingstone always excepted) are perfect nuisances, and leave every place worse than they found it."—*Dickens*.

"Broad ideas are hated by partial ideas; that is the struggle of progress."—*Victor Hugo*.

A CERTAIN liveliness is now being shown in religious circles concerning the activities in the Lord's vineyard of German missionaries. It has even been suggested that Teutonic evangelists have been actuated by other and more mundane motives than purely theological ones. According to these same loud-voiced critics, who a few years back regarded all Germans as "blank Atheists," every Teutonic missionary is a pain in the neck to other workers in the same line of business. These be provocative words, and they raise the important question: "Are Christian missions doing the good they are credited with?"

China, for example, is a corner of the Lord's vineyard which yields a very poor crop, and consumes an amount of labour which might far more profitably be expended in more useful fashion. There are circumstances which take that enormous country out of the category of ordinary mission fields. It is only from an extreme John Bullish point of view that the Chinese can be regarded as barbarians. They have a civilization which was ancient while as yet our forefathers were ignorant and painted savages. They have native religions of their own, and, rightly or wrongly, they have a very decided antipathy for all foreign ideas, especially on religion. It is we, ourselves, who, in their eyes, are the real barbarians, and truth to tell, what with the quarrels and animosities of the many Christian sects who seek to make converts, and the divergence that so obviously exists between our precept and our practice, the spectacle offered by European civilization cannot be a very edifying one.

Left to herself, China would have none of us nor of the Christian Bible. We happen, however, to be a stronger Power, so we secure by force a measure of toleration for our missionaries, which all classes of Chinese, from mandarins to coolies, view with scarcely concealed contempt. Perhaps we could better understand their attitude if the positions were reversed; that is to say, if the Chinese themselves were able by naval and military force to extort terms for their almond-eyed and pig-tailed missionaries to preach Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism among British people. In some parts of the world the missionary is a civilizing agency; that is to say, he introduces Western social habits and customs. That peculiar character he does not possess in China. He has nothing but Christianity to offer the Chinese people in various conflicting forms and visions. Not only do they conflict violently with each other, but they all run counter to the most cherished and ingrained ideas of Chinese society. To the Chinaman the highest of all virtues is filial piety, and in his eyes some of the most familiar texts of the Christian Bible must appear altogether shocking and immoral. Christians ought really to look at these things from a Chinese point of view. It is not pleasant to think what unkind fate might befall Chinese missionaries with their unfamiliar rites and doctrines, if they were imposed by batons and bayonets upon the sturdy population of the Black Country, or upon the impulsive Roman Catholics of Liverpool and elsewhere.

What it costs to convert a Chinaman in blood and treasure we do not know, but it is very certain that missionary societies expend upon a hopelessly barren

soil like China an amount of energy and money which might be used to far better purpose in remedying social shortcomings in Britain among men and women, who, destitute of the morality of Confucius, stand in more need of reclamation than the Oriental race whom we pretend, hypocritically, to pity.

Some time ago, it was gravely calculated that the mission-harvest, on the most favourable computation, amounted to the extremely modest figures of two Chinese per missionary per year, and that even so, the quality and reputation of the converts was open to very distressing suspicions. The renegade heathen Chinese has a confirmed habit of turning his spiritual studies to grossly material account, and is even said to frequent mission stations, and even to succeed in being converted in turn by all the missionaries, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, and other varieties, in return for being provided with money and rice. The unfortunate sequel to this rule of conduct is that one slippery and wily scoundrel figures as half a dozen converts to Christianity in as many different missionary reports, and a bad Chinaman is transformed into a worse Christian.

Unquestionably, the matter of missionaries will have to be duly considered; and, as Hindoos and Moslems are looked upon in Christian circles with the same benevolent regard as is the Chinaman, it will be interesting to see what public opinion determines. The missionary question with Orientals, that is to say, missions to them, has always had its background of comedy. Although enormous sums of money are spent yearly, it is not a real danger to Hinduism and Mohammedanism, and is never likely to be. There may be Hindoos and Moslems who have become Christians from wholly conscientious motives, but few people have met such admirable Crichtons. Some of these converts may have become missionaries in turn. It is an easy method of earning money, if not an honest one.

There is even a society in England for the conversion of the Jewish people to the Christian Religion. It has an income of about fifty thousand pounds a year, and the number of its converts appears to be so small that every one of them, on the average, costs the society a third of a year's income.

It used to be alleged against John Bull, that he had little tact in dealing with other races. He trampled on the things he did not understand. Even in Ireland he dubbed the Roman Catholic religion "a heathenish superstition," and behaved accordingly. In the East, and far East, he epitomized his sentiments concerning Oriental faiths by regarding all and sundry as "damned niggers." Of late years John Bull has altered his attitude, and is trying to make amends. Sooner or later the whole question of missionary enterprise will require drastic reconsideration. The matter cannot be evaded much longer by men who may be Christians, who may even be ordained to the Christian ministry, but who most certainly have never been converted to real culture and civilization.

MIMNERMUS.

The dim and shadowy outlines of the superhuman deity fade slowly away from before us; and as the mist of his presence floats aside, we perceive with greater and greater clearness the shape of a grander and nobler figure—of Him who made all Gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of history, and from the inmost depths of every soul, the face of our Father, Man, looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in his eyes, and says, "Before Jehovah was, I am."

*William Kingdon Clifford.*

## Potted Piety

It was said aforetime that "the devil can quote Scripture for his purpose,"—but the cunning rogue sees no necessity to do so, his reputed aims being better served by the leash-collared gentry. How the horned old gentleman must chuckle, if his dignity permits him to peruse the potted piffle occupying so-called "valuable" space in the so-called "national" press! Interspersed among nudities of screen and stage, bandits of State and society, murderers, and the latest models in "undies," Nicky perhaps thinks these clerical inanities most suitably framed to his designs.

Well, well—! circulation demands that a paper must keep in line with "popular" contemporaries, and as we do not wish to lose any of our 7,000,000 subscribers [Catholic Truth numeration, my dear Watson], we have pleasure in announcing that the Reverberant Lou Deadwood has engaged to contribute a weekly soul-stirrer to this journal.

Mr. Deadwood's marvellous facility for manipulating the dictionary to absolutely meaningless moralizations will impress our "national" readers, however much it may confound lexicographers. Our reverberant friend now casts before you the first pearls of his spiritual fishery.

"We shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye."—By Lou Deadwood.

How wonderfully appropriate to our time are the Bible texts! Yet how confused so many of us become when called upon to interpret God's word or the words of the apostles and martyrs in the light of this Volt Age. But really, it is all so simple—otherwise I could not venture to expound the inspired book to you, my friends.

Consider the word "changed." Is it meant that we shall rush into our "glad rags" to dine with the Lord, and, maybe, from thence attend a play of Sanctified Souls or a film of winged and white-robed stars? Oh, no, I think not. It is a "change" in *spirit* to which the writer refers. Nor must it be thought that such a "change" has reference to the blending of a modern cocktail. Rather might we call it an elevation of the soul—but again, let us not apply the word "elevation" in a *spirituous* sense.

Now mark the word "twinkling." Not in the levity of a *wink*, but in a heavenly twinkle does our author convey the beauty of his profound prophecy. Oh, yes, I think so.

Simple and satisfying as the Scriptures may be to those who understand by faith, much misconstruction is to be met with even inside the fold. My readers may have heard the story of the rustic member of a congregation who presented a sack of his best potatoes to the parson because the latter had remarked in his sermon that "the commentators did not agree with him." This, of course, is just an instance of sweet rustic innocence so common to our country-side after nineteen centuries of Church teaching. A more remarkable error was once revealed in the transcription of our present text. An earlier version read "we shall all be *hanged*." The mistake arose when a monk of the order of St. Snuzzle was translating the Abbey manuscripts. It appears that the "c" of the word "changed" had become obscured by a tiny, tickling tormentor which had dropped from the holy man's tonsure upon the page, just covering the vital letter. The Abbot happened to be visiting the monk's cell at the time, and, noting what had transpired, squashed the little creature with habitual nonchalance—and his thumb-nail. Fortunately, a later transcriber discovered the remains, and gently scraped the manu-

script clean. Thus does divine guidance rectify human error.

