

THE FREETHINKER

▪ EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ▪

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Frazer and Religion

IN my notes last week I said there was a passage in the introductory chapter to the "Belief in Immortality" which, in conjunction with other passages I have quoted, reads as though it were intended as a confession of Frazer's own position with regard to the belief in God. It follows a brief outline of the origin of the idea of gods, and runs:—

"From one department of nature after another the gods are reluctantly or contemptuously dismissed and their provinces committed to the care of certain abstract ideas of ethers, atoms, molecules and so forth which, though just as imperceptible to human senses as their divine predecessors, are judged by prevailing opinion to discharge their duties with regularity and dispatch, and are accordingly firmly installed on the vacant thrones amid the general applause of the more enlightened portion of mankind. Thus, instead of being peopled with a noisy, bustling crowd of full-blooded and picturesque deities, clothed in the graceful form and animated with the warm passions of humanity, the universe outside the narrow circle of our consciousness is now conceived as absolutely silent, colourless and deserted. The cheerful sounds which we hear, the bright hues which we see have no existence, we are told, in the external world; the voices of friends, the harmonies of music, the chime of falling waters, the solemn roll of ocean, the silver splendour of the moon, the golden glory of the sunset, the verdure of summer woods and the hectic tints of autumn—all these subsist only in our minds; and if we imagine them to have any reality elsewhere we deceive ourselves. . . . Outside of ourselves there stretched away on every side an infinitude of space without sound, without light, without colour, a solitude traversed only in every direction by an inconceivably complex web of silent and impersonal forces. That, if I understand it, is the general conception of the world which modern science has substituted for polytheism."

No one who is able to read with his ears, and who is not among those unfortunates who can read only with their eyes, can fail to observe here two things: first the eloquence of the language used and, secondly, a strain of feeling that can find its origin

in personal conviction only. Put that passage with the tone in which he deals with the conception of God, his insistence that the only legitimate and honest sense of the word is that of a magnified man and the vein of Atheism running through Frazer's thought becomes quite clear. He does occasionally say that probably the belief in gods helped to enforce obedience to prescribed conduct; but that is more of a "sop to Cerebus" than a statement of conviction. His dismissal of the idea of god and gods in some instances approaches the contemptuous. The most that can be said on behalf of the gods might well be put in the words of a French writer (I quote from memory): "Modern science leads the gods to the boundaries of the universe, thanks them for past services and bids them a final good-bye."

There is one feature of contemporary science in civilised countries that is very significant to informed students. The origin of morals in, first, the unconscious pressure of group life—a feature that carries us beyond the distinctively animal group—is admitted by all scientific authorities. The religious world (this must include all those who, from lack of courage or mental clarity, shrink from taking up an Atheistic position) divides itself here into two phases. On the one side we have the presentation of clouds of words, of much sound but little substance, which loses itself in a curious kind of transcendentalism that makes morality cover all sorts of vain "yearnings" and converts morality into an eternal mystery. The other phase is a Christian defence that is aimed at a lower, less mentally alert audience—or, if alert, are so with regard to personal interest—who argue that man can only be "deterred" from ill-doing for any length of time if convinced that there is a God from whom a moral imperative comes. I have given of late many illustrations of this last phase of a decaying creed and need not repeat them here. I am now concerned with the Atheistic standpoint of Sir James Frazer.

Morals and Religion

On this question of morals, Frazer follows substantially the road marked by Spencer and Tylor, and indeed of all modern sociologists who are also evolutionists. To put the position briefly, religion and ethics have different roots and independent origins. Religion is a precipitate from the confused thinking of man after he had travelled some considerable distance from his animal forebears. Confused, inadequate and false, yet religion has its beginnings in the intellectual side of human life; but morality is practised before it has any intellectual quality at all. The love of the animal mother for its young is not something that is discovered: it is practised before it is understood; were it otherwise it would never be practised. Gregariousness arises in the same way and is developed up to a certain point without a "why" or a "wherefore." Morality, as I have so often said, is the physiology of associated life. I mean by this that just as physiology deals with the vital processes and functions of living organisms, so morality deals primarily with the vital processes and functions of a social group; and in both instances the necessary processes must go on or in both cases the individual and the group would disappear.

But there is to-day no question that man is descended from a gregarious type of animal life. It is not true that man formed the group: it is the group that formed man; and if writers on morals had borne this simple fact in mind we should not find so many university lecturers and other public men paying lip-homage to religion in a way that reflects on the quality of their courage and intelligence.

Morality is implicit in practice long before it is explicit in theory. To identify morality with the early forms of religious belief is absurd. In their earliest phases, religions have no connection with morals. The association of the two begins with the reactions of morals on religion; and that reaction has continued ever since. In the course of two or three generations we have seen so cardinal a doctrine of Christianity as that of eternal damnation rejected by vast masses of professing Christians; and even the Churches admit the rightful claims of non-Christians and anti-Christians to equal citizenship. Decency and justice cannot be defied for ever even by the Churches.

