

# THE FREETHINKER

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*Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,  
Letters to the Editor, etc.*

Views and Opinions

Man and God

It is a characteristic of pre-evolutionary thought that there should have been a discussion whether a child was born an Atheist or a Theist. On the one side it was said the idea of God was wholly the result of education, on the other that religion was inborn, although education might eradicate it. More accurate understanding of the problem showed that the question had not been answered correctly because it had not been properly stated. Mr. Du Cann in his interesting article which appeared in this paper for August 27, and which I dealt with in part last week, came back to this point of view by asking whether as W. S. Gilbert "pleasantly fabled that we are all born Liberals or Tories, might it not be that we are born with a bent to Animism or Materialism, that is to say, born believers or disbelievers in God." Gilbert did not, of course, suggest that we were born either Liberal or Tory, he was laughing at the notion that the population could be divided into two political bodies only. I think it is equally erroneous to assume that people are born either Atheists or Theists.

Mr. Du Cann thinks he was born with a religious mind. I see no reason for his taking such a poor view of his native endowment. The article he has written proves that if his parents had that ambition, their intention has been frustrated by their offspring, even though some of the influence of early religion is still discernible in his writing.

We may take the whole of what Mr. Du Cann says on this head by citing the following:—

Let us get to the root of the matter, which is, "Is there a God of any kind at all?" Take away the Church and the Bible and put a baby on a desert island, and as he grew up would he not pose that question to himself, and would he not answer it somehow? If I had been that baby would not my answer have been in favour of God's existence?

I do not think so, unless the Du Cann baby had crowded into a few years of existence an evolution it

actually took the race some thousands of generations to achieve. But taking the baby as following the track the human race followed, the process would have been as follows. For a long, long time the Du Cann baby would have been aware of things around it, some of which were pleasant and some of which were unpleasant. It is the latter that would have attracted most attention, just as a boil on the neck attracts more attention than a clear healthy skin. He would have found these things very curious and rather puzzling, and after some time he would have advanced to the stage of thinking that things happened because of some powerful person, or persons, who were responsible for all that occurred. He would then begin to pay them reverence, given them sometimes in the shape of sacrifices, and so have gradually brought the gods into being. But by this time he would have forgotten how the whole thing had proceeded, and so would end by reversing the process and conclude that the gods had made him, when he had really made the gods.

This would have been a tremendous blunder for the Du Cann baby to make, and it might have been avoided by its parents sending along a nurse with it who could have explained things in terms of civilized life instead of leaving it to find out everything for itself.

Now this is not a mere metaphor, actually it is the account which modern science gives of the origin of the belief in gods. Mr. Du Cann's way of stating the question is quite wrong. It is what I believe is called at law a "leading question," that is, a question put in such a way that the person questioned is induced to give the answer the questioner desires. And if put by the prosecution it would be ruled out. The correct way to put the question would be this. Place a baby on a desert island. Let it be assumed that by some means the child will find food and will grow up, and as it grows it will receive the instruction in simple science in a form it would get in civilized life. Would the child then, of its own accord, postulate a God? I think the answer is very definitely, No. I am not a lawyer, but I have always considered it common sense to examine an indictment before pleading to it.

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"Good" Religion

An apparently more serious charge against the *Freethinker* and *Freethought* is that both ignore "the good of religion." Mr. Du Cann does not say what he means by religion, so I must suggest a definition myself. And the only definition that embraces all religions, and a definition is obviously faulty if it does not cover all the phenomena with which it deals, is "belief in supernatural beings." Apart from this you may make ethical, or emotional, or intellectual excursions, but you will not have a definition which includes all religion, primitive and modern, savage



and civilized. Belief in the supernatural is the one thing that all religions have in common.

Now when I take the statement that we ignore the good of religion, I am a bit puzzled to know what "good" it is that can be said to be an essential part of religion. I know, of course, that many good things have been associated with religion. In the name of religion quite a number of good things have been taught, but, *per contra*, they have also been taught without religion. In a thieves' kitchen one will meet with honesty—in the division of the "swag," loyalty—in not splitting on a pal, courage—in risking imprisonment for committing a burglary, and so forth. It will also be remembered that Charles Peace the notorious burglar was very fond of music. Or to take an illustration that Mr. Du Cann will see the more readily, doctors, lawyers, and business men manifest, in the course of their respective pursuits a great many qualities which everyone will agree are not essential parts of their professional lives. Mr. Du Cann will, I think, agree that these ethical and intellectual qualities exhibited by the classes named come to them as members of society, and not from the professional side of their lives. Society insists that without regard to the social qualities manifested as doctor, lawyer, or business man, each must obey certain moral conventions that are imposed by society upon all its members. If these conventions are not observed, or if they are outraged to a too great extent, society everywhere has a simple way of dealing with those who refuse to toe the social line. They are punished, or in extreme cases eliminated.

Now why does not this reasoning apply to religion? There is religious belief—existing to some extent, and with a considerable number of people everywhere. But there is also the coercion of social life which is more general in the pressure exerted, and more insistent in its commands. For if ignored the ethical demands of society issue a very sharp reminder, and a very prompt punishment. I submit then that what Mr. Du Cann calls the "good" of religion, is the good associated with religion, and there is an important and vital distinction between the two statements. The first implies that the good arises out of religion, the second that the "good" of religion is forced upon it by that social pressure which fashions all of us to a greater or lesser degree. To justify his use of such a phrase as "the good of religion," Mr. Du Cann would need to show that there is some ethical or intellectual good associated with religion that cannot exist apart from it.

\* \* \*

#### Religion and Art

The only light that Mr. Du Cann throws on his statement that we ignore the good of religion is in the following passage:—

When I look on Salisbury Cathedral, or when I read Milton's sonnet *On His Blindness*, I am awed by the stupendous achievements of man's religion.

So also should I be overawed with the stupendous achievements of man's religion—if music, and poetry, and architecture were exclusively the products of religion; but I see no better reason for concluding that these things are products of man's religion, than I attribute Milton's sonnet to his blindness, Beethoven's music to his deafness, or Byron's poetry to his lameness. There is an obvious distinction between the occasion of genius and its origin.

Now I marvel just as much as does Mr. Du Cann at the genius of man when I look at a fine building (I do not confine myself to Cathedrals) or listen to fine music, or read a fine piece of writing, but, strangely (to Mr. Du Cann), I do not think of any of these things as part of religion. When I listen to Wagner's

"Meistersingers," I do not feel religious, but I do marvel at the process that has brought that opera from the crude chanting and the sense of rhythm of a naked savage. When I look at a fine building—devoted to religion or aught else, I marvel at the genius of man, not men, that from the mere fashioning of a shelter covered with sticks and mud has developed the architecture that Mr. Du Cann so greatly admires. And when I look at that miracle of ingenuity, a modern ship, I am in awe at the marvellous story that from a floating log has developed stage by stage an ocean greyhound.

Now in all seriousness how does Mr. Du Cann explain the differences between us? I can easily explain him, but how does he explain me? I might be a "sport," but there are too many of me for that, and anyhow I decline to look at Mr. Du Cann as an unexplainable miracle.

Now, I insist that a sound philosophy of life must explain all of us, the Theist and the Atheist, the philosopher and the fool. A philosophy that does not do this is a mere sham. A theory of evolution that left half the animal world out would be very unsatisfactory; and a philosophy of art, music, or architecture which explains part of it as due to religion, and leaves the other half with no explanation at all, is really not worth considering. It leaves a part of life in the air; it has a very close connexion with "God only knows!" or "It is the work of God"—and that I may remind Mr. Du Cann was called by Spinoza, the asylum of ignorance. I may also remind Mr. Du Cann that architecture did not commence with Cathedrals, places of primitive worship, or in connexion with any kind of religious belief. It began with the simple desire of semi-animal human nature to provide a shelter, and the roofing of a shelter with pieces of trees, and the dabbing of them with mud set going the train of improvements that finds expression in the Cathedrals that arouse Mr. Du Cann's admiration for religion.

There is a further consideration that may be noted. To-day the finest architecture, the finest paintings, the finest music does not occur in connexion with religion. Creative artists find their inspiration, apart from religion, while religious architecture either follows civic architecture or repeats the stereotyped religious form. Why is this so? Does it not look as though at any time one must look at the art of a people—whether plastic or literary—as an expression of the life of the time rather than to the inspiration of religion which must always represent the thought of the past rather than the life of the present. In that case it would seem that Mr. Du Cann has misdirected his admiration, and that when he looks at a cathedral, or admires a poem, he should properly marvel at that human genius which starting at zero is able to clothe every shade of human feeling, good or bad, all the glory and terror of nature, all the love and hatred of man, in coats of colour, in armour of stone, in the glory of great music, and in the magic of the written word.

Of course if Mr. Du Cann means no more than that religion has had associated with it fine buildings, superb architecture, music, and even great literature, I agree. I would even grant more by pointing out that in the Freethinker's philosophy most of our institutions began under the shadow of religion, and some bear the impress of religion until to-day. But this is no more than an illustration of the principle of supply and demand, and that the genius of man will always be influenced by his environment. I might even suggest that there is also the question of an economic factor, and that the Church bought the artist as it bought other men and other things as an aid to its own power.