Under God and the pious editor of this famous national journal, we hope to show how topically the lives, works, and sayings of an obscure and uncouth group of old-time believers can be used. As a concluding and conclusive instance, take the word "changed" again. Are not we good Christians the true *currency* of our Lord? Is not our "change" value good? Then shall we not see to it that we fall not below par on the celestial exchange? Let us look well to the Treasury Bonds of our creed, and guard well the Consolidated Funds of our Faith. Watch—ah, watch! not for the full length of an hour, but for "the twinkling of an eye"—than which space of time nothing can be more brief. Even now the spirit hovers over us in promise of that glorious "change." Watch, therefore: and pray. Need I ask, "Can you spare the time, brother?"

D.

## Unconventional Sermons

### II.

#### OUR NEED FOR RE-BIRTH

My text is from the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John and the third verse. When our Lord went up to Jerusalem it was the time of the Passover, and he found there multitudes of people. His fame had spread abroad, and he gathered round him numerous followers. And one came unto him and asked him questions. The nature of those questions do not concern us here, but I would ask all of you to note the answer. Jesus looked at his questioner, looked deep down into his soul, penetrated all that was there weighed up its worth, of the possibilities and the potentialities of the man, and then answered him in these words, "Ye must be born again."

Now my brethren, I would ask you to reflect deeply upon this saying. How can a man be born again? No wonder that people marvelled greatly, no wonder they exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man."

Remember that Jesus was part of the Godhead. He knew that God had made man; he knew that God had declared all he had made to be good. Why, therefore, should there be a need for a man to be born again?

Remember also that God had endowed man with a spark of his own wisdom. He had made him the Lord of creation, giving him dominion over the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. He was among the things that God had declared perfect. What could it profit man to be born again?

All these things Jesus knew. But he also knew that man was not as he had left him. He sought out new ways. The world was not as God had left it. Sin and death had entered therein. It had been made wicked by man's own action, through the operation of that free-will with which God had endowed him, and without which man would never have sought out evil ways, would never have run the risk of eternal damnation, would never have forsaken or forgotten God, would never have had what the world calls "a devil of a time," would have died without knowing the attractiveness of sinful ways, or the attraction of the path that leads straight to damnation. Nay, without the exercise of that Free-will which led man along the path of sin, there would have been no need for a scheme of salvation, and that text, "Ye must be born again," would never have been written.

It was not the first time that something of this kind had occurred in the life of Jesus. It will be remembered that on another occasion, after he had been

conversing with his followers, examining their faces, looking into their hearts and analysing their natures, he had left them sorrowing, and when he had retired from them, and had reflected upon what he had seen and heard, then, we are told, "Jesus wept." Think of it my brethren. The conversation and the company of the disciples that should have cheered him up caused him to weep. He looked at them, he thought on them, he, to use a colloquialism, "weighed them up"—and wept.

We must take this statement along with our text. We may read one in the light of the other. Jesus was a judge of men. From one another they could disguise their motives, hide their feelings, pretend to an excellence they lacked, to a stability that was not theirs. But with that divine insight that was his, Jesus could pierce all disguises. He knew them through and through, and he knew the kind of work that was required of them if his Gospel was to conquer the world. And knowing what he did, can we be surprised that he had come up to Jerusalem, and when he had gathered his followers round him once more, said to them with sad finality, "It is of no use, 'Ye must be born again.'"

I am sure, if I may so far venture to follow our Lord and Master in his judgment as to say it, that many a preacher of the gospel of Christ, must have felt towards the congregation as our Lord felt towards his disciples, and is tempted to say to them the same thing, "Ye must be born again."

I who stand here know what it is to look into your faces Sunday after Sunday, to note the large, eager way with which you return thanks to the Lord for his manifold goodness unto you, and the careful manner in which you select the smallest coin for the collection box. I know that when you raise your voice in joyful anticipation of being at rest in the Lord, you are making a mental note to take a daily tonic so that your days may be long in the land. While you say to the unbeliever that your religion is the sole guarantee for a healthy moral life, we know that every form of religious belief is well represented in every prison, we know that laws have been passed in this community for the prevention of cruelty to animals and to children, and that even the insurance of the life of children had to be limited to an amount of ten pounds for those under three years of age, for fear of some parents killing their children for the sake of that paltry sum.

This is not characteristic of this congregation alone. It is true to the same extent of every congregation in the land; nay the neglect of the right and the doing of wrong by Christians has been the theme of countless preachers ever since our Lord walked the earth.

Can anyone be surprised that if with this experience around us and behind us we say now, solemnly and sadly, in the words of Jesus, "Ye must be born again?" There is no other possible remedy that lies to hand.

My brethren, I put forward that suggestion with inward tears, and with considerable misgiving. We must take the risk that God himself took when he brought man to the first birth. True, it is a risk. For the result of the second birth may prove as great a failure as the first. No one man can offer any guarantee that when ye are born again ye will be any better than ye are now. You may develop the same faults, and we may have to weep over the product as Jesus had to weep after he had carefully examined his followers.

Would he weep less over you were he to come among you again? Might he not even question whether the sacrifice he made for you was worth

while? Might he not say, "I came as a sacrifice to save you? But had I known you before the sacrifice was made, then I might never have thought it worth while to have left my father's home."

Those who are listening to me now may be no better after they are born again. The prospect is doubtful, the outlook is obscure, the certainty of improvement is small. Yet must the risk be taken. The product of the second birth cannot be worse than that of the first. From the bottom of my soul I feel that, however small the chances of this great experiment of being born again may be, yet it is all that can be done. Some little improvement there must be. We have touched bottom, and deeper we cannot get. Any change must be for the better. My friends, we must face the necessity; we must cast the die; there is no hope elsewhere or in any other direction. Ye must be born again, and pray that God will work a miracle that may justify the experiment.

QUONDAM.

### Religious Fanaticism: Fakirs

ALTHOUGH we possess at least a partial explanation of fanaticism in the superstitious fear that arose among early people, and was nursed and exploited by medicine-men and their successors (the priests of organized religions), yet to me the intense development of the phenomenon is still a source of wonder. Early in this era Christian fanatics began to appear, one of the first, presumably, being St. James, a (traditional) Bishop of Jerusalem of whom it is recorded that he never had a bath or anointed himself, and spent so much time in prayer that his knees became hard like a camel's. Fasting, scarification and other methods of self-torture were often resorted to in Europe during the Dark and Middle Ages, and, of course, fasting has not yet ceased.

But in such practices Christians have been far surpassed by devotees of some other religions, notably by Hindoo and Mahometan fakirs. In *St. Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, a series of three articles on this topic has lately appeared, and we have an up-to-date description, illustrated by abundant photographs, of the many amazing, and in some cases, revolting feats performed by these fanatics in order to demonstrate their piety, to excite admiration, and extract alms and money from spectators.

The Hindoo ascetics (Sadhu) can be seen on every highway in India, carrying a begging bowl of some sort, a water pot and a staff; in some cases a rosary (to count prayers or repetitions of the name of their deity) of beads, seeds, snake bones, teeth, etc.; fire tongs (the iron of which is supposed to protect them from evil Spirits: compare the hanging up of horse-shoes at the entrances of dwellings in our own day a relic of the ancient superstition regarding the magical power of iron); a pestle and mortar in which they grind the leaves of Indian hemp for smoking or adding to drinks and sweetmeats.