Frazer's position with regard to the independent social origin of morality is substantially that laid down by Spencer and Tylor. In his valuable little work, "Anthropology," published in 1881, Tylor says:—

"It is plain that even the lowest men cannot live quite by what the Germans call *faustrecht*, or fist-right, and we call club law. The strong savage does not rush into his weaker neighbour's hut and take possession, driving the owner out into the forest with a stone-headed javelin sent flying after him. Without some control beyond the mere right of the stronger, the tribe would break up in a week; whereas savage tribes last on for ages."

No modern sociologist would dispute the principle involved in this statement. Certainly, Frazer does not; it is everywhere implied in his writings and sometimes deliberately stated. He does lay greater stress than Tylor on the belief that conscious morality develops out of taboos; but all taboos are not religious, although religion trades on this principle. A "taboo" means only something that is forbidden, and Frazer points out that the "old savage taboos rest on the direct relations of living creatures"—not, be it noted, on the belief in gods. Of course, the development of taboos increases with the power of religion, with the added anti-social result of introducing the use of "sacred"—devoted to the gods—things and so preventing so far as is possible further development. Practice, to use a common phrase, becomes "frozen," and adaptation to changing circumstances is made difficult and sometimes impossible. The "religious or supernatural sanction"—this equating of religion with supernaturalism—often occurs with Frazer and leaves no doubt of his strongly anti-religious frame of mind. Another significant attitude of Frazer is one often met in such a statement as: "Yet here it would seem that superstition has proved a useful crutch on which morality can lean until it is strong enough to walk alone." But he neither believes nor wishes others to believe that this has anything to do with the origin or development of moral ideas. The gods at most serve the purpose of a police force for the time being; and against the value of their services even here he sets the ills of superstition, as described in my previous notes taken from his "Psyche's Task," but, in saying all that can be said on behalf of religion, he admits that his plea cannot do more than delay the sentence which civilisation passes on it. It must ultimately be one of death.

The Anthropological Key

There are other points of view one may name as illustrating the identity of the fundamental thought of Tylor and Frazer. Tylor defines religion as "belief in spiritual beings"—and by "spiritual beings" he means the ghostly forces which early mankind believed existed all around them. Frazer defines religion as belief in a supernatural being made in the exact likeness of man; and it may be noted in passing that this was the general belief of all Christians until a couple of generations ago, so little had they moved from the viewpoint of the savage—and millions of Christians are still in that low state of mental development where "god" is concerned.

Tylor, again, stresses the fact that the study of religious beliefs and their social evaluation has far more than a museum interest. He says deliberately, in taking his farewell of his readers, that our current religious views "expose the remains of a crude old culture which have passed into harmful superstition," and he marks these for a "destruction" that is "urgently needful for the good of mankind." His work ends with a sentence we strongly commend to those present-day "social reformers" who pay lip-homage to the current religion, or remain silent when they should be loudly vocal, that the study of superstition "is essentially a reformer's science."

We have the same note struck even more continuously in Frazer. Over and over again he draws the moral from his researches that our civilisation is honeycombed with superstitions which threaten the security of whatever culture we have acquired. He gives us an illustration in the magico-religious ceremony presented in our Coronation Service down to the vogue of mascots and other charms. (One would much like to have had Frazer's open opinion of the purely savage performance that took place in Westminster Abbey on the Coronation of the present King.) It is the existence of such superstitions as are present in the Roman Church with unashamed effrontery, in the other churches with less dramatic representations, the days of prayer to win a war or for the recovery of a king or queen from illness that cause Frazer to remind us that we are like a people living on the crust of what they believe to be an extinct volcano, while all the time nothing lies between them and a devastating explosion. Beneath the superficial culture of our modern civilisation there exist fierce, primitive passions, fed by the survivals of these early superstitions of mankind, which must be swept on one side and destroyed if our development is to continue.

There are other things I may note before I close these notes, inadequate as they are as a full tribute to a great anthropologist. One reader has, quite unnecessarily, reminded me that Frazer accepted the actual existence of the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. As put, the statement is not correct. Frazer does say that, in his judgment, there is a real personage behind the Jesus Christ of the New Testament; but he believes that Osiris, who resembles Jesus Christ so closely, and lived (?) so many centuries before Jesus Christ is said to have lived, may also have been an actual character. In fact, he has some sympathy with the old Greek theory that all gods were originally men, deified after their death. But all this is quite beside the point, and the stress that modern apologists lay upon the social and ethical reformer, Jesus, in order to get people to believe in the incarnate god, Christ, is but one example of the intellectual dishonesty and moral waywardness that must accompany all religion in a modern environment.