**Life and Man**

I can but briefly touch on one more point associated with what Mr. Du Cann has called "the good of religion." In all its stages of life the problem before man is to appreciate the art of living. If he cannot do that he disappears. His qualities, his spontaneous reactions, his appetites, must be such as will preserve his existence. The dice of life are thus heavily loaded on the side of what is necessary to preserve life, and in a lesser degree in favour of what we may call the art of life. This applies to whatever institutions he fashions. An institution that leads to a continuous worsening of life dies out and the people with it. But a harmful institution may continue, provided its harmfulness does not go beyond a certain point. There is thus set up a contest, sometimes hidden, sometimes open, between religion, which is a fossilized conception of man and the world, and that view of the world which is based upon increased knowledge and understanding. In that fight religion must modify its teachings or disappear. In this way we get what are called "improvements" in religion, but which are really signs of religious disintegration. In our own times we have seen this process at work in the surrender of the infallible character of the Bible, in the giving up of such sadistic, brutalizing doctrines as eternal torment, even in the fact that Mr. Du Cann may safely express doubts of orthodoxy, and I may attack it root and branch. Apply this principle throughout history and you will see it working, either forward or backward, but forward from the era of human sacrifice down to the claim for an enlightened "Sunday." It means that, in the long run, either life kills religion or religion kills life. In its attempt to control life, religion uses every possible weapon—music, art, literature. I agree it has become an expert in using these weapons, but I see no cause for praising religion on that ground. Mr. Du Cann, in his plea for religion, appears to be acting as though he were appealing for the release of a convicted forger because of his supreme skill in imitating signatures.

CHAPMAN COHEN

**A Niagara of Nonsense**

The world already has all the charlatans and all the rubbish it can cope with.—*James Agate.*

The press is the voice of Democracy.—*W. T. Stead.*

One of the things of which Britons should be proud is the freedom of the press. It was achieved by men who were the bravest of the brave, and only after a struggle which was Homeric in its intensity. The pioneers were men of the highest principles, even idealists, who saw in the newspaper an instrument of human progress. Men of this breed are never very numerous, and it was only to be expected that their descendants should lack some of the aspirations and enthusiasm, and fall short of the magnificent ideals of the pioneers.

To-day, the newspaper press is more prosperous than at any time in its history. It circulates in terms of millions of copies; its editors are paid with four-figure salaries; and a proportion of the leading owners are millionaires. Yet there is a fly in the ointment. With a few bright exceptions, newspapers are further from the ideals of the men who fought for a free press than ever. Culture has been succeeded by half culture, and sensationalism by mere rubbish, until what was once a beneficent production radiating knowledge, has become a menace to the intellectual life of the people of this country.

What is the cause of this change for the worse?

It is the almost complete commercialism of the press. Once, journalism was a profession; now, it is a trade. It once had a moral function; in these latter days it far too often has no more ethical significance than the manufacture of sausages. The old-time editor provided the news, and presented a certain view of public policy which he believed to be good for the community. It was sober, responsible, and, in its way, did good. Nowadays, financiers invest their money in newspapers, just as they buy iron, copper, soap, or any other article, in order to get a good "rake-off." And the editors and staff must get that money for the owners, or get out. The editor, once captain of his own ship, is now little better than a bell-hop. The man who really controls the newspaper may be as illiterate as a turf-accountant, whose reading consists of the racing calendar, and "Foods for the Fat." He is, like all his class, simply a guinea-pig.

The man of importance on the paper itself is not the editor, but the advertisement manager. He it is who insists on the huge circulations on which he bases ever-growing charges. In order to obtain more and yet more readers, the editor has to "tickle the ears of the groundlings." That is why newspapers trade so largely in scare-stuff, and rubbish. Daily, continuously, the silly traffic goes on playing on people's nerves, retailing muck, pandering to superstition, buttering-up vested interests, until any man with a modicum of culture may be pardoned at becoming a little ashamed of his own species.

Maybe, the press proprietors will retort that there is a demand for their stuff. Of course there is. There is also a demand for dangerous drugs. But what becomes of the glorious free press, the instrument of education and enlightenment? Our ancestors flocked to see unfortunate people burnt alive; they enjoyed public executions; they paid to see mad people whipped in Bedlam. What sort of national service does the press give in pandering to the lower instincts, which only need some extra excitement to bring horrors gibbering to the surface of our social life?

This problem of the liberty of the press degenerating, under the stress of sheer commercialism, into the licence of the press, is a difficult one. It is a sorry sight to see "the glorious free press" descend to such a shabby level. For years on end the editors have made a couple of cheap dictators the bogey men of Europe. For years the editors have made an endless serial story of impending horror and disaster out of the European situation. For years they have disfigured their pages with ridiculous horoscopes, and accepted the advertisements of charlatans. And all this niagara of nonsense is regarded as being legitimate under the banner of free speech. No democrat wishes to limit the liberty of the press, for while there is free speech there is the opportunity for an independent voice to be heard. Our press, with all its faults, is manifestly superior to the press of a Dictatorship, where all the instruments of propaganda play the same sorry tune, and do it very badly. That, at least, is to our advantage. But why in the name of common-sense should our own newspapers retail muck, and pretend that the press is an instrument of education and enlightenment? It is hypocrisy gone mad.

The English press is in a bad way. Editors and journalists can neither do justice to themselves nor serve their readers with honesty, in a press absolutely dominated by advertisers and vested interests. In spite of their rivalry, the British newspapers are of one mind in suppressing advanced thought, which is understood to be fatal to fat dividends. The conspiracy of silence against Freethought borders on the miraculous. The papers devote columns to the most disgusting murder cases, and report divorce and police-court cases. In the summer, when space is



plentiful, there is always the sea-serpent, the big gooseberry, and other sensational rubbish, vamped up from the old newspaper files. In the midst of a world-war room space was found for accounts of "angels" on battlefields, or the alleged miraculous happenings to stone statues of the Madonna. Let there be no mistake on this point. The writers of this rubbish do not all believe it. It is not entirely due to fanaticism or ignorance, but simply done to promote huge circulations. It is, in the last analysis, a matter of smart business. Journalists are not all nit-wits. They know better than that Freethinkers are weak, foolish, and ill-conditioned persons, but they wish to court the favours of the many-headed orthodox. The platitudinous nonsense of the clergy, and of the illustrious obscure, are reported regularly in the newspapers, but the leaders of Freethought seldom have a line devoted to their work, unless it be of abuse or misrepresentation.

Newspapers are commercial speculations. The "glorious free press" is an ironical term, for it is neither glorious nor free. It exists to pervert and corrupt the public mind, as far as possible, in favour of certain vested interests which are never openly stated. Any claim that it once had of being a vehicle of education and enlightenment has long since been lost sight of; and some of the more popular news-sheets are, intellectually speaking, of no more ethical significance than a panorama of the Lord Mayor's Show, "The pity of it, Iago, the pity of it"!

To serve up scares, sensations, horrors, and rubbish almost every other day the entire year may be good business for the proprietors, but it is all a kind of drug, and, in its way, highly dangerous. And the purveyors of this drug-habit camouflage their shameful traffic under the name of the freedom of the press. The trouble is that so little can be done in the matter. The utmost that can be hoped for is that sober readers may transfer their patronage to the few reputable newspapers that remain to us, and by this means induce the errant periodicals to at last return to some sense of decency and responsibility. For, if the daily reading of a great people consists of almost unadulterated rubbish, it must, in the long run, debase the intellectual currency, and help to debauch the mind of a nation. The freedom of the press has been hardly won; but being won demands eternal vigilance which is the price of liberty, to hold as well as to win.

MIMNERMUS

## Man's Supreme Benefactor

THOMAS HUXLEY once defined science as organized common sense. In his *First Principles*, Herbert Spencer declares that: "Knowledge of the lowest kind is *un-unified* knowledge; science is *partially-unified* knowledge; Philosophy is *completely-unified* knowledge." Clearly, philosophy so defined is profoundly distinct from the airy speculations and fantasies of mere metaphysics which usually have very little relationship to ascertained fact.

Science has developed from the observations, experiments and reflections of primitive times. Early man made his stone and bone implements to aid him in the battle of life. Primitive food gatherers and fishers unconsciously prepared the way for a later biological science. Their advancing mastery of flint and fire and their discovery of the art of alloying copper and tin in the production of bronze, with the later utilization of iron, were all stages in the evolution of modern science. Prehistoric survey of the skies led to astronomy, and the crude husbandry of

primeval ages laid the foundations of contemporary scientific agriculture.

Modern science was practically inaugurated by the influences emanating from Moslem Spain. Roger Bacon, an early forerunner, was deeply indebted to Saracen precepts. Directly and indirectly the later exponents of science—Descartes, Newton, Boyle and others derived much inspiration from Pagan Greece. The services rendered by Euclid, Archimedes and Ptolemy among other illustrious Greeks, proved priceless. As Dr. John Storck in his highly suggestive volume: *Man and Civilization* (third revised edition, Constable, 1929), points out: "Even when the modern scientists found it necessary to attack the Alexandrians (as when Copernicus offered his heliocentric theory in place of Ptolemy's geocentric hypothesis) they must have felt that they were bound more closely to these ancients in interests and in fundamental approach to Nature than they were to the philosophical theologians of their own day."