Their practices include vows of silence (for a period or for life); fasting or/and abstention from certain foods and drinks; immersion in water up to the neck for days; living in iron cages; habitually wearing a load of very heavy chains; hanging upside down; scourging, branding, mutilating, including the suspension of weights from the body by means of iron hooks held in the flesh; and a devotee may be swung round in the air while fixed to a beam by an iron hook embedded in the muscles of his back; sitting and lying on "beds" of nails (knocked vertically into the wooden structure); fastening one or both arms in an upright position until it withers and cannot then be moved (in the latter case, of course, the man has to be fed like a baby throughout his life); burial alive for a few days or even weeks (some have been found alive and some dead when exhumed).

But the true Fakirs are, it is said, Mohammedan. The word "Fakir" means a poor man, and is synonymous with "dervish," the term "howling dervishes," applied

in particular to those of North Africa, refers to their rites, in which they work themselves up into such a state of wild religious ecstasy that they cut themselves about, eat live coals and broken glass, handle red-hot iron, etc., seemingly without pain or injury.

The Rafae fakirs are a small community in Hyderabad City in the Deccan, and claim to be descendants of the Rafaees or howling dervishes of Arabia. They have a yearly celebration in memory of their founder, Syed Ahmed Kabeer Rafae Kazmi (born in Mecca some 800 years ago), smaller rituals in the palaces of Mohammedans of high position, and demonstrations in the bazaars for the purpose of collecting money. On the more important occasions there is strict fasting, long prayers, reading of the Koran, weird music and drumming, incense, and so on.

Then a fakir proceeds to perform. He takes one of a number of long pointed instruments (which have been passed through the incense smoke and blessed by a priest) and thrusts it through the middle of his tongue, and then, immediately, drives two similar instruments through his cheeks. He then struts about, to the drumming of the tom-toms and the cries of approval, showing no evidence of pain and no bleeding at all. Others do the same or pass the instrument through their necks, the tissue at the top of the skull, the flesh of the abdomen, or/and hammer the point vertically into their skulls with a stone. A still more ghastly performance is the forcing out with an instrument of the eye-ball, and, while it protrudes, dancing about for a while, and then pressing it back with the palm of the hand.

There is a good deal that is unexplained in these evidently genuine practices. Of course vital parts such as the jugular vein and brain are not pierced. But the real or apparent absence of pain, bleeding and suppuration are puzzling features. And it may be that hypnotism—of the fakirs themselves, and not of the onlookers—may play some part, as also may starvation (they fast before the performances), drugging by opium and Indian hemp, the inhaling of thick incense smoke, accompanied by religious hysteria. But there is not yet a complete explanation of some of the phenomena.

It is to be noted, however, that the mid line of the tongue where the organ is pierced, has comparatively less muscular tissue than other parts, and that the pulling forward of the organ may prevent bleeding, a device practised by surgeons in cases of hæmorrhage; and also it is known that a bullet may pass through the neck in a certain way without doing much damage.

These fanatics also do the well-known rope trick, and also that of growing a mango plant in a cocoanut shell. But these are now known to be mere legerdemain. The "rolling on swords" (exaggerated into the story of men who can chop off their heads and put them on again), is also fraudulent; for as the principal performer lies back with his neck on the sword, which is held by two accomplices, it is contrived that the sharp edge of the weapon becomes concealed by a fold of skin, and the pressure is taken on the flat. In this case superficial scratches and drops of blood have been found.

The fatuous theory on which the genuine if not the fraudulent practices are based is contained in the *Hindoo Manu*: "Whatever is hard to be traversed . . . attained . . . reached . . . performed, all may be accomplished by austerities. . . . Whatever sin men commit by thoughts, word or deed, that they speedily burn away by penance." And it is said that the power gained by austerities is so great that even some of the gods themselves have to suffer thousands of years of self-torture in order not to be surpassed by mere mortals.

J. REEVES.

When the Spaniards were masters of the Huguenot port of Florida, a scene of carnage ensued. Soldiers, women, children, the aged, the sick, were alike massacred. After the carnage was completed, mass was said, a cross was raised, and the site of a church selected, on ground still smoking with the blood of a peaceful colony. Over 900 people were killed.—*Bancroft*.

## Acid Drops

A religious leader-writer does not seem to be particularly impressed by the orgy of "faith-healing" going on in Brighton. He probably has seen some of the reports—pathetic in the extreme—of the crowds of poor, unfortunate people, suffering from all sorts of ailments who have vainly attended the services. At all events, he thinks that "there can be no question that the sensational publicity which this effort has attracted can do no good to the cause of religion or to the prestige of the Church of England. Faith-healing appeals to a national love of the marvellous . . . (and Brighton) is a town where peculiar cults have always flourished." And he concludes "that where healing and religion are identified, religion is likely to be the loser." There is a very good reason for that: the only cures faith-healing accomplishes are a few nervous or hysterical cases. In cases of cancer, consumption, Bright's disease, diabetes and similar illnesses—how many cures have been registered? Is there *one* genuine cure?

We don't often agree with a parson, but the Rev. E. J. G. Forse, discussing "Roman Propaganda," in an Anglo-Catholic journal, hits the nail right on the head. He points out that Roman Catholics never attempt to convert the "irreligious"—the unbelievers—but those who are already thoroughly religious, prayerful, devout, well-instructed and even some who already go to confession. This is quite true. A very little push is required to make these people, already nine-tenths Christian, 100 per cent Christian; and to indulge in triumphant boasting about such "converts" would be pathetic if it were not so silly. It is true that some converts claim to have been dogmatic Atheists somewhere about the age of six, but how many over that age have embraced the superstitious tomfooleries of Roman Catholics? Any?

Mr. T. S. Eliot, the well-known poet and man of letters, said at a meeting of the Church Literature Association, that one side of its work was "the attempt to Christianize the world." It also "was anxious to instruct its opponents." He continued:—

Its desire was that the (Anglo) Catholic Movement should have the finest and most scholarly theological support that it could get, because it believed this to be essential, not only for progress, but for consolidating its gains. Without exact scholarship and the best theology the movement could not persist.

Mr. Eliot seems to be very optimistic. Or is he? Where is he going to get the wonderful scholarship which will "instruct opponents," and consolidate the Church's "gains"? Why, it is common knowledge that the Church of England cannot boast of half-a-dozen scholars worth mentioning; and as for its "gains," where are they? What chance would Mr. Eliot himself have converting the instructed unbeliever? We advise him to try his luck.

The attempt of English Catholics to get the Pope to authorize the canonization of John Fisher and Sir Thomas More has been crowned with success. It is, of course, an astute political movement as much as anything else—to boost up England and English Catholics, so that the Pope and his hierarchy can count on the support of this country in times of trouble. Obviously, the claims of More and Fisher to canonization must always have been as strong as they are now; but England was never exactly in Popish favour after Henry VIII. It need hardly be said that some of the reasons given for the success of the appeal for the two "Martyrs" are the usual silly ones. The Pope, it is said, actually received letters from people urging the canonization "recounting favours received through the intercession of the martyrs. Some of them were very remarkable, and at least to their recipients seemed miraculous." There was also "a mass of evidence concerning cures which,

selected from a vast number, seemed the most likely to be accepted as miraculous." Thus is superstition and ignorant credulity perpetuated.

Some of the parishioners of the Welsh Church, which recently "blessed" a crowd of cats, dogs, rabbits, birds, etc., consider it an impertinence on the part of anybody to criticize the priest who performed the ceremony. One of these gentlemen rightly points out that the ass and ox were companions of the Jesus at his birth; and it may be added that a pig was the dear friend of St. Anthony. Moreover, in the Psalms, "the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air are continually called upon to give praise to God"—all of which is so very sublime—or so very divine as the case may be. But what can one say of the mentality of these people. . . ?

A terrible catastrophe took place at Milwaukee. A fire destroyed a great part of St. John's Cathedral, including the Blessed Sacrament. Valuable paintings, ornaments, etc., were also destroyed, but the destruction of the Sacred Host seems to have been accompanied by no divine phenomena. On the contrary, it might have been just an ordinary bit of bread getting burnt to a cinder. Here was a magnificent opportunity for Our Lord helping to save himself—if the Host was himself—but nothing whatever happened. Still it was a terrible catastrophe.