For the only Jesus Christ that is of value to the honest Christian—and, as Ben Jonson remarked of

critical readers, "Ye be mighty few"—is the Jesus who was born of a virgin, was God incarnate, a worker of miracles, the revealer of a geographical heaven and hell, who was ceremonially crucified and who rose from the dead an historical personage? And it is precisely these teachings that Frazer over and over again identifies in kind with the vain imaginings of the savage.

There is also a passage in the third volume of the "Golden Bough" which is worth quoting because it expresses Frazer's attitude towards what may be regarded as one of the central doctrines of Christianity. Referring to the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, he says with hardly disguised contempt for the belief in a supernatural being: "Who by a simple fiat can cancel the transgressions and restore the transgressors to a state of pristine innocence. This comfortable doctrine teaches us that in order to blot out the effects of our misdeeds we have only to acknowledge and confess them with a lowly and penitent heart, whereupon a merciful God will graciously pardon our sin and absolve us and ours from its consequence. It might indeed be well for the world if we could thus easily undo the past; if we could recall the words that have been spoken amiss; if we could arrest the long train that follows, like a flight of avenging Furies, on every evil action. But this we cannot do. Our words and acts, good and bad, have their natural, their inevitable consequences. God may pardon sin, but nature cannot."

This cardinal teaching of Christianity, without which even Jesus Christ sinks to nothing, was never condemned with a more precise or a colder contempt.

I must bring these notes to a close. I have said nothing much of Frazer's quality as a writer, nor of the width of his studies. He wrote with a grace that few men who have travelled the same road have possessed. There is a fine humanity in all that he writes and an unmistakable contempt for all that is mean in human action. Above all, he is a charming guide and companion for lovers of a fine character and who appreciate forceful writing. Quite by accident I have, in writing these notes, been using his "Pausanias and Other Greek Sketches" as a paper, for I am writing, as I so often do, in the open air. I could not suggest a better example of a style that will commend itself to anyone who deserves to have fine writing placed before him.

CHAPMAN COHEN

THE PENMAN'S ART AND APPLIANCES

AS an instrument for the preservation of human thought, the written record has rendered priceless services to civilisation. Yet, even now, when the entire world is taken into account, writing plays but a subordinate part in the diffusion of knowledge. Most people still gather through conversation and oral inquiry what they desire to know. Still, signs and symbols of the crudest character serve successfully to impart and preserve information among very primitive races. The picture-writing Bushmen of Africa portray their hunting expeditions with remarkable fidelity; also, the prehistoric cave painters of Western Europe were capable of executing drawings of reindeer, wild oxen and other animals which command the admiration of modern artists.

So far as we at present know, the alphabet is of relatively recent origin. Despite the superb literature of ancient Greece and the multitudinous records of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, the written word exercised far less influence on the culture of the

antique world—even in Athens—than it does to-day. Certainly, this reservation must be made: At the moment the censorship, the increased cost of printing and the almost prohibitive price of paper, as well as its scarcity, all conspire to lessen the potency of the printed page. But in normal times the power of the Press in countries where a modicum of freedom precariously survives possessed no counterpart in civilised antiquity.

This dearth in the olden days is largely attributable to the lack of writing material. When inscriptions on stone in Egypt, and on sun-baked bricks in Babylon, were supplemented in the Land of the Nile by papyrus, the art of writing rapidly developed and libraries housing manuscripts came into being. The earliest media of Egypt and Assyria—stone and clay—were later respectively reinforced by papyrus and leather. The latter had long been utilised in Asia, while in the 4th century A.D. parchment prepared from leather was used for books and business documents; but in Pagan times the customary writing-paper remained papyrus.

Twelve centuries before our era Phœnician merchants are mentioned in Nilotic records as importers of papyrus. Yet leather continued to hold its own in the Orient; and it is noteworthy that the Hebrew Scriptures were written on rolls of dressed hide. Professor J. T. Shotwell, in his highly instructive "History of History" (Columbia University Press, 1939), assures us that "The Greeks, too, were surprisingly slow to adopt it. Already by the 6th century B.C. they were familiar with the material [papyrus], which they named 'biblos' from the Phœnician city that traded in it. As a matter of fact, the Greeks were always hampered by the scarcity of papyrus, which they had to import. This partly accounts for the extent to which their literature was cast in form for oral delivery rather than for private reading. Papyrus began to appear at the time of the great lyric poets, and to it is probably due the preservation of the works of Sappho, Alcæus and Anacreon. Written prose dates from the end of the 6th century. Herodotus first composed his history for public recitation. Thucydides was apparently the first Greek to write a long book primarily for readers rather than for listeners."