Although the whole of our material civilization rests on science and invention, many artists, men of letters, and naturally, the majority of the clergy tend to view its achievements with dislike and alarm. The new ideas science introduces certainly discredit orthodox claims in regard to religion. Still, the nineteenth century—a pre-eminently scientific period—showed itself remarkably fruitful in artistic and literary production. The fine arts, deathless poetry and prose are not extinguished by the contemporary growth of natural knowledge, but are truly complementary in character. Lucretius, the majestic singer of ancient Rome was pervaded with the spirit of science, while the sage Goethe, the mighty Shakespeare, the tuneful Watson, the highly-endowed Tennyson, and the philosophic Meredith were all inspired by the revelations of scientific research.

Moreover, distinguished scientists such as Helmholtz, Huxley, Tyndall, Tylor and Faraday were all splendid prose writers. The world of art has also been enriched by the study and appreciation of Nature. As Dr. Storck intimates: "The artist cannot feed his own life with the spiritual materials necessary to his art. These he can receive only from outside himself from the activities of his group and from the accepted interpretations of the world which his group offers him. These things form an indispensable part of the materials entering into a work of art. They are in fact just as necessary as the pigments, the canvas, or the artist's technical skill, for they constitute the data which make possible the artist's vision."

One of the present-day-world's leading philosophers, Professor Dewey, deems artistic all creations capable of the restoration of previously experienced pleasures. He dismisses as a mere convention the doctrine that fine art is restricted to songs and symphonies, poetry and the pictorial and plastic products. "Any activity" he argues, "that is productive of objects whose perception is an immediate good, and whose operation is a perpetual source of enjoyable perception of other events exhibits fineness of art."

Artists and art critics have delivered the most diverse judgments concerning the scope and limits of æsthetic creations. Still, some are convinced that the Bard of Avon in his *Winter's Tale* appropriately expressed the truth in his assurance that:—

Nature is made better by no mean,  
But nature makes that mean: over that art  
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art  
That Nature makes.

Science itself emerges from the study, appreciation, and even the idealization of natural phenomena. For while the mathematical sciences have rendered indispensable services to civilization they do not complete



the circle of the sciences. While their triumphs have assuredly been great, and interpreters of Nature are mostly desirous of obtaining generalized and systematized information, yet there exists a pronounced distinction between abstract and concrete science.

Mensuration and number, quantitative and spatial relations are essential to all scientific activity. Indeed, some men of science assert that their real realm is restricted to researches of quantitative character. Yet the fact remains that many far-reaching results have arisen with little or no assistance from mathematical formulations. As Storck cogently declares, this verity is evidenced in the epoch-making discoveries of paleontologists and geologists which have enabled them to reconstruct our planet's past history. "Only the simplest measuring and counting operations," he observes, "are of use in determining the order of deposition of the sedimentary rocks or the historical relationships between fossil remains, and yet these studies are indubitably scientific. Mathematics therefore does not constitute an absolutely indispensable organon of scientific research. Even within the field of physics much valuable work has been non-mathematical in nature, as for instance, Faraday's great researches in electricity."

Darwin's and Haeckel's biological investigations were conducted in terms of observation and experiment alone, and the evolutionary doctrines they propounded served to revolutionize the thought of the intellectual public. In astronomy also observation has vastly increased human concepts of the cosmos. Some of the most startling discoveries in chemistry have been made almost adventitiously, and in the case of the aniline dyes, in consequence of laboratory mishaps. Again, electricity of low tension (galvanism) was unsuspected until Galvani casually irritated a frog's leg with metal fragments. The real architecture of crystals was first revealed when Haüy accidentally fractured a calc-spar crystal, and while attempting to repair the damage he detected geometrical structures previously unknown.

Scientific studies are immensely aided by instrumental means. The instruments indispensable in a modern laboratory or observatory vastly extend the range of the unaided senses. The photographic plate, the thermometer, the microscope and telescope and other appliances all serve in this way.

Although Copernicus mainly depended on mathematical analysis, his famous successor, Tycho Brahe developed astronomy by means of patient observation, while Copernicus utilized quadrants, chronometers and other instruments in his studies. In the words of Storck: "The one laid the main theoretical foundations of the new astronomy, the other through his magnificent observations furnished that science with the means for its self-correction and development."

Kepler devoted a quarter of a century to the scrutiny of Tycho's records, and later announced his discovery of the laws of planetary motion. This triumph is attributable to observations practically unaided by mathematical theory. Moreover, in the 150 years that elapsed between the time of Copernicus and that of Newton, nearly all the advances in astronomy and physics reposed on the aid afforded by instruments of precision. The opening years of the seventeenth century witnessed the invention of the microscope, the thermometer and barometer, while many mathematical tools or devices including the calculus and Napier's logarithms made their appearance in the same century.

The average man's thinking is more or less inconsequential, save when he ruminates or reflects over matters of personal importance or of special personal interest. Flashes of insight are said to denote

genius, and in science disciplined imagination may be fruitfully exercised. But in this department the inductions and deductions of the finest intellect need verification and control. As Tyndall once asserted: "The brightest flashes in the world of thought are incomplete until they have been proved to have their counterpart in the world of fact. Thus the vocation of the true experimentalist may be defined as the continual exercise of spiritual insight, and its incessant correction and realization."

Science ever grows from more to more and her latest triumphs result from the amplification of the labours of dead and sometimes forgotten pioneers. Newton himself acknowledged his immense obligation to his predecessors when he said: "If I have seen further than Descartes, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Co-operation as well as division of labour contributes to scientific progress, and the various scientific societies of Europe and America have rendered yeoman service in her cause. The printing press has made the results of research available in all civilized lands, and every hypothesis or theory, and even the data of investigators are subjected to the most searching criticism. As Storck justly states: "Every scientist publishes his investigations, knowing that other scientists will scrutinize them with the greatest care, that his co-workers will be eager to pick out logical flaws statistical inaccuracies, experimental ineptitudes and unwarrantable conclusions, and that his reputation will in large measure depend upon his ability to run this formidable gauntlet." One wonders respecting the fate of theological claims were they subjected to similar treatment.

In place of miracles and divine providences science discloses the reign of law. It is true that her theories have undergone revision, but her services to civilization in all stages of her evolution speak volumes for the validity of her methods. Truly enough "science herself usually corrects her mistakes, whereas the mistakes of theology are most frequently discovered by others—and especially by scientists."

Scientists of the first rank such as Huxley, Tyndall, Galton, Maudsley and Clifford did not disdain to make their province attractive to the intelligent public. But many branches of science have since become so technical that there is less general appreciation of her aims and achievements, despite the work of Hogben and others. Still, the far-wider recognition of natural causation, and the general security of life in times of peace are popularly related to scientific impact. Even if the man in the street is unaware "that to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, still he usually substitutes for the axiom, 'The Lord will provide' some view approximating a little more closely to the scientific dictum." He is still at the mercy of traditional misconceptions. Nor for that matter, are these extinct with religious scientists such as Arthur Eddington and Ambrose Fleming. But, perhaps the average citizen's outlook is saner than ever before. He lives in a practical and mechanical age and, in field, factory and workshop, and the now ubiquitous motor-car, he daily witnesses the ever-present operation of cause and effect in the dynamics of his daily existence.

T. F. PALMER

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Everything is good which takes away one plaything and delusion more, and drives us home to add one stroke of faithful work.—Emerson.

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The priest hovers round the cradle like a needy Chancellor of the Exchequer, speculating on the taxable possibilities of developing industry.



## Jesus and His Women Friends

(Continued from page 567)

At the beginning of his next chapter, John says that, "six days before the passover," Jesus came to Bethany, and that a supper was made for him at which Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and other persons were present. Here the question of date has considerable importance, as will subsequently become evident; and therefore a brief digression must be excused. We reckon our day from midnight to midnight; but the Jews reckoned their day from sunset to sunset. This difference is apt to become confusing, because, in winter, for instance, our day ends at 12 p.m. as usual, whereas the Jewish day would then have ended many hours earlier, so that in winter the second day of the Jewish week began long before the first day of our week would have ended. Now John, elsewhere in his Gospel, relates things to show that Jesus, "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," was put to death on the 14th of the month Nisan at the time when the paschal lambs his typical representatives were being slain. This indication corresponds with the afternoon of the day which the Christian Church names Good Friday. If from the preceding Jewish day, the 13th Nisan, we reckon six days backwards, we find that Jesus, on the above occasion, came to Bethany upon the 8th Nisan. If we reckon according to our days he arrived there on the Saturday before Good Friday. But it must be remembered that according to Jewish reckoning Saturday would include a good part of Friday. This was the last journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, and Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree that, on his way thither from Jericho, he halted at Bethany. The distance from Jericho to Bethany is twenty-four miles, so that probably he reached Bethany near the end of that Jewish day which preceded the Jewish Sabbath, and which lasted until the sunset of our Saturday. As the Jewish sabbath began at sunset, and the Jews kept it very strictly, the supper above referred to, which was evidently an important affair, could not have been legally held the day when Jesus arrived, but must have taken place after sunset the next day, which time would correspond with the evening of our Saturday. This conclusion is verified by the statement that "on the morrow" of the natural day following the night of the supper, Jesus made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, an event referred to the Sunday before Good Friday.

At this supper (according to John's account), while Martha was serving, and Lazarus was at table, Mary, taking a pound of ointment of spikenard very precious, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with her hair, the ointment filling the house with its odour. Thereupon, Judas Iscariot exclaimed, "Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence and given to the poor?" Jesus replied, "Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying. For the poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always." This reply shows that only a part of the ointment had been used; and this is not all that it does show! The account ends by saying that many of the commonality, hearing about the presence of Jesus and Lazarus at the house came to see them, which made the authorities consider the advisability of putting Lazarus also to death; a thing they were not likely to have

thought of had they believed in his alleged resurrection.