Reading some of the religious weeklies is occasionally brightened by coming across a gem of unconscious humour. The Prize Tit-Bit last week was in the *Methodist Recorder*, where it is solemnly recorded that Gipsy Smith, at Launceston, after a Mission Service asked a young man, "Do you love the Lord?" and received the reply, "Well, I try!" A less amusing story, but with a quaint lack of understanding the implications of the story is in the report (in the same paper) of a Procession (called "a stately procession") in Exeter Cathedral, "headed by a verger bearing a dog-whippers' verge." To teach kindness to animals, no doubt!

The Cinema Church has arrived. Lambeth Methodist Church has decided that as people won't come to HEAR, they may be induced to SEE. We should rather put it that as they refuse to come to church and be bored, they will be asked to come and be entertained. Judging by the Programme and the report which appears in the *Methodist Recorder*, the "entertainment" occupied little of the time, and the rest was the boredom of Hymn, Prayer, Sermon, Scripture reading, and even "nine items of the service were taken from the Anglican Prayer-book. As a transition from service to cinema, the screen offered for reading several of the commandments." The "Film" is not named, but apparently it was one of the "Tom Mix" variety, as it is said to have been "a story with plenty of action from galloping horses." But then the reporter realizes that "Lambeth Pagans are more difficult to win (for Christ, we presume) than natives in Nigeria." So, On with the Motley!

Ex-Dean Inge, in his latest book *The Gate of Life*, pokes fun at the Fundamentalist School (and indeed the whole of Christendom with few exceptions) who "do not see how completely is shattered the theological map of the universe." He complains of the slowness of religious dogma to accommodate itself to modern knowledge, especially of astronomy. "We cannot," he says, "seriously suppose that any of the millions of stars with which the boundless expanse of space is sparsely sown has been chosen as the abode of the Creator and of beautiful spirits." The ex-Dean satirizes all "the alternatives open to us"; he cannot picture the Risen Christ "occupying any position in space." What a pity Dr. Inge cannot in plain words dismiss the exploded theories of ancient nescience. He says everything except that God never existed, and that the Bible and the Churches teach what is untrue.

There is such intellectual anarchy in the Church today that a preacher is as likely to "get it in the neck" for being too orthodox as for being too heretical. We cannot exactly place Dr. James Black, who is being hauled over the coals for criticizing St. Paul. The Rev. Doctor boldly condemned St. Paul by declaring that his famous address on the Hill of Mars "had not enough Gospel in it to convert a tomtit." From China the Rev. Henry Payne writes to the *Christian World* (where the blasphemous utterance appeared) telling Dr. Black what China thinks about him. "I would like to ask Dr. Black," he says, "how he would have begun to speak to such a crowd of polytheists." Mr. Payne has himself "often used" Paul's type of appeal which he therefore thinks a most "valuable model for an approach to an idolatrous congregation." Paul said a lot of foolish things, he taught that "the man sent by God" was going to "judge the world" and that the dead would rise again. There was far too much of the "gospel" for the cultured Greeks to listen to, and Paul very wisely "departed from them."

The Germany of Goethe, and even of Frederick the Great is not becoming less militaristic perhaps, but at least it is becoming more religious under the Nazi regime. Dr. John Oman, Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, speaks with authority. He says, in the *British Weekly*, that "the old materialistic Atheism has entirely disappeared." We imagine it will be found in Hitler's prisons and Concentration Camps. Its resurrection is as certain as that after the darkest night, day dawns. At present, Dr. Oman, continues "the people are convinced that they live in a spiritual world." There is every sign of it. Freedom is denied to citizens, racial hate lives most actively, and obedience to the dictatorship is the chief virtue.

The Rev. E. W. Mills of West Norwood Baptist Church, is not very particular as to the intellectual status of his congregations. He wants an audience, anyhow, and it must be a live audience. He says, "there is more hope in preaching to wooden heads than wooden pews." It should be easy to find Mr. Mills an ideal congregation if he does not mind preaching to the converted.

Father Ronald Knox, brother of the Editor of *Punch*, seems to have a grim sardonic humour all his own. He has been writing on "Miracles," and although the following excerpt has no particular bearing on that subject, it certainly illustrates what we may call the "normal" daily delights of a beneficent Deity:—

When a sparrow flies against a telegraph wire and falls dead, it is He who supplies the force of its flight, and the resistance with which it meets; His Hand communicates the impact of the shock to the little fluttering heart, and draws the lifeless creature down into the bosom of its parent earth. That is the God we Christians worship.

The Church has to face enemies in its own ranks—not "infidel" Bishops exactly, but sober bodies like the Modern Churchmen's Union. This Union has just published a booklet, and circulated it to headmasters for use by sixth forms and students of training colleges. One reviewer says that some chapters "are intensely repugnant to the convictions of most Churchmen." One thing Churchmen will not like, certainly, is that one chapter "denies all distinction between natural and revealed religion." This is bad enough, but in the chapter dealing with the Life of Jesus, it ignores the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, and "is replete with tendentious interpretations of Gospel sayings and incidents, reading into the text much which it neither states nor implies." We agree that this is truly awful. It actually "denies historical authority to the Fourth Gospel," and "says practically nothing of our Lord's deeds," and of his Person, it merely states he "was the best of men." Words fail us to describe such shocking unbelief—and the booklet emanates from such a pious body as the Modern Churchmen's Union! What are we coming to?



Photo by Swaine.

N.S.S. ANNUAL DINNER, HOLFORS RESTAURANT, JANUARY 26, 1935.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

## EDITORIAL:

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THE editor asks the indulgence of his readers for letters that remain unanswered.

A. B. MOSS, T. MOSLEY, E. LECHMERE, and others.—We share your feelings with regard to our late contributor, Mr. Walter Mann. His articles were greatly appreciated, and the indications provided by him of new books of interest to Freethinkers, were very valuable as a guide to reading. His death leaves at present a gap in the paper, which we trust to fill as soon as possible.

THE BRYNANAM PUBLIC INSTITUTE writes expressing its thanks for copies of the *Freethinker* supplied weekly to the reading-room.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

The "*Freethinker*" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to this office.

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1357.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—

One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.  
All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "Midland Bank, Ltd., Clerkenwell Branch."

## Sugar Plums

To-day (February 24) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Picton Hall, Liverpool, on "How Science Explains Religion." Admission will be free, but there are a limited number or reserved seats at 1s. Judging from previous meetings, those who wish to make certain of a seat should be there in good time.

Next Sunday (March 3) Mr. Cohen will speak in the King Edward Hall, Church End, Finchley. This is the second Freethought meeting in this district, but the first experiment last Autumn invited a return visit. We hope North London Freethinkers will do their best to advertise the meeting. Those who can assist in distributing advertising slips will oblige by applying to the General Secretary who will be glad to supply them with what they require.

The Bradford Branch had a very good meeting in the Queen's Hall on Sunday last. Mr. Cohen was in excellent form, and the lecture appeared to delight the majority of those present. The Bradford Branch is working very hard and deserves all the support local Freethinkers can give it.

Even those who have formally given up belief in the Christian religion have a very great difficulty in *outgrowing* it, and we have always taken it as one of the indications that they should still cling to the reality of an historical Jesus. One might just as well believe in the existence of a phoenix, as in the face of all that is known of the development of religion to assume that

there must have been an original Jesus Christ for the New Testament. But religion gives up its hold on people very slowly—it is of too great an age for it to be otherwise, and when the formal doctrines of religion have been shaken off, the religious forms of thought persist under this and that disguise. We are almost afraid to say what proportion of Freethinkers would pass a test designed to determine how much religion they still have left in their mental make-up.