It seems surprising that no outstanding library existed in Athens even in the period of Pericles. Its first public library was apparently that established by Hadrian in later Roman times. It was in Egypt, when under Greek dominion, that the earliest great Grecian library appeared. The date of the founding of the famous Alexandrian Library is uncertain, but in the 3rd century B.C. Ptolemy Philadelphus was probably the initiator. Subsequently there were noted libraries at Pergamum and Ephesus, while under the Empire vast collections of books were stored in Rome and the leading provincial cities.

As the generations passed away, papyrus lost its pride of place as writing material. Until recent archaeological researches restored them, no classical works were known to have survived in their original rolls of papyrus. For papyrus was later superseded by the use of parchment. The growing scarcity of the Egyptian reed partly explains this. In any case, less papyrus was available and the plant had apparently died out in the Nile delta. Thus, from the 4th century onwards the original papyrus roll was replaced by a quite dissimilar manuscript book, the parchment codex.

The term "parchment" is derived from Pergamum, an Asiatic city, where the Greek, Eumenes II., erected palatial buildings, including a fine library. A rival ruler then reigning in Egypt, Ptolemy VI.,

is said to have prevented supplies of papyrus from reaching Eumenes, who then first used parchment as a substitute. This story, however, seems apocryphal, for skins were employed for writing purposes at least as early if not earlier than papyrus. So Dr. Shotwell concludes that the name Pergamum "attached to the sheets of leather (pergamena charta) seems to indicate a new process of tanning and preparation and a centre of the trade at Pergamum."

Yet, from the period of Eumenes II. (197-159) papyrus retained its position as the usual medium for writing until the 4th century of our era. Then, the parchment that replaced papyrus was no longer coiled in rolls but cut like the pages of a modern volume, and many scribes copied the papyrus-inscribed masterpieces of antiquity that have come down to us, although, deplorably enough, much precious material has been lost past recovery.

As Dr. Shotwell intimates, the parchment codex proved much more lasting than the papyrus roll, as well as more practicable. The oldest codices we now possess are Bibles: the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus, both alleged to date from the 4th century A.D.; but in their transcriptions from papyrus to parchment the monkish scribes were only too prone to desecrate with pious drivel many priceless fragments of ancient literature. Still, as Dr. Shotwell somewhat mordantly reminds us, "Fragmentary as they are, however, these old texts, treated chemically and read critically by modern scholars, have restored many a precious passage of the lost literature of antiquity. It is one of the ironies of history that books of devotion, used for centuries in the service of the Church, which denounced the vanities of pagan thought and practice, kept for the modern humanist those very texts of myth and history which otherwise would have passed into complete oblivion."

Throughout medieval times the codex persisted, but with the invention of the art of printing by means of movable types, paper—long in use in China—filtered into Europe through Moslem lands; but in the 14th century paper was not utilised for writing purposes to any considerable extent. It was still scarce and costly, and so continued until it was produced by machinery towards the close of the 18th century. Then it became fairly abundant, although decidedly inferior in quality to the hand-made paper it so extensively superseded. Yet, it was greatly superior to the bulk of the paper manufactured to-day. Should civilisation survive the present conflict, Dr. Shotwell's warning may prove salutary; for, as he justly states, historians and librarians have repeatedly deplored the perishable nature of the paper now in universal use. "The paper made to-day," he complains, "is the most fragile stuff to which any civilisation has ever entrusted its records. All but a tiny fraction of the output of our printing presses is crumbling and discoloured waste in a few years after it is printed upon. We are writing not upon sand but upon dust heaps. The thought is a sobering one to anyone who looks back . . . over the fate of other civilisations and the slight and fragmentary traces they have left."

In all ages inscriptional media have proved themselves socially serviceable. Yet, the scribes of old could never have evolved classical literature in all its variety and splendour had they possessed no writing substances save stone and clay. As we have seen, the use of papyrus and parchment enabled them to surmount this impediment. As early as 4,000 years B.C. the dimly distant Nile dwellers were acquainted with the art of cleaving the stem of the papyrus plant and affixing strips of the reed thereto: thus producing a convenient writing material.

T. F. PALMER

EVERLASTING LIFE

ONE of the "articles" of the Apostles' Creed in which every Christian is bound to believe, is "The Life Everlasting." In ancient days practically nothing was known about life; it was a great mystery; and it was easy, therefore, to imagine (by what to-day is called "wishful thinking") that it might continue without end. That consummation seemed to Ancient Theology not only possible, but obviously desirable.