It is a singular thing that Matthew and Mark when recording the last days of Jesus mention an incident which presents resemblances to and differences from that just described. Here an unnamed woman anoints Jesus at Bethany in the house of one Simon a leper. Immediately before giving this account they say that when the passover was yet two days distant a council was held by the authorities anent the best means of suppressing Jesus stealthily to avoid a tumult. Matthew even says that Jesus himself gave the above indication of time. What are the implications in this case? The 14th Nisan ended at sunset on Good Friday, and began at sunset on the preceding Thursday. The 13th Nisan began at sunset on the preceding Wednesday. The 12th Nisan began at sunset on the preceding Tuesday. Thus, the two Jewish days before the passover must be reckoned from sunset on the Tuesday until sunset on the Thursday. Hence, the meal in the house of Simon the leper took place at the earliest on the Tuesday night, i.e., at the beginning of the 12th Nisan, two days later than the supper at which Mary the Bethanian anointed Jesus. Ardent fundamentalists see nothing objectionable in the propinquity of the two anointments; but other orthodox critics, more sensible to ridicule, pretend that Matthew and Mark record the same unction, which John records. In support of this view they assert that the time-qualification "two days before the passover," relates to the council which was held by the authorities with respect to measures for the arrest of Jesus, and which is mentioned in the passage mentioning the "two days"; whilst they take the account of anointing as the record of a previous event. Now, if Matthew and Mark had the slightest claim to be regarded as careful scribes, this pretention could never be allowed, but alas, like the other two evangelists, they are very negligent. Hence it is possible that, although they related the anointing after specifying the "two days," they were relating an incident which in their opinion had taken place before the time referred to. Traditional opinion, strongly supported by critics who attach but slight importance to tradition, places John as the last of the four evangelists. In the present case I have given precedence to his account because of its connexion with other matters concerning Mary of Bethany, to whom he assigns the anointing of Jesus on this occasion.

Matthew, Mark and John agree in referring the episode to the week before the passover whereon Jesus died. Matthew and Mark specify the host as "Simon the leper"; John does not name either the host or Simon. All three mention Bethany as the place. Matthew and Mark leave the woman unnamed, John names her "Mary." Matthew and Mark say that she brought the ointment in "an alabaster cruse"; John omits the cruse. Mark and John call the ointment "spikenard," Matthew does not give its name. Mark says that she brake the cruse before pouring out the ointment. Matthew and Mark agree that she poured the ointment upon the head of Jesus; John affirms that she poured it upon the feet of Jesus and then wiped them with her hair. As regards the grumbling, Matthew refers it to "the disciples"; Mark to "themselves," probably meaning the disciples; while John limits it to Judas Iscariot. Respecting the price for which the ointment might have been sold, Matthew says "for much"; Mark, "for above 300 pence"; and John, "for 300 pence." All three agree that "the poor" were alleged as those who ought to have received the proceeds of the sale. All three agree likewise about the reply which Jesus made contrasting himself with the poor. But, whilst

<sup>7</sup> The *Ency. Bib.* (Vol. III. Col. 3646), says that the unit of value here in question equalled  $8\frac{1}{4}$ d. of our money. Hence, £10 6s. 3d. would be the worth of the ointment. John (xix. 39) says Nicodemus brought a hundredweight of myrrh and aloes for the embalmment of Jesus!



Matthew and Mark report Jesus as saying that the woman had pre-anointed him for his burial; John reports Jesus as telling Judas to let the woman keep the ointment (meaning the rest of it) for his own burial.

According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus then added that wheresoever the gospel should be preached the woman's deed should be remembered to her honour. Some of the details common only to Matthew and Mark, are open to grave suspicion. The anointing of the head seems to have a symbolical meaning, and does not agree with the notion of a body being anointed for burial; whereas, in John's account, the affriktion of the feet with ointment is easily explicable on the supposition that they were still painful from the journey, whilst the injunction that the ointment (i.e. the rest thereof) should be preserved for the burial is a sarcasm not devoid of elegance. Upon the other hand, the limitation of the remonstrance to Judas Iscariot, seems inspired by personal animus on the part of the writer, who, indeed, goes on to say that Judas abused his position as treasurer of the apostles by stealing their money; which is a serious reflection upon Jesus, who, in spite of his superhuman perceptivity had never warned them of their danger.

It is well worth noting that the cynical contrast between himself and the poor, which, according to all the three accounts, Jesus did not scruple to draw; and also the boastful prediction wherewith, according to Matthew and Mark, he ended the incident, are examples of the morbid vanity which is so repeatedly attributed to him in all the four gospels. It is no less noteworthy that although several Marys are mentioned as having been among the witnesses in some or all of the following cases, to wit, the crucifixion, the empty tomb, the angelic announcement, and the appearance of Jesus in his risen body; yet, nevertheless cross-references prove that Mary the Bethanian was not among the Marys specified. The fact is that all three members of the family at Bethany vanish from the scene before the arrest of Jesus, and do not reappear; whereas we should have expected to find that in every one of the above cases, the adorning Mary, the practical Martha, and the grateful Lazarus, were prominent spectators, and therefore we must conclude that strong indeed were the reasons for their absence.

C. CLAYTON DOVE

(To be concluded)

### Apathy

SMITH: "I see in the press that the Bishop of London, having reached the ripe age of eighty, has magnanimously decided to retire to make way for a younger man."

Robinson: "Yes. In what concern other than the Church would its officials be allowed to retain their posts until they approach senility when, more often than not, they are either physically or mentally unfit efficiently to perform their work. Can you imagine, say, a Bank Cashier being retained by his employers long after he had reached the age of sixty? He, like other employees engaged in commercial firms, is usually considered incapable after this age, and is retired upon reaching it."

S.: "The work, particularly in the country districts, being so light, the controlling authorities appear to think that aged men can muddle through it without disastrous effects. The clergy are human, and I do not blame them, for naturally they desire to make ample provision for those who come after them. I condemn the authorities for tolerating such an unsound system."

R.: "Judging by the published lists of wills the Bishops, at any rate, usually leave their dependents well provided for. Many years ago, when making a railway journey in the West of England, a fellow passenger procured a newspaper at a roadside station, and, after reading it, announced with a gesture of disgust, that the then recently deceased Bishop of Manchester had died worth a large sum of money. From that time to this I have noted the sums bequeathed by deceased Bishops, and am satisfied that few, if any, practice what they preach regarding the injunction not to lay up treasures in this world."

S.: "I agree. The ordinary clergy take their cue from the Bishops. If you will extend your scrutiny to their wills you will see that a comparatively large number die fairly rich men."

R.: "What are we to think of the present state of the Church in the country districts? In my neighbourhood it is a common event during the winter months for congregations to consist of two or three people only. I have known services having to be cancelled for want of congregations. The Church is destitute of life save for the customary disputes between the shepherds and their attenuated flocks. Presumably it is no different in many other parts of England."

S.: "Why is it we hear so little about disestablishment? In my young days the disestablishment of the Church in Wales was a burning question with the Welsh people. They were determined to sever its connexion with the State and, as you know, eventually succeeded. Why are not the English people equally resolved to put an end to the alliance between their Church and the State? The need is as great in England as it was in Wales."

R.: "I cannot understand their apathy. What has become of the Liberation Society, which played such a useful part in the Welsh agitation, and what are the Labour Party doing? As champions of democracy one would imagine the latter would place the question in the fore front of their programme, but they have done nothing of the kind, an omission as surprising as it is regrettable."

S.: "It would be an advantage if we had in Parliament more men of the type of the Radical stalwarts of the 'eighties, men who could be trusted to strive incessantly for the removal of all archaic obstacles to progress."

PRO REASON

### Acid Drops

War is a grim thing at its best, and one ought to seize and develop any opportunity for laughter that presents itself. So our best thanks ought to be given to the flapper's philosopher who maintains his capacity for solemnity, even while making the most amusingly nonsensical comments upon life and his imaginary experiences. In his *weakly* fantasia in the *Sunday Chronicle*, he says that the war caught him away from home, and he came to Lourdes, or rather—as he is fully appreciative of the help he and Providence are to each other, "Lourdes came to him." He went to the service at Lourdes and, not to disappoint those for whom he writes, was convinced that "if God is anywhere it is here." Apparently the evidence of God's presence was found in the music, the statue of the Virgin, the blaze of candles, "whose light is so intense that the eyes can scarcely gaze on them" and a collection of crutches. So, not to disappoint the semi-moronic section of the *Sunday Chronicle* readers, and probably feeling that in these trying times, he launches the following funny passage:—

I had a sense, not of war, but of peace. By the time these words are published, history may have made them look ridiculous, but that is no reason for recanting them.



The humour of this is delicious, and so subtle that it may escape many. Consider the stroke of genius in "history may have made his words ridiculous!" And the future tense, too. That solemn poke in the ribs of the pious could hardly be bettered. We have few writers who can be so solemnly ridiculous as Mr. Beverley Nichols. Truly he is a gift from the gods.