But those who are still held in bondage of the belief that "there must have been some one who served as a foundation," will find very good grounds for revising their opinion after reading *Did Jesus Ever Live?* by J. Gordon Rylands (Watts & Co., 2s. 6d.). In the space of 115 pages Mr. Rylands packs a capital outline of the case against the belief in an historical Christ, and does it without that aggravating display of scholarship which is so beloved of those who have a very questionable claim to the title of "scholar." But the brevity of the summary adds, rather than detracts from the force with which the case is presented; and we cannot think of a better book for those who wish to get a conception of the strength of the case in favour of the New Testament Jesus being a wholly mythical character. The only passage in the book that made us open our eyes a little wider occurs in the "Foreword." Mr. Rylands says, "This book is in no sense an attack on the Christian Religion." Like Mercurio's wound, "'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve." If Mr. Rylands' book is not an attack on the Christian religion, 'twill serve. There can be precious little of real Christianity left with those who accept its teachings.

For those who care to follow Mr. Rylands' lead further, we would commend two other books that have not been adequately noticed. One is *Pagan Regeneration*, by H. B. Willoughby (University of Chicago Press), the other *From Orpheus to Paul*, a History of Orphism, by Vittorio Macchioro (Constable).

Another book recently issued by Messrs. Watts is *Damnable Opinions*, by Llewelyn Powys (2s. 6d.). The only criticism we have to raise here is against the title. Of course every opinion is damnable to some one or to some group. But the damnable opinions in this case are those that are held by a large number of people and enjoy a certain degree of respectability. But after having said this, we hasten to add that Mr. Powys's book is written with manifest sincerity, and with considerable eloquence. Even better than that, nearly every page either commands assent or arouses fruitful questioning, and no book that does this should be missed. Mr. Powys ranges over a wide range of subjects, and one often regrets that they are so sketchily treated. The author's own creed is summed up in the following credo:—

I believe in no God,  
I believe in no immortality,  
I believe that the secret of life is happiness,  
I believe that virtue is heathen goodness.

We have to express our thanks to Mr. R. Speirs for his kindness in providing the block from which the picture of the Annual Dinner is printed. Those who were there will like to preserve this number as a memento, and probably so will those who were not there, but intend "making good" next year.

The West London Branch has had a very successful lecture season this year, and we are pleased to learn that its recent "Social" went off quite satisfactorily. There was a good attendance, and all present enjoyed themselves thoroughly. It is probable that the experiment will be repeated.

Birmingham saints who heard Mr. G. Redborough speak for the local N.S.S. Branch in November, will be pleased to know he will lecture in the Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street, to-day (February 24) on "Myth and Miracle," at 7.30 p.m. The local Branch is expecting a full house, and we have no doubt the lecturer will again give his audience another interesting evening.

Christians so soon forget! Here is a writer in the *British Weekly* calmly ignoring Christ's own claim that He came not to bring peace but a sword, and completely forgetting what the churches said in 1914 about His attitude. The *British Weekly* writer says, "Jesus stood out and out for peace without any exceptions and qualifications." We suggest to him that such pretensions savour of hypocrisy. Is it fear or merely hypocrisy which makes the *British Weekly* refuse to answer or even mention *Arms and the Clergy*, a copy of which was sent them for review.

Another Christian has discovered that the Sermon on the Mount was impracticable, and therefore useless in a practical world. The Rev. John Bevan puts it in this way: "It is quite certain that society as we know it could not go on if the code (of Christ's "Sermon") was the obligatory basis of conduct. We must be realists." As instances of its absurdity Mr. Bevan says, "We know that sometimes we must resist evil, just as we know that it would never do to lend to everyone who asked of us." No Freethinker has ever failed to make the same criticism. Yet Christians continue to tell us that this "Sermon" and the gospels to which it belongs are the only true guide to human life.

## Obituary

### HENRY JESSOP

A TELEPHONE message on the evening of February 12, brought me the news of the death of my good friend Henry Jessop, of Whitkirk, Yorks. He had been in indifferent health for some time, and just a few days before his death he had written me—it was the last letter he wrote—asking me to stay with him over the week-end, on the occasion of a lecturing visit to Bradford. I had just returned from posting a promise to come, when the telephone told me of his death. It was a shock, and I left on Thursday afternoon to be present at the cremation on Friday, in fulfilment of a promise made many years ago. It was no easy task, but it was an inescapable debt to one whom I shall always remember as among the best men whom I have known.

Henry Jessop was in the best and truest sense of the word a self-made man. With neither financial nor other advantages he had succeeded in building up a very large business, and in becoming one of the best known commercial men in his area of Yorkshire. His relations with his workpeople were intimate and cordial. He was one of the first to adopt the eight-hour working day, and in private he often expressed his obligation to those whom he employed, and with whom he had worked.

But one cannot form an adequate estimate of the character of Henry Jessop merely from the standpoint of a successful business man. Many commonplace characters have achieved that kind of success. The best praise that can be given him is that he used his success in life to give expression to qualities that are too often permitted to atrophy in the stress of commercial life, and in the achievement of success. Local newspapers stressed his wide-spread public philanthropy, and the praise was deserved. He gave generously to hospitals, to numerous public institutions, and one of his most recent gifts was a park to his native town. But his private acts of charity were far more numerous, and none but himself and those whom he helped knew about these. But even wide-spread charity is not uncommon. It is to the credit of Henry Jessop that he discovered the real beauty of giving, and therefore reaped on the instant that sense of

gratification and undiluted pleasure which comes from giving help where help is needed. I think that few who required help ever turned from Henry Jessop with their needs ungratified. Sect or party mattered little where the opportunity of stretching a helping hand was present.

Had he sought local honours he might easily have gained them. But he had a capacity for linking up with unpopular causes, and had little liking for public praise. Readers of the *Freethinker* will know of his keen interest in Freethought and in this journal. Whenever help was needed he was the first to respond, and was often the first to make enquiry. He was one of the most generous subscribers to the Freethinker Endowment Trust and when last in London urged me to make an appeal to raise the invested funds of the Trust to £10,000, so that the present yearly deficit on the paper might be met. I thought that the times were not very favourable for appeals of this kind, and now we shall have to trust to carry on for a little longer as we have been doing. The Freethought Party has never had a more loyal or a more generous supporter: but he was a Freethinker, not a sectarian; he had not freed himself from one form of sectarianism to put on the mental uniform of another.

Those who knew Henry Jessop intimately, and by that I mean were able to penetrate to the core of the man, and beneath a rugged expression get to the texture of his thought, would not be long before they recognized that they were dealing with one who had all the temper of a real poet. He had a sense of the more delicate shades of natural beauty, a perception of the music of fine verse, and an appreciation of the quality of human nature keener than is possessed by ordinary men. I have been more than interested in exciting these qualities to activity when walking through a field or along the road with him and have enjoyed his responses. The same artistic feeling was seen in the fine collection of paintings that he had acquired. These had not been bought because they were painted by well-known artists, and because he was able to purchase them; they were nearly all bought on the strength of his own judgment, and many of them have greatly appreciated in the eyes of connoisseurs since they became his. In the very large collection he had, I do not think there was a painting that anyone could say was really bad, and most of them were very good. I believe that some of his pictures are destined by his will to pass into local art galleries.

Henry Jessop leaves behind him a wife, unfortunately at present in poor health, a daughter and two sons who are carrying on the business which their father founded. He was as careful of them in his last wishes as he was during the whole of his married life. He bade them to wear no mourning, to have no public ceremony over his grave, to have a simple funeral, a cremation, with only myself to say a few words over his body. His wishes were carried out in the letter and in the spirit. It was not perhaps quite fair to the large body of the public, who would have liked publicly to rank themselves with his mourners, but as he passed through life displaying concern for the well-being of others, so he resolved to leave it without inciting a public display of feeling. There may be some public manifestation of respect at a later date. After the ceremony at the crematorium, the ashes were taken to Batley Cemetery and deposited in the family grave. Mrs. Jessop and family have lost a good husband and parent.