But to us more sophisticated moderns the outlook is not so mysterious. We know much about life in its manifold forms, ranging from protoplasm to mankind, and we know well in Swinburne's words: "That no life lives for ever." Change and decay are the iron laws of life. "And so from hour to hour we ripe and ripe and then from hour to hour we rot and rot, and thereby hangs a tale," wrote Shakespeare. The human destiny is that of the grass in the field; of the mouse in the chimney-corner; of the bird in the air; and the fish in the sea; of the tiger in the jungle; of Nineveh and Tyre; and all our pomp of yesterday. Why, indeed, should man have a Resurrection denied to his animal ancestry? Can it be any more necessary for him than for them? Is it just that you should live for ever and that the beetle on the lesser dung-heap die for ever? You think so—but what could the beetle say to that? The grass withereth, the flower fadeth—and man, less innocent, less beautiful, is to last for ever. But why!

Modern men do not even want to last for ever. Bernard Shaw put the modern outlook on this point tolerably well in "Back to Methuselah." At 20 young men and maidens may feel the wish, and even the intimation, of immortality; but when they know more of life at 40, 50 or 60, do they really want an endless existence? When we have lost our illusions about life and we see it for the fraud of old Mother Nature that it really is, do we really want the residue of our days lengthened to infinity? Bald, decrepit, toothless, tottering and doddering, responsive to no earthly stimuli but food, drink, warmth and sleep, your Methuselah is kindlier put to bed in the grave. It is childish perversity to want to "stay up" after bedtime. "I have not finished my game," pleads the child, and so thinks the reluctant old man in second childhood. But, after a time, the tired eyes and hands disobey their owner—and sleep is inevitable.

Can we, knowing the terms on which we hold our precarious leaseholds of life, really believe that "Life Everlasting" is good for us? Cried a famous general to his hesitating soldiers: "Dogs! would you then live for ever?" He was right. Man is not made for life everlasting. "Out, out, brief candle!" Man is made (like all else) for temporary use. The babe in the womb; the infant at the breast; the boy at his mother's skirts; the youth seeking his girl; the mature man with his purposes and follies; the ancient with his memories and regrets; the corpse denuded of all he had and all he was, in his coffin—and the female counterparts of these—what more have they to experience?

What more indeed? Surely it is enough of the burden of years. But no, say the religious greedily: "Let me live for ever."

To what end? Two, and only two, destinies are preferred: Hell and Heaven. Hell, which consists of an eternal bonfire no one in his senses would choose. Heaven, in which one is to be bored for ever instead of being burned for ever, is no prize to the modern mind. Praising God (or anyone else) for countless ages, or listening to angelic choirs (or anyone else) crying "Holy, Holy Holy" without cessation would drive even a clergyman insane. So limited is human imagination on this topic that pictures of Heaven are either glorified jewellers' shops or musical lunatic asylums. For my part, I like moderation and good taste in jewellery, and music, and praise, and I detest excess in any of the three. The *ennui* of Heaven and the torment of Hell as depicted by Religion make eternal sleep a "consummation devoutly to be wished." As the cynic said, the only attractive thing he had ever heard of Heaven was that there was no marrying or giving in marriage there. And even that is no attraction to a barrister with a divorce practice or a clergyman with a nice little income from wedding fees!

Do religious folk who repeat solemnly their patter: "I believe in . . . the Life Everlasting" really believe in it? They have never considered the fearful implications of the exact words. Theological romance has cast a rosy halo over the concept: "Our dear ones will be there"—"No more sorrow, no more anguish, no more pain"—"Eternal bliss"—"Eye have not seen nor hath ear heard"—"Peace passing all understanding" (like this war, which also passes all understanding!) But unending life! For the stillborn, the suicide and the worn-out!

"Death is a fearful thing!" Yes, indeed, to young Claudio. But his sister Isabella's retort: "And sham'd life a hateful" is true, too. And this "everlasting life" concept (born of fear and ignorance and fostered by the greed of men unwilling to admit "enough") is essentially a shameful thing. Robert Browning expressed it in its noblest form: "Other heights in other lives"—but even so, it is a chimera, for every babe must begin at the beginning. We had better accept Death as we accept sleep; as ordinary and necessary and no evil at all.

Life is not so valuable after all. Even the humblest British Tommy is taught to regard his own life in war-time as a thing to be squandered at the dictate of folly or incompetence, as a thing of no value and not even his own to dispose of—and he accepts that state of affairs uncomplainingly. That dark Elizabethan dramatist, John Webster, who wrote "The Duchess of Malfi," put it with exact knowledge of the religious view:—

"Of what is't Fools make such vain keeping?
Sin their conception; their birth, weeping;
Their life, a general mist of error;
Their death, a hideous storm of terror—"

But life and death are capable of nobler purposes; better to live and die like the common soldier in war-time, we obeying Nature as he, his superior.