The squabble in Liverpool about Catholic schools seems to have been settled, if not exactly to the satisfaction of all parties, very much in favour of Catholic schools. The building of the first Catholic school will commence in 1940, and many sites are being considered. Fifteen thousand school places will be needed and will be provided at a cost of £900,000, which sum will be raised by loan. The *Universe* adds:—

When the rents amounting to £10,000 have been paid by Catholics, the annual loan charges will amount to about £32,000, half of which will be paid by the Exchequer, the other half coming from the city rates.

In other words, both the city rates and the Exchequer are going to pay for Catholic teaching—not, be it remembered, because that teaching is true or useful, but because it is *religious*! We can only exclaim with Shakespeare, "It is a damned and a bloody work."

Another miracle has gone west—according to the *Sunday Post*. This is the famous miraculous draught of fishes. It appears, according to this inspired journal that Jesus

made his disciples lower their nets at the right side of the boat, not because he was going to drop a thousand fishes there by supernatural means, but because he had noticed a silver sheen in the water which indicated the presence of a shoal. Hence the miraculous draught of fishes was no miracle at all—but a natural phenomenon.

Personally we protest against this watering-down of even fishy miracles. Directly one begins to take away miracles from "Our Lord," he becomes just a plain human being like ourselves, and he never would have commanded the worship of millions of other human beings throughout the ages. We gladly record that the journal in question has received many protests to this effect.

We are glad to hear that the Birth-Control movement is forging ahead, and we wish it increased success. We learn that the International Birth-Control Association has changed its name to The Family Planning Association (the address is still 69 Eccleston Square, S.W.1). We always thought there was some good reason for so-called "Malthusians" inventing so good a title as "Birth-Control" to describe their movement. We doubt the wisdom of the new name. Atheists who like to call themselves Agnostics; Freethinkers who are "only rationalists you know," and those who talk about "falling on sleep" when referring to death—all these people imagine that the enemies of heterodox ideas will tolerate them if they are called another name. Experience proves the opposite. Courage is the only way to win toleration, if toleration is desired. Freethinkers, however, demand the right to speak, not the offensive toleration of bigots who are compelled to curb their intolerance.

The *Methodist Recorder* quotes without approval Professor Whitehead's saying that Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness. It is not open to question that Religion is what some individuals do with their solitude. People have queer ideas, queer hobbies, queer studies—some good, some funny, some lunny, which can do no harm perhaps, so long as they really don't intrude on other people's solitariness. Morality is a contrast to religion in this very fact. All morality is necessarily what mankind does—individually and collectively—in relation to its fellows. Morality is essentially social. Religion is essentially self-regarding.

The Rev. J. Vernon Bartlett says the time has come "for a really relevant re-statement of Christian theology." He places first the need to "set forth Christianity as a religion to support democracy." Surely Dr. Bartlett should address his remarks to the "King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Only Ruler of Princes."—the Dictator of Dictators we might expect God to have been called in these days. We must be good because God is good we must be "good soldiers" because God's word commands it. Why then should we believe in democracy when every bit of evidence put forward about God's laws and God's ways proclaim first and foremost that He is the Great "I AM." What sort of popular government is represented by God and His Rule except Absolutism of the most irresistible character? Imagine God devising a plebiscite to decide whether a majority of us approve of one or other of His orders, or try to think of God—as judge—appointing a Jury to decide a man's guilt or innocence before judgment!

We take the following from *Commonweal*. There is sufficient acidity in it to make further comment superfluous:—

The Westmorland Fanes have 2 Church livings in their gift; the Barnards own 17, and the Mildmays have 5. Twenty-four parsons look to these three "patrons" to give them this day their daily bread!

We learn from the *Voice of Spain* (published 11, Great Turnstile, London, W.C.1), that a Decree has now been promulgated in Spain authorizing priests to direct the instruction in primary schools. "Chairs" of Religion have been created in the Grammar Schools. Full powers are granted to bishops to nominate religious instructors and giving them full control of religious teaching. So that when these children arrive at maturity they may be depended upon to see beauty in poison gas, massacre and torture, always providing that these means to ends and thus on behalf of Christian civilization are being used by the friends of the Holy Roman Church.

An American Catholic writer, Lawrence A. Fernsworth, expresses himself freely in *Foreign Affairs*. He gives instances of the active part in politics played by the Catholic Church in Spain, a fact freely denied by Catholics in this country.

There was formed in 1936 simultaneously with "Accion Popular," a great organization of laymen, women and children, and even clergy, known as "Accion Catolica." Every individual owning the name of Catholic was urged to join it. When the elections of 1936 were preparing it boldly flung itself into the political campaign against the Popular Front. A single citation is enough—the manifesto of the Archdiocesan Junta of "Accion Catolica" for the Archdiocese of Tarragona, forewarning Catholics of "the dangers of the triumph of the revolution in the forthcoming elections" and enjoining upon them the "duty" of voting "the announced candidacy of order," since by so doing they would be conforming to the desire of the Pontiff recently set forth by His Eminence Cardinal Gomá, Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain. This manifesto added: "Abstention in these circumstances would be a desertion and a betrayal of the fatherland and a manifest disobedience to the norms which, in the present situation, have been outlined by the Holy See and the Spanish Episcopacy. Let all of them vote as a single man, with a single ticket, for religion and the fatherland." I can bear personal witness regarding good Catholics of scant Republican sympathies who, shocked by this attempt to tell them how to vote either abstained or voted for the Republic.

Mr. Fernsworth continues:—

Penitents of the church have been compelled to don sackcloth and ashes. They have gone to Canossa. But the Spanish church never does. It does not look into its own heart, it does not make an examination of conscience or a confession of error. Its defenders abroad, moreover, represent it as the victim of completely unreasoning persecution without practical cause. The gates of hell are simply presumed to have been opened against it.

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# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTÉ

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

T. G. ROGERS.—Dr. Broom's opinion that evolution ended when man appeared on the scene is farcical in its misunderstanding. What he should have said, if he understood evolution, is that with the development of the direction of human evolution man became social and intellectual, with but trifling modification in physical structure. We have to deal with this subject in several of our books, and also special articles. The statement was obviously made to justify the foolish theory of an intelligence behind evolution.

S. GORDON HOGG.—The information was given in a special article in the *Daily Telegraph*. One cannot count on either Hitler or Mussolini being bound by rules of decency or honesty that actuate ordinary individuals. We expect if either of them ever compiled a dictionary one item would read "Scoundrelism: anything with which I disagree," and another, "Honest: Anything I care to do." The only thing that can be said in favour of either is that they have lied and cheated so often that only those who wish to be misled can be deceived.

N. H. RAINS.—Thanks for article, but one of the most cultured and able men of our acquaintance was subject to attacks of dementia.

R. NORMAN.—We cannot say yet what we may do yet. All we can do is to do the best in our power. And we have always with us the knowledge that the *Freethinker* has too many friends for us to lack whatever support is needed. We hope to make a statement as soon as it is necessary and possible.

G. WALLACE AND OTHERS.—Many thanks for congratulations. —The times act as tonic.

G. H. PRATE.—A conscientious objection to military—not national—service has no legal connection with religion, but one may expect that the average tribunal will lean more to the side of the religious objector than the other. One must hope for a sense of fair play to animate the tribunal.

R. WALTERS.—Our chief difficulty looks like being an adequate supply of paper. But we daresay we shall manage.

H. M. ATKINS, G. V. CREECH.—Thanks for address of a likely new reader; paper being sent for four weeks.

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

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

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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. Rosell, giving as long notice as possible.

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One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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

### AN INCOMPLETE BAN

"I was just telling my daughter," said Mrs. Godfrey, "that it's really a shame for her to play the piano on Sunday."

"And why Sunday?" asked the Colonel.

## SPECIAL

THE Armistice of 1918-39 is at an end. Since 11 o'clock on September 3 this country has been at War with Germany, and if ever war was justifiable it is the one in which this country is now engaged. There ought to be no confusion on this point. Hitler's "fifth column" in this country has done its best for him up to the last moment by crying out that British soldiers are being sent to fight in defence of Poland. That is not true; more, it is a deliberate lie on the part of those whose whole campaign has been based on lies. We are fighting primarily to defend our own interests, and in a wider sense for the preservation of the very moderate degree of civilization that has been achieved. Circumstances have now demonstrated to all that no greater blunder was ever made in British politics than the increased strength given to Hitler by the disaster of Munich. Those who had a clear vision of the character of the criminal gang that has gained control of the German people, knew that no reliance could be placed upon their conduct, and the latest demonstration of this has been given in the deliberate torpedoing of a passenger vessel, a very large part of those on board being women and children. The gang of criminally-minded sexual perverts and sadistic monstrosities who began their career by burning their own parliament house in order to fix the crime on others, and has proceeded by committing offences against all that is best in human nature, has run true to form.

There can be no lasting peace between such monsters and decent-minded men and women, and no further hope of entering into peaceful relations or negotiations with them should be entertained. We should make it clear from the outset that while we are ready, even anxious, to make a lasting peace with the German *people*, there is to be no peace at any time between the Allies and the gangsters. They should be outlawed by the civilized States of the world. If propaganda among the German people is to be maintained—and it can be maintained if conducted on these lines—the end whenever it comes will be more beneficial than if we clog our minds with the possibility of appeasing those now in power in Germany. We do not talk of appeasing confirmed criminals. The policy is that of capturing them and preventing their doing further mischief.