The Freethought Movement has lost a very loyal follower, and I have lost another very good friend.

C.C.

## The Mere Propagandist

THE impudent assumptions of the pious are a never-ending source of amusement. For example, a weekly paper is advertising a series of articles by the Bishop of London fronted with an appeal to the public containing a portrait of the Bishop in his robes, supported by the slogan that the articles are dealing with questions "Vital to you." It is much on the lines of the War Poster, exhibiting a large portrait of Lord Kitchener with finger pointing forward, and the legend, "Your King and Country need you!" That is, this advertisement of the Bishop's articles purports to tell *me* individually what is vital to me without any consultation with me as to whether I think so. Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof; but one can intelligently anticipate, and it is safe to conclude that what the Bishop regards as vital to me, I regard as not vital and immaterial.

The ecclesiastical leaders are working the daily and weekly press and the B.B.C. at high pressure, to get their mythical messages "across" to the general public. They are evidently apprehensive of the possible arrival of a day when the B.B.C. and the majority of newspapers shall be under non-theistic control; when every kind of thought and opinion will have free and unfettered expression without any let or hindrance. It is very suggestive to hear egregious priests and clerically-minded laymen gabbling and prating about liberty—save the mark—when they very well know that there are sincere opinions held by myriads which they are doing everything in their power to suppress or boycott; and of which, if they had the power to do so, they would prevent the expression by penal legislation of the most relentless kind.

That is *their* estimate of Liberty. We are free to do what we choose so long as we subscribe to the pronouncements of Mother Church!

We read foolish utterances in the correspondence columns of daily papers by fatuous semi-literate laymen, which are enough to make the Angels of Free-thought weep! One, for example, asks: Who can conceive of this universe existing of itself from everlasting to everlasting without an Almighty Creator and master-mind behind it? The *tu quocque* is clear and close to hand. Who can conceive of a God existing of himself from everlasting to everlasting without some progenitor? The Catechism asks: Who made you? And answers—God. But who made God? Did the hen or the egg come first?

Ruskin once wrote an angry reply to a Glasgow student, who asked his advice as to a course of study in metaphysics, to the effect that the youth had nothing to do with metaphysics, the study of which would avail him and his fellows nothing, and that he would be doing much more useful work by studying rats. The professors of theology which they themselves call the Queen of Sciences, are cunning, demnition—cunning. They will say to the youthful pupil: Oh—ah yes—well metaphysics may as an abstraction be defined by a concrete example. For instance, take an architect. He is the metaphysician. The builder who carries out his plan is the physician—in the non-medical meaning of the term. Thus the Christian God is conceived of not only in the Church, but also in masonic circles, as the "Great Architect of the Universe." Pitiable footling, of course, and a shallow device to seduce the adolescent mind into acceptance of the supernatural by giving it a mask of naturalism. And these are the methods employed by the believer—cleric or lay—to reinforce ecclesiasticism, and to secure the *material* property for its continued existence and the propagation of "bunk."

The title of this article is taken from a concluding article by "Medicus," an acute and cultured contributor to these columns (p. 747, November 25, 1934). Therein he says, "To-day in the Modern Church are countless men of high aspirations and fine character, whose interest is truly focussed in the happiness of their fellowmen. I know many of these ministers personally, and to speak otherwise of them would be to fall in with the insincere taunts of the mere propagandist." I fear I must class myself as a "mere propagandist," though I plead not guilty to any charge of using insincere taunts. I am satisfied that the obsession of the personal equation has done much to obstruct the work of Freethinkers. Assuming all the good qualities ascribed to the parsons referred to by "Medicus," may one avoid anything in the nature of a taunt by respectfully enquiring what the devil they are doing in that galley? Like "Medicus," I have met several very genial parsons; but their personal good qualities do not enter the picture in regard to their profession and professional activities. In that aspect I, as a convinced Freethinker—hostile to supernaturalism in every form—must regard them as my implacable foes and myself as one of theirs. And if some outwardly attractive parsons are convinced of the falsity of the bases of their faith, and still continue to preach what they do not believe, how are they to be characterized? Really there is no room for compromise in our battle for Truth and Liberty. I regard the majority of the leaders of the great ecclesiastical corporations as astute organizers of propaganda from their point of view, and that propaganda must be vigorously countered in the light of Reason. I do not think myself reproached by being called a mere propagandist, and humbly subscribe myself,

IGNOTUS.

## The Fish Symbol

It has often been jocularly remarked that the injunction to take no meat but fish in Lent is a proof that Christianity came from fishermen. And, in truth, it will be found on examination that there is something very fishy about the origin of our national religion. Antiquaries make the fish a symbol of Jesus Christ. Christianity seems to have spread at first largely among the fishing population of the Mediterranean. A fish is sculptured on a number of early Christian monuments. It was as much a symbol of the baptized as the square and compasses are of Freemasons. St. Clement of Alexandria says: "Let the dove and the fish remain as signs unto you." Tertullian adds: "We are like fishes in Christ, our great fish; for we are born in water, and can only be saved by continuing therein." About the middle of the fourth century Optatus, Bishop of Miliesia, in Africa, declared that "the single name of fish, according to the Greek denomination, contained in the letters composing it a host of sacred names; ICHTHUS gives in the Latin, Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Saviour." In fact, by taking each letter of ICHTHUS for the initial of a Greek word, we make ICHTHUS=Iesous CHrhistos THEout Uios Soter.

The fish symbol was an ancient pre-Christian one, which came into special signification about 263 B.C., when the sun entered Pisces. *Ichthus* was a title not only of Jesus, but of Bacchus and Horus. The Sibylline oracles, which existed long before the Christian era, contained an acrostic on the word *Ichthus*. Justin Martyr, the earliest Christian writer of undisputed authenticity, in the middle of the second century, appeals to the Sibyl as predicting,

"in a clear and patent manner, the advent of our Saviour Jesus Christ"; and Celsus soon after nicknamed the Christians "Sibyllists." Possibly what the Sibylline books predicted was simply that the equinox would pass from Aries into Pisces—from the Lamb of God into the Divine Fishes. Gerald Massey (*Natural Genesis*, i. 454) says: "When the equinox passed into the sign of Pisces, the fish became the figure of the Christ on the cross. Hence the fish on the pre-Christian cross which is found in Scotland and Ireland, and the fish type which was continued whenever the reckonings were kept." He further tells us that "Horus in Egypt had been a fish from time immemorial; and when the equinox entered the sign of Pisces, Horus, who was continued by the Gnostics, is portrayed as *Ichthus* with the fish sign over his head." Jesus said his only sign is that of Jonas, who was swallowed by a fish, or, as Kenneth Mackenzie says, "absorbed into the *Vesica Pisces*." This writer, in his *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*, cites Dr. Crucifix, who says: "In former days the Grand Master of our Order used to wear a silver fish on his person." Dr. Kenealy, in the curious anonymous hodge-podge he called *The Book of God*, said (p. 240): "The fishes mystically signify the Initiated into the Eleusinia." It was the symbol of the perfected, the elect.

Baptismal fonts are particularly ornamented with fish. Thus at Gemona in Frioul, and Pirano in Istria, are two large baptismal urns, bearing fish. In a village church near Beigetad, in Denmark, around a baptistery, are three fishes, intertwined in the form of a triangle. France contains many similar examples. The fish is distinctly depicted on the baptismal font at Boulogne-sur-Mer; and so, likewise, on that of St. Jacques at Compiègne. In Saint Germain-des-Près, at the entrance where the baptismal font is placed, a male and female siren are seen, with fishes in their arms; while other fish play beneath the waters which undulate around those fantastic personages. Fishes are likewise seen in other parts of French churches besides the baptisteries. In the nave of St. Caprais-d'Agen three fishes are represented. A fish is also sculptured on a statue in the cemetery of St. Jean, department of la Nièvre.