Modern-minded religious folk, seeing the difficulties of persuading people to want their present ugly or sick "bodies" for everlasting life, often throw over "The Resurrection of the Body." (But this denial of bodily resurrection is unorthodox and contrary to the immemorial dogmas of the Church.) The heterodox believe instead (they say) in the Soul only being everlasting, or in re-incarnation in another form, or in a merger with God, or in new life in another human birth. Alas! so perverse is human nature that these imaginary abstractions make little appeal to the mob. People want to remain themselves and remain conscious of resurrection and identity—otherwise most folk have little use for resurrection and everlasting life. They feel cheated by these "modern" attempts to fob them off with something that is not the real thing—the real thing being after-life romance of the boy-meets-girl type and a-good-time-will-be-had-by-all in Paradise. Really, it is orthodoxy or nothing for most people so far as everlasting life is concerned.

One may challenge the concept of "everlasting life" as applied to the individual without being an enemy of life. I am all for life; intenser, vividder, life, and I am all for the mastery of life. But why should I pretend that it is possible for men to master Death any more than they can master the Unconscious Period before their birth? I am willing to concede that there is a sense in which men with brains may believe in "everlasting" life—there was an ancestral beetle on the lesser dunghill yesterday and the present beetles' posterity will be there "to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow to the last syllable of recorded Time," as Shakespeare has it. But must it not end at last? Everlasting Life is like the mathematical concept of a recurring decimal stretching from here to infinity, and the finite human brain reels at it like a drunken man. The truth is, I suspect, that everything has an end. Even this article!

C. G. L. DU CANN.

ACID DROPS

WHY bomb London? That is a question that might be answered in various ways. It depends who has to give the answer. The answer given by the "Church Times," for example, is "God, in fact, is giving, as He always does, a second chance—the chance to rebuild London." That may be the case, but there are difficulties in the way of accepting the explanation. We can understand his having "The Freethinker" office bombed. But that was not to see a new "Freethinker" office established. And, after all, we defended God from the accusations of his followers. We have denied that God caused earthquakes or sends disease, etc., etc., but why bomb the churches? Surely he did not want them to be destroyed? When God gets to work he is too promiscuous. Someone gets hurt, but he never appears to discriminate between his friends and his enemies, although often enough, those who turn out to be his best friends are treated as his worst enemies. For all the improvements that have taken place in the character of God are due to those who were counted as opposed to him.

Of course there are slums. They were a disgrace—we had almost said to any civilised country, but that would make it appear that they belonged properly to non-civilised countries. But these do not have such vile slums as grew up in Christian Britain and within the shadow of the Churches. They ought to have been blown up long ago. But if man had done the blowing up, he would have taken care that the people were out of them when the explosions took place. Apparently, God goes to work, in his usual promiscuous manner; he bombs places or uses his agents to give us a chance to rebuild London by blowing up houses when old and young, sick and healthy, good and bad are sleeping in them—while those who built them, or drew the rents from these slums were living comfortably enough in safe parts. Now will some of these apologists answer a very simple, but a very direct, question? Suppose God does not exist. Would, or could, these things be worse than they are? And assuming that he does exist, ought they to be as bad as they are? Why keep on singing "Praise God from whom all 'blitzkriegs' flow"? We do not believe, and for the best of reasons, that God has anything to do with the bombing.

It almost looks as though some of the religious journals are not very sanguine about the power of prayer in this war to a desirable-British-end. In a recent issue, for example, the "Church Times" said that "the smashing tactics adopted by the Germans might prove alike more politic and more effective" in Syria. We are inclined to agree with this policy, although not strongly. At any rate, there is little room here for the power of prayer or for the doctrine of turning one cheek when the other is smitten. Hitler, the man of action, actually seems more attractive for the time being to one of our leading Christian journals than the central figure of the New Testament. The editor does not appear to ask himself, "What would Jesus do?" but rather "What would the German general staff do?" And the rest of the Christian entourage are continuously crying out for more guns, and more men and more aeroplanes. With plenty of these, then we shall have an opportunity to thank Jesus for winning the war for us.

On the anniversary of Magna Carta, which, as the comedian has it, gave English people the right to do as they pleased, provided they did as they were told, Lord Hugh Cecil gave an address on the anniversary of this foundation of England's greatness. He said all the usual things about the great charter, and we are inclined to believe the wrong things. Some 40 years ago, when we had more time than we have at present, we went digging into this question, and failed to find what real liberties owe their foundations to the revolt of the barons against John. We found that the first man who gave Magna Carta its popular character was Blackstone (seventeenth century). Selden, a very great writer of the same century, confessed himself puzzled as to the meaning of some of the cardinal words in the Charter. And if we are not very seriously mistaken, it was the rights granted to the barons under the Charter that have blocked progress in this country many a time.

And in these four things—opinions of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear and taking of things casual for prognostics—consisteth the natural seeds of religion; which, by reason of different fancies, judgments and passions of several men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different that those which are used by one man are, for the most part, ridiculous to another.