If the war is to be a lengthy one it will involve a frightful amount of suffering and loss of life. But however severe the suffering and however great the social deterioration that accompanies all wars, the destruction of human value that would follow life in a world dominated by German Fascism would be incalculably greater. That also should be clear to men and women who value life, not for its mere continuance, but for its ethical and intellectual and human content. And, if the war and, more importantly, the peace that will follow the war, are conducted on the right lines the end of this conflict should mark a decisive step forward in the direction of world peace. Unless this is done the monuments we may raise to the memory of the dead will be a mockery of them, and a prostitution of their sacrifices. At the outset of the war of 1914, I said that the great thing was to think of how we might live peacefully with Germans



when the war was over. Killing them was comparatively an easy thing. I repeat this sentiment now, and I feel that in doing so I am expressing the feelings of British Freethinkers. Justice in action should not be blind. It should be wide-eyed and effectively impartial.

Since writing the above we learn (Tuesday, September 5), that an actual commencement has been made with propaganda in Germany. Six million leaflets addressed to the German people have been scattered over German towns and cities. And Hitler has gone to the front. That his military advisers do not need his advice on military policy is certain. That it may help to hearten the spirits of his troops is possible, but if so it has for him an ominous significance. That he thinks it personally safer for him to be at the front than remain in Berlin is also likely. The man who was contemptible enough to address a mass meeting behind a bullet-proof shelter must be a coward at heart.

I have already received many letters enquiring how the war with its inevitable restrictions will affect the *Freethinker*. It is too early to give a decisive answer to that question. So soon as it is possible I will indicate the nature of the difficulties that may arise or have arisen, and I am quite certain that whatever help is needed can and will be forthcoming. Over twenty years ago the *Freethinker* came triumphantly through one of the severest trials that a Freethought paper has ever had to face in this country. Every supporter of this journal knows that we are engaged in a war which is unceasing in its action, because each victory raises society to a higher level, and with each ascent there comes the perception of higher levels to be reached. It has been my lot to stand in the front ranks of an army of men and women that has fought battles which have left no burning homes or maimed lives in their track. Whatever I have been able to do in my fifty years of service has been due to the loyal support that has been given. I am certain that this support is mine until I do something that will justify its withdrawal.

CHAPMAN COHEN

President of the National Secular Society...  
and Editor of the "Freethinker"

## Sugar Plums

We have several times published complaints that—quite innocently in most cases, we believe—recruiting officials have insisted that a man joining the army must state what is his religion. The question is in order, but a recruit is within his rights when insisting that whatever he dictates shall be set down—and if he does not wish any religion being entered he has the right to have set down "Atheist," "Freethinker," "None," or any other term he pleases. We raised this matter in the beginning of the 1914 war, and a circular was issued to all recruiting officials to see that this rule was carried out. A man's legal rights in this matter remain untouched by any military rule.

In 1930 we instructed the General Secretary of the N.S.S. to write the War Office regarding this matter, and the answer received was again satisfactory. The letter was dated December 12th, 1930. In the face of renewed complaints, the General Secretary again wrote, and the following reply was received under date of August 30th, 1939.

"I am directed to say that a recruit may still declare on enlistment into the Regular Army that he is an Atheist or has no religious belief . . . such declaration would hold good during a man's term of service unless he desired to have it changed."

The letter is signed by the Director of Recruiting and Organisation. It should also be remembered that the right to affirm in lieu of taking a religious oath also holds good. The recruit should insist upon his rights in this matter, and refer to this letter if necessary. It is a pity that the officer in charge is not made acquainted with the law by a circular letter. It is bad for a man's military career to commence with a compulsory false statement.

We wish to draw special attention to the official statement that the declaration made by a man on joining will hold good "unless he desired to have it changed." This will enable those who have signed under some religious term, under the impression that they had to do so, to have that cancelled and a proper statement entered.

A very old supporter of the *Freethinker*, Mr. H. Irving, in sending us birthday congratulations, adds:

"Will the *Freethinker* be put to the straits it was during the last 'picnic'? You must have had giant mandarin sleeves to conjure the paper from week to week. . . . It was a great adventure.

"You guided your readers in the last business with a marvellous sagacity. There seems to be the same power in you now after nearly a quarter of a century. The quality is there for certain. But when I read that you are not as well as you might be, I get anxious about the engine."

It is not possible to say yet what we may have to face, but we are quite certain that we shall have always the same loyal support that we have received whenever it has been required. At our health, with moderate care our friends need be under no alarm. And when so great a compliment has been paid us as to give us an international war as a birthday present, we should indeed be ungrateful if we did not feel "bucked."

We are asked by our business manager to inform those who have been kept waiting for their copies of *Possession* that the delay is due to the binders. There has been a delay at that end, but all orders will be discharged during the next few days. Meanwhile we advise those who would care for a copy of this important work that although we bought the whole of the copies of the book, the supply is limited, and cannot, of course, then be bought for the price advertised—which is less than one-third of the published price.

What egoists these Christians be. We do not for a moment blame the old gentleman nearing the grave who thinks, poor fellow, that it is enough for him to have to worry about his own trifling necessities. But what can we say of a pious paper which quote his garrulous nonsense with approval?

"I am an old age pensioner, just out of hospital. Seventy-two years of age, but I find that God never fails and is never foiled. I am fed just like the sparrows, never once having lacked a meal or a comfortable bed. So I go on, simply trusting every day, trusting through a stormy way, even when my faith is small, trusting Jesus, that is all."

The dying man can be easily pardoned. But the lying priests who read newspapers, who know the world's dire needs, who see ruthless armies and vile laws crueling torturing and destroying harmless citizens, starving people much better than themselves in concentration camps and prisons! It is a Christian imposture to talk about God feeding birds—"caring for sparrows." Innocent sparrows, like innocent human beings, die of starvation and disease, for God does nothing!

At St. George's Church, Ramsgate, a dance band accompanied the service, and Mr. Bruce Green, a pantomime "dame" assisted. The vicar, thanking the performers, regretted that most people got their impression of the clergy from the stage. In any case, that would



be a far more faithful picture of the "Lord's anointed" than when people get their impression of the actor from the church and chapel.

Mr. Middleton Murry says that a Christian society is the only one in which men can live and not die. Mr. Murry has not expressed himself clearly. For his own reputation we prefer to believe that what he wrote was, "A Christian society is the one in which a man can die and still believe he is alive." Some mischievous "comp." must have played about with the script.

## Some Recent Books

(Continued from page 566)

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHYSICS" (Max Planck; Englished in 1936, from the German originals; Allen & Unwin). This is mostly a polemic against the indeterminists. Prof. Planck's famous contribution to modern physics was, of course, the discovery of Planck's constant ( $h$ ).

He shows that the difficulties of measurement are difficulties of technique and do not arise from any "innate free will" in the particles. "The exact determination of the position of an electron implies a relatively powerful interference with its motion; and conversely the exact measurement of the velocity of an electron requires a relatively lengthy time. In the first case there is interference with the electron's velocity; in the second its position in space becomes indefinite." Planck suggests that possibly an improved technique will one day make it possible to calculate the interference in advance.

Eddington, of course, maintains that the case against determinism in small-scale phenomena is such that no advance can ever affect the inapplicability of determinism, which is inherent.

Until practice is perfect, Planck makes a plan for theory as a valid aid to practice. A weather forecast by (a) a complete novice, (b) a farmer, and (c) a meteorologist will show graded degrees of accuracy. Hence an omnipresent and omniscient Being could foretell without error. "The same applies to every forecast of physical events," he concludes.

"The validity of the statistical laws," he says, "is entirely compatible with a strict causality." Moreover, "like Planck's quantum every other elementary constant, e.g., the charge or mass of an electron, is a definite real magnitude, and it seems wholly absurd to attribute a certain fundamental inexactitude to these universal constants, as those who deny causality would have to do."

We should no more expect small-scale phenomena to fit exactly into our measuring instruments than we should expect a weigh-bridge to weigh to the nearest milligramme.

In attempting to estimate the present status of "indeterminism," to which belief Heisenberg unwittingly gave birth in presenting his Principle of Uncertainty, we are confronted at the outset by Eddington's confident assertion that the researchers in physics are definitely converted to indeterminacy not merely as something temporary, but as a proven principle. The late J. W. N. Sullivan also appeared to take the same view in his books (*Aspects of Science*, 1923; *The Bases of Science*, 1928; *Limitations of Science*, 1933; etc.). Nevertheless there is much evidence that Planck's view is shared widely. The step from the uncertainty principle to the principle of indeterminacy has been made too hastily. In his attack Prof. Dingle (*Science and Human Experience*) remarks, "When we try, Procrustes-like, to force it (the electron) to fit a time-scale, it retaliates by lying partly in the future,

and the reason why it does so is that *its actions are determined and it can do no other*" (his italics). Indeterminacy, he concludes, "pertains only to the conceptional world of atomic physics and not to the world of observation." Einstein, too, has said that the indeterminacy is subjective, and Jeans, in an address, has also suggested that, after all, the indeterminacy of the particle-picture may reside in our own conceptions and not in the external world. Dr. J. E. Turner (though he is not a high authority) has put the situation thus: "The Principle of Indeterminacy has to do *with measurement*, not with causation" (*Nature*, December 27, 1930) and J. B. S. Haldane (*Fact and Faith*) has lucidly exposed the difficulty of measurement. There is also the opposition of Levy, Bertrand Russell, Dr. N. Campbell and Sir H. Samuel which we have here dealt with before.