Jesus is said in the Gospels to have declared he would make Peter and Andrew "fishers of men." His representative on earth, the Pope, is par-excellence the Fisherman of Rome, and signs with the fisherman's ring. Jesus himself was called "fisher of men." St. Gregory Nazianzen says that Jesus, the fisher of men, descended into the troubled sea of this world in order to draw men from it like fishes, and carry them up into heaven. M. Robert informs us that on one of the sarcophagi in the Vatican, described by Bottari, Jesus is represented standing on the shore, a line in his hand, and a crowd of little aquatic beings nibbling at the bait. An engraving taken from a cornelian, and published by the Abbé Vallarsi, at Verona, represents a young fisherman, holding a little fish on his hook; against the fish is the word *ICHTHUS*. But the most complete existing monument of this description is furnished by a miniature in the manuscript of Herrade. God the Father is there represented holding in his hand a line, which he casts into the abyss of ocean. The line itself is formed of the busts of patriarchs, prophets, and kings, enchained the one with the other, from Adam, who is nearest God, down to David, who is next to the hook; the bait, in fact, is no other than Jesus the Saviour, attached to the Cross.\*

Beyond the astronomical explanation of the fish as a religious emblem is the fact that much of the food of

the ancient world was drawn from the sea, and fish, from being extraordinarily prolific, became signs of abundance and increase. Major-General Forlong (*Rivers of Life*, i. 246) says: "The fish is universally worshipped in all lands as the most fecundative of all creatures; and, where most valued, the superstitious have offered it in sacrifice to their gods, refusing to eat or injure it." While some abstained from fish, others partook of it as the sacred food, taken as a preparation for a following feast. Thus the fasting, or fish diet, of Lent is a preliminary to the celebration of the spring resurrection.

(Reprinted.)

J. M. WHEELER.

## More About Marcus

READERS of my book entitled *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. His Life and Times* will possibly remember that in the chapter dealing with the treacherous rebellion of his friend, Avidius Cassius, I quoted four letters said to have passed at that period between Marcus and Faustina his wife. The difficulty of reconciling certain statements in these letters with the reported movements of Marcus at the period in question caused me to offer a tentative explanation of the divergency; but I was not then aware that the authenticity of the letters themselves could be impugned. They occur in the *Life of Avidius Cassius (Avidii Cassii Vita)* by Vulcatius Gallicanus. This work was quoted by me from Panckoucke's edition (Paris, 1844), where the editor, F. C. Legay, had not treated them with doubt either in his Notice or in his Annotations. Indeed, except for a brief remark in a footnote to Gros and Boissée's edition of Dio Cassius (Paris, 1870. Vol. X. p. 43) which says that Tillemont suspected them to have been forged, and which, until the other day, had escaped either my eye or my memory, none of the sources whence I drew indicated any such suspicion. Recently, however, my attention has been drawn to the matter by some observations made in an edition of Froute's *Correspondence* published among the Loeb Classics (London and New York, 1919), and also in that of the *Historia Augusta* belonging to the same series.

The revolt of Cassius endured throughout part of the spring and part of the summer of A.D. 175, and when Marcus heard of it he was conducting the Second Germanic War. The letters are as follows:—

### I.—MARCUS TO FAUSTINA

[Lucius] Verus had written me the verity about Avidius: that he desired to rule. For I think thou hast heard what [sort of news] about him the couriers of [Martius] Verus reported. Come, therefore, to the Alban Villa, so that, the gods being willing we may discuss everything. Fear nothing.

### II.—FAUSTINA TO MARCUS

I myself [come] to the Alban Villa tomorrow as thou biddest; I will come shortly. But already I do press that, if thou lovest thy children, thou wilt most keenly pursue those rebels. For both soldiers and generals have become evilly accustomed, and unless they are crushed they will crush.

### III.—FAUSTINA TO MARCUS

My mother, Faustina, pressed thy [adoptive] father, her husband Pius, that in the revolt of Celsus he would first show piety towards his own, and then towards others,<sup>1</sup> for an emperor is not pious who doth not consider his wife and children. Our son Commodus, thou seest at what age he is! Pompeionus, our son-law, is both elderly and a stranger.<sup>2</sup> See what thou doest about Avidius Cassius and his accomplices. Spare not men who have not spared thee, neither would have spared me, nor our

\* *Université Catholique*, Vol. VI.

children, if they had conquered. I myself will follow thy way shortly. Because our Fadilla was ill I could not come to the Formian Villa. But, if I cannot find thee at Formiæ, I will follow on to Capua, which city may relieve my sickness, and that of our children. I would that thou send Soterida, the physician, unto the Formian Villa; on the other hand, I credit nothing to Pisthius, who does not know how to cure a girl, a virgin. Calpurnius gave me the sealed letter to which if I tarry on, I will reply through Cæcilius the old eunuch, a man, as thou knowest, worthy of confidence: to whom I will entrust by word what the wife, the sons, and the son-in-law of Avidius Cassius are said to be throwing out about thee.

#### IV.—MARCUS TO FAUSTINA

Thou indeed, my Faustina, dost act religiously on behalf of thy husband and on behalf of our children. For, at the Formian Villa, I reread the letter wherein thou didst press me to take vengeance upon the accomplices of Avidius Cassius. I, however, will spare his children, his son-law, and his wife, and will write to the Senate lest either the proscription be too grave, or the punishment too severe. For there is nothing that commands a Roman emperor to the nations more than clemency. This made Cæsar a god, this consecrated Augustus, this especially adorned thy father with the name of Pius. Finally, if the war had been decided according to my way of thinking, Avidius would not have been slain. Be, therefore, free of care. The Gods protect me: to the Gods my piety is at heart.<sup>3</sup>

I have designated our Pompeianus consul for the following year.

This correspondence<sup>4</sup> deserves close examination. In Letter I. Marcus bids Faustina to meet him at the Alban Villa. In Letter II. Faustina, whose style betrays haste, promises to come unto the Alban Villa "to-morrow," and yet immediately adds that she will come "shortly." Letters III. and IV. contain no reference to any meeting at the Alban Villa, but they afford evidence that one had been arranged to take place at the Formian Villa.<sup>5</sup> In Letter III. Faustina excuses her not having come to Formiæ, and says that if she does not find Marcus at Formiæ she will follow on to Capua. In Letter IV. Marcus, replying to Letter III., says that he read it in the Formian Villa. Moreover Letters I. and II. refer to the usurpation of Cassius as though it had recently begun, whereas Letters III. and IV. imply that Cassius was already dead, and discuss how his accomplices were to be treated. Hence, since, according to Dio, the dream of Cassius lasted three months and six days,<sup>6</sup> it follows that if the news in question were transmitted with the utmost celerity then possible, at least three months must have elapsed between the two pairs of letters. It is quite certain that Marcus did not return

to Italy upon the revolt of Cassius, for, instead of doing so, he had his son Commodus brought from Rome in order to present him to the troops at Sirnium, or at some other place in Pannonia where he himself was directing the Second Germanic War. Commodus left Rome on May 19, and received the toga at his presentation on July 7.<sup>7</sup> These facts, however, do not prove that the two letters concerning the appointment of Marcus and Faustina to meet at the Alban Villa are forgeries, as it is quite possible that he changed his purpose, thinking it better to stay with the army, and to have Commodus brought him for presentation. As to the second pair of letters, the two which contain the appointment to meet at the Formian Villa shortly after the death of Cassius, and before the fate of his accomplices was determined, the last one distinctly states that Marcus had re-read the first one at Formiæ. There is no other evidence in proof of his return to Italy at this time. But, if the visit were a private affair, it would not be commemorated by medals or mural inscriptions, and might escape the notice of his biographers, whilst, even though some of the many whose works are lost perhaps did report it, the confused and desultory few whose writings still survive may easily have failed to transmit the record. It is not difficult to imagine either the why or the how of such a visit. The time occupied by the messengers from Syria, who reported to Marcus in Pannonia the revolt of Cassius, and by those whom Marcus immediately sent from Pannonia to Rome for the purpose of fetching his son Commodus to the Front, would be about three weeks; and therefore the three months and six days rule of Cassius would terminate near the end of July or in the beginning of August. As Marcus did not set off to oppose Cassius until after the presentation of Commodus on July 7, he could not have got far on the way to Syria when the head of Cassius was brought into his presence. He may have been in Illyria, intending to march along the Via Egnatia, which on that side of the Adriatic ran from Dyrrhachium to Byzantium.