—HOBBS.

We wish to emphasise "rights granted to the barons," for, so far as we could see, it was the barons who benefited, and **they** got what they wanted. But we should much like some one with more time, and greater historical knowledge than we have, to point out whether the Great Charter did more than convert the privileges enjoyed by the barons into legal rights? When thinking on these matters Free-thinkers should remember how many thousands of witnesses to things that have never occurred the Christian Church has provided, and how difficult it is to get the truth of, say, the lives of monarchs who lived but yesterday. And the **true** story of the World War will, we imagine, be told somewhere about the year 2050.

It seems that Christian fugitives in England from the Hitler terror "often find difficulty in selecting a suitable church in which to worship." Again we are puzzled. Why, particularly in these times when we are feeding and living as we may, are believers disturbed at not finding a "suitable church"? Is it God who is responsible for this sensitiveness in the matter? Or does the sensitiveness come from those who worship? In either case, might not a preface something like the following be said before worshipping: "Oh God we know that this is not the kind of place to ask you to listen to our prayers and praises. But, oh Lord, please remember there is a war on, and war-time makes strange acquaintances inevitable. We have to worship with all kinds of odds and ends of believers joining in. The building is not so nice as it might be, and the praise not so eloquent as it ought to be. But, oh Lord, please remember that for the duration we all have to do the best we can, and if you are doing your best to help us, we are doing our best to save you, for if Hitler wins there will be another sort of god in your place. And when the war is over, and we can go to our different churches and chapels, we can then praise thee and damn each other in the way that thy followers have always done."

"God," says the "Universe," "never intended illness in His scheme of creation. It is a result of the fall." Poor God! He meant so well, and things have turned out so ill. There is an old maxim that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. One wonders who invented the road? Man just discovered it. The source of origin seems very obvious. It actually looks as though the "Universe" agrees with us in this, for it says that "bodily afflictions sent or permitted by God may be a great means of grace to us, and we should be resigned to God's will in them and thank God for them." So let us praise God—first for providing a hell, next for making us so that we were sure to so act that it would be pretty certain that a fair number of his creatures would go there.

We agree thoroughly with the "Universe" when it says that some of the saints seem to make ill-health an ideal. There is hardly a competent psychologist or medical authority who would doubt this. Tylor said, long ago, that the opening of the refectory door would often have closed the gates of heaven. Fasting and general ill-treatment of the body, from savagery up to modern Spiritualism, have had much to do with celestial visions. It was the celibate monk who mostly had visions of the Virgin, and celibate nuns those of Jesus. For ourself, we have never questioned the "reality" of most of these "revelations of the unseen." They are as real as any of the thousand-and-one fantasies that accompany the tortured mind and ill-treated body. Even to-day fasting and "self-denial" stand high in the opinion of the chief religions of the world.

It may be remembered that the planned crusade for the capture of the schools by the Churches was started by a leading article in "The Times." It was also "The Times," in an issue during February that published an account from some local parson who discovered that 19 out of 31 evacuated children—average age twelve years—did not know who died on Christmas Day. The item of news—it was said—was furnished by a country parson, name unknown, and no attempt was made to verify a statement, which

bore falsity on the face of it. But "The Times" reprinted the article and 40,000 were circulated in a few days. It was a well-laid plot, and the end of it is not yet. This plot may be taken as one of the great war efforts by the Churches—and it follows the Goebbelian lead.

The Rev. G. Knight is very much concerned with what will happen after the war, but hopes that the Gospel will be carried to the Jews everywhere. Mr. Knight thinks "they are open to conversion." So some always have been, but the converts gained have been, mainly, of two orders. Those who, in certain circumstances, have become Christians for sheer safety's sake, and those who have turned Christian from motives of sheer gain. Provided that after the war the world starts out on the attempt to create a genuine civilisation, it is the least likely of all events that the Jews will become converted to Christianity. Religiously he has nothing to gain, and intellectually the Jew will follow the general trend of civilisation by dropping religion altogether. Of course, we are thinking of a state of culture where people have mentally and socially outgrown these mummified remains of savage culture.

Heine said that the Jews took revenge on Christians in anticipation by giving them their religion. And a Christian Heine—if Christianity could breed such wits—might retort that the Christian reply, in kind, was to keep them Jews. For it is owing to Christian persecution that the Jew has continued. Departures from the ranks of Judaism have always been numerous, but those who **would** remain Jews could only do so by sticking obstinately to their inherited religion. Persecution always either stamps out a people or solidifies their customs and strengthens the devotion of those who believe in the cause for which they suffer. So the Jew has remained largely what the Christians have compelled him to be. Remove that element of persecution and social ostracism, give the Jew both social and political equality—the former is of the greater importance—and in a few generations Judaism and the Jew would be reduced to very, very small proportions.