There may, then, be adequate grounds for the opinion of F. W. Westaway (*The Endless Quest*, 1934), "The balance of opinion is at present heavily on the side of causality, though the precise nature of causality yet remains to be discovered. . . . The majority of eminent mathematicians also are determinists."

*Human Psychology* (Butler and Karwoski; Pitman, 1937; 10s. 6d.). These two American researchers, show in this illustrated work how psychology can become a practical study, instead of a text-book nightmare. The time is perhaps coming when such as Kant and Hamilton will only be of historic interest. Perhaps another Beadnell will then produce a picture book of psychology.

The authors start from the assumption that "psychology is the study of man's reactions to his environment." This gives them a pro-behaviorist bias but they are careful to reserve a limited field for subjective methods (in the older terminology introspection) The term "auto-analysis" has already been used (see the symposium *Psychologies of 1930*).

In connexion with the study of man's reactions there are descriptions of the ways of measuring reactions to robot lights while driving, and descriptions of Watson's experiments with babies. Watson used burning paper, lizards, live snakes, and the usual paraphernalia which so horrifies Aldous Huxley. He found fear to be absent, and claims there are only two unconditioned causes of fear (loss of support and a loud noise). Similarly the stimulus for anger is thwarted movement.

In an interesting treatment of the story of embryonic recapitulation it is estimated that a week to the foetus is as a million years to the species. They take some pains to show that the individual is the result of hereditary *times* environment not *plus* (if one is nought the other is nought).

The distinctions between idiot, imbecile and moron are carefully drawn (in America the word moron is used for a definite sub-normal class). A high-grade moron, they contend, may attain even to the printing trade. They do not define intelligence, but then the nearest that Binet, joint author of the Binet-Simon tests, was able to get was, "intelligence is that which is measured by the intelligence test." Intelligence, they hold, nowhere supplants, but always supplements, instinct; and there is an instinctive basis for every learned act. Just as guinea pigs can run at birth, so are birds able to fly before taken out of the nest. Their mother does not teach them to fly, but practises them in flying.

The authors also expose the superstition once held by ignorant people that the famous Eberfeld horses could do arithmetic (and the notion is even entertained by a writer on science, Schofield, *The Borderlands of Science*). The horses took the signals from



the observer's head, whose motions were reduced to a minimum.

They report that Gestalt psychologists have also undertaken experiments similar to Pavlov's on dogs. An intelligent ape of Köhler's had food presented with a cloth of light grey, but not with a darker shade of grey. In time the expectation of food became associated with the lighter shade irrespective of its being presented. Similar experiments were successful with children—and even with fowls. A retriever can be taught to bring back a bird without eating into it if practised properly with a ball of yarn into which needles have been stuck. The extensions are almost endless—the dancing bear, the "turkey in the straw" and so on. Two experimenters, Krasnagorski and Mateer, have taught mere babes something about the elements of feeding themselves. By associating a bright flash of light with the sound of a bell Cason has induced the contraction of the eye pupil merely by the stimulus of the bell. Hodgins has with human beings reduced the stimulus for pupillary contraction to the mere saying of a word, and Cason conditioned winking with a very faint sound previously associated with electrical stimulation.

G. H. TAYLOR

(To be concluded)

## Some Bible Studies

### IV.

ON the north coast of Syria, there is a little insignificant hillock called Ras esh Shamra, which became the scene of excavations by the French authorities in 1929. The remains of a temple and other buildings, as well as some paved courtyards, were unearthed, and also a large number of tablets discovered in the sacred college adjoining, containing the archives of the religious cult practised there. Some of the tablets were covered with cuneiform writing—of a kind of wedge-shaped character—which, on being examined by experts, was discovered to be alphabetical, the characters indeed being, affirms Mr. Theodore Gaster, in his monograph *New Light on Early Palestinian Religion*, "the earliest alphabetical script anywhere known." He adds:—

This mysterious script was subsequently deciphered by the brilliant and independent efforts of three Semitists to whom the world of historians will owe a lasting debt of gratitude: Professor Hans Bauer of Halle, Edouard Dhorme of Jerusalem, and Charles Virolleaud of Paris. The decipherment showed that the contents of the tablets was ritual and mythological, and that the language was a highly obscure proto-semitic dialect, calling for all the resources of comparative philology in its elucidation. A large portion of the texts has now been published, though their meaning has often proved baffling and their general significance obscure.

In his *The Bible is True*, Sir Charles Marston, who has a chapter on these Ras Shamra Tablets, gives one the impression that there was precious little difficulty in deciphering them; and that a few of the tablets were written in "archaic Hebrew"—whatever that is, for we are not told. Dr. J. W. Jack, who has also written a monograph on the Ras Shamra Tablets (with this title), says their language is an old Semitic one, and that authorities differ about it very considerably. Some claim it to be Canaanite; others, ancient Phœnician or some allied language; still others, either Southern Semitic, or Proto-Hebrew. Dr. Jack himself thinks it to be "ancient Phœnician (or a northern dialect of this), with traces of Aramaen and

Hurrian influence." He admits also that some of the tablets can be translated readily by a Hebrew scholar because of the identity of the language with Hebrew. There are, indeed, quite a number of words which are like Hebrew, but as Dr. Jack admits, the language is "several centuries anterior to Biblical Hebrew," the word formation is "of a more primitive type." Also, there are many words borrowed from foreign languages—Accadian, Hittite, Hurrian, Egyptian, and others. His final conclusion is that the language of the tablets is "early Phœnician or a dialect of it, and embodies the earliest writings of the Phœnician race."

The tablets are dated provisionally as about the same time as the Tell El Amarna Tablets, that is, 1400-1350 B.C. This is the date given in Bible chronology to the book of Judges, when, as I pointed out in a previous article, the Israelites had already conquered Palestine—though, of course, they were not having the easy time of resting on their laurels. But the tablets give no hint whatever that the Israelites were in Palestine at the time when they were written. In fact if the result of any excavation had set out to *disprove* the Bible story, it is this discovery. At the same time it should be frankly admitted that any attempt to discredit the Old Testament on the grounds that nobody, or very few people, could write, say at the time of Moses or Joshua, or that the final editors could have had no documents by them when compiling it, can now be rebutted. The point that very early writings were impossible, or never transmitted, can now be seen to be to have no foundation—always presuming, of course, that excavated proofs of the kind afforded by the discoveries at Ras Shamra are genuine, and that the linguistic authorities have succeeded in their efforts of translation.

Admitting then that the tablets are quite authentic, and that the translations do give their contents as nearly as possible, we have some literary documents which tell us something about the land and the peoples in lands very near Palestine, as well as their culture and beliefs. In fact, for the first time in history, we can see what was the state of Syria and Palestine before the invasion of the Israelites; and we can judge from contemporary documents coming from the other side how true is the Old Testament story. The importance of this can hardly be exaggerated.

First of all, who or what were the gods of the people or priests who wrote these tablets? The two principal gods were El and Baal—and both these gods are mentioned also in the Tell El Amarna Tablets. Both gods are found in the Old Testament, El being, of course, the "Elohim" of the Jews, the Supreme God; while Baal is his rival, whose altars were continually destroyed, and whose worship was severely forbidden to the Israelites. Mr. Gaster says that "it is probable" that these gods "were popularly identified with the stars," for the tablets prove that the sun and moon were worshipped at Ras Shamra and "the high-god El was frequently identified with the former, and the high-goddess with the latter." Moreover the gods were collectively called "the sons of El," and the Bible tells us how the "sons of God" found the daughters of men fair. Mr. Gaster, in his monograph, gives us the distinction between the two gods, Baal and El, the El being, he says, "in the language of modern anthropologists, a 'high god,' the Baal, a 'transformer god.'" His conclusion is that "the modern God is *au fond* the product of the amalgam of El and Baal, combining the features of a dominating and transcendent lord with a dominant and immanent spirit." What modern and thorough-believing Jews and Christians think of this "amalgam" producing their "God," the only true "God," of course, would be very interesting to learn.



Dr. Jack in his monograph admits without question that El is a solar god, in which respect, he adds, "he has the characteristics of the Babylonian Shamash," who probably appears in the Ras Shamra pantheon as a female divinity called Shapash. But there is a much more significant point to be made in this connexion. The solar view of El

may perhaps explain certain passages in the Old Testament such as "El of Jeshurun riding upon the heavens" (Dt. xxxiii. 26), and Habakkuk's words (iii. 3): "His majesty covereth the heavens, and the earth is full of his glory." (Cf., "The chariots of the sun" in 2K xxiii. 11). It seems also to offer a better derivation of the name than any yet proposed. Instead of connecting it with the Hebrew root, "to be strong," or the Arabic *ʾil* "to be in front" or some similar origin, the writer would suggest the Sum-erian word *el*, which means "to shine," "to be bright," and which is probably a loan-word from the Semitic *ʾllu*, "bright," "shining." We can understand how people in primitive ages, observing the movements of the sun and its influence on the earth, came to regard it as a living thing and then to make it their deity. It is well known that the ancient Hebrews were not wholly free from this idea, especially during their early settlement in Canaan.