The voyage from the port of Dyrrhachium to the port of Brundisium was short and safe, and from Brundisium to Rome led the Via Appia, or "queen of roads," as Statius terms it.<sup>8</sup> This passed through Capua, and afterwards through Formiæ, some six score miles from the metropolis. Marcus could easily have taken this route, telling his army to await him at some spot in the line of march and leaving it in charge of Martius Verus, whom a very few weeks ago he had designed to be its actual leader against Cassius.<sup>9</sup> As regards the object of the visit, this might have been to join his wife and his unmarried daughters in order to take them away with him on his eastern journey, which in fact he made in their company. Even before leaving Illyria for Italy, Marcus may have sent a message to Faustina at Rome, asking her to meet him at the Formian Villa, and to send him word to Brundisium, or to some other halting place on his journey to Formiæ. She evidently took into account that he might be delayed, for she promised to go on to Capua, if she did not find him at Formiæ. Besides this, unless the physician whom she requested Marcus to send to the Formian Villa were somewhere else than Marcus was, she must have thought it possible that he might dispatch the man so as to get there some time before his own arrival could take place.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be concluded)

<sup>1</sup> The text has *primum—sic* where *primum—deinde* was to be expected.

<sup>2</sup> He was a native of Antioch.

<sup>3</sup> *Dii me tumentur: Dis pietas mea, Et musa cordi est.* Horace (*Ode i. 17*).

<sup>4</sup> The present version is more literal than the previous one.

<sup>5</sup> Alba Longa (now Albano) and Formiæ (now Formia) were ancient cities turned into places of pleasure, where opulent Romans had luxurious villas. The first is within easy reach of the Eternal City, whilst the second is about two thirds of the distance from there to Naples. Formiæ graced a lovely bay which had at its western extremity the noble harbour of Caieta (now Mola di Gaeta); Albanum was the name of the imperial villa at Alba Longa; and Formianum would be that of the one at Formiæ. This last edifice had belonged to Cicero, who refers to it in his letters; and ruins thereof are reported to be still in existence. (See Dr. William Smith's *Class Dic. of Biog. etcetra*, London, 1850, and Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son's *Guide to Southern Italy*, London, 1899).

<sup>6</sup> lxx. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Lampridius, *Com.* 12, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Silv.* ii. 2, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Speech of Marcus recorded by Dio. (lxx. 25).

## Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

### EXPERIENCE

SIR,—Without in the least wishing to provoke controversy, may I append one or two brief observations to your editorial note on my letter of February 10, 1935.

The idea of "conceptual experience" had not escaped me. But it means to me simply that we conceive of certain events *as if* they were given to us in experience. But if scientific experience is reliable they were not in fact so given. If it be said that we cannot think about them except *as if* they had been given in experience, I agree. If it be said that it is futile to pursue what is beyond experience because it is impossible to conceive it, I agree. But if it be said that our analysis of experience does not even postulate it, I cannot agree. To me there is a world of difference between these last two positions. Finally, if it were said that the postulate referred to might just as well be "God," I should refer the speaker to *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought*. The following quotations occur in the course of a very fine exposition of this very fallacy:—

The question of the existence of, or the belief in God, has no connexion whatever with the "problem of existence." The question of God belongs to theology, that of existence belongs to philosophy.

There is no logical connexion between these two questions, and, as a matter of fact, they have distinct and independent origins.

### MEDICUS.

[My difficulty lies in "conceiving" anything save in terms of experience, and also in understanding how experience can postulate anything of which it can form no conception. It appears to me that it would be as mysterious as "God," and about as useful. And when we come to the region of the inconceivable one might as profitably remain silent as to make assertions, either by way of postulate or affirmation, concerning its existence.—C.C.]

[Letters from Mr. G. H. Taylor and others are held over till next week.—EDITOR.]

Catholic historians make much of the fact that the Church busied itself, after the Third Crusade, with the liberation of Christians held by Moslems, and point with pride to the Trinitarian Order founded for the purpose in 1198, which ransomed, or otherwise, rescued 90,000 such captives during the three centuries following, including no less a person than Cervantes. The Mercedarians, devoted to the same humane end, are said to have brought home nearly 500,000 between 1218 and 1632. But it is conveniently forgotten that these worthy brethren gave all their attention to Christians enslaved by the heathen, and had none left for the Christian slaves of Christians. Nor is there much point in showing that Pius II. denounced slavery as a great crime (*magnum scelus*) in 1462, for by that time it was almost extinct in Europe. Nor in showing that Pius VII. urged the Congress of Vienna to suppress the American slave trade in 1815; for England had passed laws against it in 1807, and John Jay had tried to have proscribed by the treaty of Paris in 1783. The men who really launched the long agitation which finally disposed of slavery in Christendom were, in the main, not Christians at all, save in name.—H. L. Mencken, *Treatise on Right and Wrong*, pp. 31-3.

Slavery and the slave-trade are older than the records of human society; they are found to have existed wherever the savage hunter began to assume the habits of pastoral or agricultural life; and with the exception of Australasia, they have extended to every portion of the globe. They pervaded every nation of civilized antiquity. The founder of the Jewish nation was a slaveholder and a purchaser of slaves.—*Bancroft*.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Ect.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

### LONDON

#### OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.30, Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.30, Sunday, Messrs. W. B. Collins and E. Gee. 3.30, Messrs. Wood, Bryant, Collins, Gee and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale outside Park gates, and literature to order.

#### INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, Hall No. 5, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4): 7.30, Miss H. Pocock, S.R.H.M.I.H. (Eugenics Society)—"Eugenics—Our Responsibility as Citizens."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.16): 7.0, Dr. Cooke Taylor—"Germany To-day."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): 11.0, G. E. G. Catlin, M.A., Ph. D.—"The New Religion of the Sword."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4): 8.0, Monday, February 25, Mr. P. Goldman—"Psycho-Analysis and the Emotions."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (No. 5 Room, Grove House, High Road, Leyton, E. 10): 7.30, Debate. *Affir.*: C. Lester, S.P.G.B. *Neg.*: H. S. Wishart, N.S.S.—"Which Organization should the Working-class Support?" Chairman: W. G. T. Cole, F.C.C.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. ("The Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Debate—*Affir.*: A. I. Morton. *Neg.*: L. Ebury.—"Is Non-Political Freethought Futile?"

### COUNTRY

#### INDOOR

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Shakespeare Rooms, Edmund Street): 7.30, Mr. G. Bedborough—"Myth and Miracle."

BRADFORD SECULAR SOCIETY (Godwin Commercial Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford): 7.0, Mr. A. Ingle—"Civilization."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Morals in the Making."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, M'Lellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mr. James Richardson, F.R.E.S.—"Science and Humanity." *Freethinker* and other literature on sale at all meetings.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S.—Saturday, February 23, Merseyside Freethinkers' Third Annual Dinner.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Picton Hall, William Brown Street, Liverpool): February 24, 7.0, Chapman Cohen—"How Science Explains Religion."

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers, Drake Circus): 7.0, Mr. James—"Religion and Sex."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Hall, Laygate): 7.30, Friday, February 22, Mr. A. Flanders—"Christianity and Unemployment."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, Miss E. Moore—"Protestantism and Fascism in Germany."

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