This passage was written in 1935—not 1830. It affords the most complete justification of the work of Dupuis, and following him, Robert Taylor, that I know of. When we are told that their work on the "Sun-myth" is out of date or "fanciful," and not worthy of serious and scientific consideration; or that it has been completely superseded by modern discoveries, the answer can now be that the very latest excavations justify their theories, not, naturally, in every detail, but in their broad outlines.

Baal is also a solar god and "in a fragment of tablet," adds Dr. Jack, "found in 1930, Baal's death and resurrection are described." Actually in the story "we have probably the oldest version of the popular Tammuz-Adonis myth, some centuries before that given by Lucian." But there is something even more vital to the understanding of the origins of religion than this, in the following passage from Dr. Jack's *The Ras Shamra Tablets* :—

El and Baal each had a son who was put to death and rose again, the one personifying Summer and the other Winter. El's son (or to be precise, Shor-El's son), who experienced this transformation, was called Môt (*Mt*) a word which is probably connected with the Hebrew "to die" . . . his title *bn elm* "son of God" reminds us forcibly of the same title in Daniel (iii. 25), and the Biblical "sons of God." He personifies Summer (or Summer and Autumn). He was the spirit of vegetation and growth . . . the reaping-time was always a critical one for him, for he perished under the scythe, and had to retire to the underworld until the following Spring, when he rose to life again. Baal's son . . . personifies Winter (or Winter and Spring) . . . His purpose was to fertilize the earth, and he died or disappeared when the dry warm weather came, and did not return to life till the end of the Summer.

Here in these ancient tablets, unearthed only the other day in Syria, giving us detailed information for the first time in history of the customs and religious myths of the people inhabiting the country nearly 4,000 years ago, we find the kind of story which is at the foundation of Christianity and Judaism. These tablets are not just the wild guesses of Freethinkers but the actual writings of contemporary people and priests. It is safe to say that nothing more damning to our current religion and its origins has ever before been discovered.

H. CUTNER

## Zebra.

### I.

A STRIP of zebra skin. Maybe nine inches long and about an inch wide. Not very exactly so, and the edges irregular. At one end a V-shaped nick and depression as if some sharp instrument had been driven forcibly into the skin.

Perhaps a lion's claws, each tearing out strips of skin like this, while the zebra writhes in death agony. Or the lion breaks its neck first with one mighty blow of its great paw after a gigantic spring from behind bushes or rocks.

Monstrous cat! Poor little mouse! Unhappy zebra!

Kicking and plunging the other zebras in the herd run; run for miles, trembling and snorting, with flying manes and tails, throwing up clouds of dust. Zebras running for miles, to stand wide-eyed with heaving flanks and twitching nostrils, snorting and trembling from fear. Fear of lions.

Lions, lions everywhere. Creeping, crouching, shuffling, pouncing, leaping, killing. Then tearing, devouring, growling, gorging. Followed by vultures and kites and hyenas and jackals.

Alas, poor zebra!

### II.

More likely a bullet from a gun.

Run, run, run.  
Run, zebra, run.  
Here comes white man.  
With his gun.

Where is the quagga? Dead of the white man's gun. Zebra is following him. White man hates anything beautiful and swift and proud. White man shoots anything running free if he cannot shut it up in a cage.

Look at this strip of zebra skin in my hand. It is strong and pliant and tough, scorning the sun and thorns of Central Africa. But it could not repel the bullet.

Look closely upon the strip of zebra skin. The dark stripes are not black, but deepest brown, a lovely ebony. The white stripes are delicately flecked with faintest chesnut, a mere tinge of chesnut, amplifying their white beauty.

Feel the skin; stroke it. Smooth, silky, glossy; a pleasure under the fingers, a joy to feel and behold. So was it alive.

Fear the white man with his gun!

One walked for many months in Africa without a gun, carrying only a stick. He was an entomologist, so because of his intense interest in insects he left all other creatures alone. They left him alone too.

Black men and beautiful or strange creatures; they all fall victims to white man's gun if living they cannot subserve his greed.

Quagga, zebra, antelope, deer; hippopotamus, rhinoceros, giraffe, elephant.

Elephants have great curving yellow tusks, magnificent and valuable. Kill the elephants and sell their tusks.

Elephants flap their ears, flap their ears, flap their ears at smell of white man.

### III.

Missionaries flap their hands, but not from anger at the smell of the white man, or fear of the gun, or pain of the bullet.



Missionaries flap their hands with joy. They wag their heads and rub their bellies, living on the best of everything. Fat on the fat of the land. Oh, monstrous imposition!

All is good to the missionaries. They have money and houses and land, cheap food and cheaper servants. They are lords of the land, hand in glove with trader and official—and tax-collector.

Latter most important person of all, emblem of white civilization. Alas for the poor negro; the hapless zebra compelled to mingle black and white.

The missionary! Why replace one gallimaufry of superstitions by another? Except that the white witch-doctor has a more profitable and prosperous and pleasanter life than his black confrere. Unlucky zebra!

Why the missionary? Put it in Euclidean form: one Mumbo-Jumbo being equal to another Mumbo-Jumbo then all Mumbo-Jumbos are equal to all other Mumbo-Jumbos. Ah, the poor striped zebra!

Africa is no country for white men. Let the negro have his native home and habitat. All-black Africa.

All-black all-black all-black black black black Africa. Tawny and grey, brown and dun, spotted and striped and speckled creatures under torrid sun. Black people. Black men, women and children. Black people in their natural element. Black residents living where they were born.

#### IV.

Klumpton is a doctor. Klumpton holds a Government appointment. Klumpton is sworn in as a magistrate. Klumpton is commissioned to act as Police Inspector. Klumpton tours country on his official duties in a powerful automobile. Britons residing among blacks must be prepared for all emergencies. Few white stripes, many dark ones. Sometimes red ones across black ones, but never across white ones. Red stripes on black.

Klumpton is deputed to investigate a murder. Doctor Klumpton makes a post-mortem examination. Coroner Klumpton holds an inquest. Dead man has been wilfully murdered. Police-Inspector Klumpton orders arrest of murderer. Magistrate Klumpton presides in Petty Sessions Court. Commits murderer to Assizes.

British Raj Klumpton addresses native populace on the justicity of British justice and the greatness of the British Empire. Up Doctor Magister Police-Inspector Poooh-Bah Klumpton!

Alas the poor zebra with white man's bullet in his beautiful striped hide!

A. R. WILLIAMS

### North Country Notes

Built on the site of a Roman camp, the Riverside Park at Chester-le-Street, is, if small, a very pretty place. On Sunday, the Secularists of the North-East found it an ideal spot for their Freethought demonstration.

After a very dull day, and five or six hours' rain and thunder, it was as if the weather repented, and a fine evening brought quite a large crowd to the bandstand where Messrs. Rooshen G. Mohamed, H. Dalkin, and Jno. T. Brighton gave addresses. In opening out the meeting Mr. Brighton said that in lending the park to the Secular Society for its demonstration, the council members had shown the people who elected them that they knew the meaning of justice. In all society justice was very necessary, but unfortunately it was seldom that the Freethinker or Atheist was given equal rights with the various religious sects.

Mr. Rooshen Mohammed, in a bright speech, showed the historic opposition of the Church to all advanced ideas and movements. He further showed the part played by

Freethinkers in these advanced movements. He went on to criticise the false ideas people held in regard to the missionary and his work amongst the "heathen." He pointed out how the "heathen" became "rice Christians" in times of famine. The cost of such missions was far ahead of any work of real value they performed. A question the native often asked was, "If only 1 in 100 people go to church in England, why not use the missionary in England first?"

Mr. H. Dalkin, in a forceful speech, dealt with the attempts to secure justice for those outside of the Christian religion. He showed the intolerance of the Churches, and the cruelties used to suppress all who disagreed with their dogmas. From the Blasphemy Laws to the Christian attempts to prevent the holding of the International Congress of Freethinkers in England last year. Mr. Dalkin showed the continual attempts to suppress all and everything which disagreed with religion. In closing the meeting, Mr. Brighton pointed out the errors in the educational system which not only permitted, but encouraged a one-sided knowledge of things and ideas. "You have no right to give a child an opinion; your duty is to help to show him or her how important it is to form one of his own." The crowd, which increased as the meeting progressed, showed keen interest in all that was said, and the first demonstration in Chester-le-Street's Park may be registered a great success.

J. T. BRIGHTON.

"That's the Stubb's house," he said, "It cost a hundred thousand dollars to build. The Stubbs are one of our best families. Old man Stubbs came here as a missionary more than seventy years ago."

He hesitated a little and looked at me with twinkling eyes through his big round spectacles.

"All our best families are missionary families," he said. "You're not very much in Honolulu unless your father or your grandfather converted the heathen."

"Is that so?"

"Do you know your Bible?"

"Fairly," I answered.

"There is a text which says: Thy fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. I guess it runs differently in Honolulu. The fathers brought Christianity to the Kanaka and the children jumped his land."

"Heaven helps those who help themselves," I murmured.

"It surely does. By the time the natives of this island had embraced Christianity they had nothing else they could afford to embrace. The kings gave the missionaries land as a mark of esteem, and the missionaries bought land by way of laying up treasure in heaven. It surely was a good investment. One missionary left the business—I think one may call it a business without essence—and became a land agent, but that is an exception. Mostly it was their sons who looked after the commercial side of the concern. Oh, it's a fine thing to have a father who came here fifty years ago to spread the faith."

From "Honolulu," by Maugham

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