There is a dispute going on among certain Christian preachers as to whether Anglo-Catholicism or Protestantism is dying. One calls Henry VIII. a "syphilitic murderer." We object to neither of these terms. In Henry's day syphilis was a very common disease, and there are strong medical grounds for believing that Henry was infected—although this is a fact not mentioned in "respectable" histories. But concerning the predictions of the two clergymen as to the approaching death of Anglo-Catholicism and Protestantism, let us hope they are both correct. If the deaths occurred at about the same dates it might kill some of the other established religious creeds by sheer shock.

The B.B.C. 7-55 a.m. caterer to religious imbecility recently advised everyone to spend half an hour with God every morning. Then, reflecting that perhaps 30 minutes right off might be too much of a strain, he gave the qualifying counsel that perhaps it would be better to commence with five minutes. In this way they would, one presumes, get used to it and, in course of time, feel the need for it. We fancy that it is the way in which the confirmed whisky drinker begins. Of course, it was a professional preacher who gave this advice. There is nothing like advertising one's own goods.

Naturally and properly the N.U.T. is chiefly concerned with the status of the teacher. The new move by the Churches, if successful, will mean giving the parsonage practical control over teachers in their appointment and supervision by clerical influences and nominees after appointment. The teachers will have themselves mainly to blame if they find themselves reduced to the status of nearly a century ago. They have the power to offer decisive opposition to this clerical plot. National education is in danger.

"THE FREETHINKER,"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

WAR DAMAGE FUND.—F. A. Hornibrook, 21s.; H. Bedford, 2s. 6d.; J. F. Robins, 15s.; D. Harper, 5s.; H. J. Hewer, 5s.; J. R. Watson, £1 5s.; Mrs. E. Barnett, 1s.

J. PEPPER.—Will deal with the subject next week. It is worth more than a curt answer in this column.

S. THOMPSON.—We are getting on as rapidly as we can with reprinting some of the burned stock. But printing is now expensive, and both paper and labour are scarce.

C. L.—The Fifth volume of Essays in Freethinking will be printed as early as possible.

C. MARTIN.—It is very difficult, if not impossible, so to define progress that the definition will command universal agreement. But it is clear that progress, in the first place, must involve movement towards a given end, and to an agreed end. Next, progress can only be posed in relation to conscious effort. The use of the term in relation to the world at large is unwarranted. What we have there is not progress, but change. It is only by reading our own feelings and ideals into nature at large that we can talk of "progress" outside the human orbit.

Lecture notices must reach 2 and 3, Furnival Street, "Language, Truth and Logic," by A. J. Ayer (1936). It is good, if not too easy, reading. The published price is 5s.

Lecture notices must reach 2, and 3, Furnival Street, Holborn, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

NOW that Russia has joined the war against Germany what will God do? And what will the Churches do? We have had many days of prayer—official and unofficial—and there was the very artful action of the Archbishop of Canterbury in discovering that the war was for the preservation of Christianity. And now Russia has joined in, and Russia is a country—not of Atheists, as even some who ought to know better have said, but a country of which the Government favours Atheism and does nothing to help Christianity. And in Spain the good and godly Baldwin declined to do anything that would frustrate the Church from gaining control of Spain, while Chamberlain favoured Hitler more than the Atheistic Russian Government. Then there was the section of aristocratic society who a few years ago were shrieking, "No alliance with Russia!" and the religious Press, with one or two exceptions, joining in the cry. Finally, there is the British Roman Catholic Press that has never tired of telling us one week that Russia will not allow Christians to worship Christ, and the next discovering that in spite of all the Russian Government can do the churches are filled with worshippers.

And now suppose that God suddenly awakens to the fact that he is asked to give victory to the allies. Russia is now one of those Allies. The answer that was given to British Christians will now carry with it the strengthening of the people who will have nothing to do with God. It will even strengthen Atheism in Russia, and also in Britain. The Russians are fighting for truth and justice, when from the religious point of view they are doing nothing of the kind. And if we do not beat the Germans it will be clear—to Christians—that God was not with us. And while the Russians remain unbeaten the "Catholic Times," the "Catholic Herald" and the "Universe" will have to stop using offensive language concerning the Russian Government. And every Roman Catholic—including Cardinal Hinsley—will be praying for the victory of Atheistic Russia. It looks as though things are—religiously—getting very considerably mixed.

We are pleased to see the "Willesden Chronicle," in its issue for June 13, continuing its adverse criticism of the clerical plot to capture the schools. This paper is one of the very few that have stood apart from the general

conspiracy to capture the schools in the interests of the Churches. It refers bluntly, but truthfully, to the "mass attack by the vested interests of dogmatic belief upon the freedom of our teachers and the nature and quality of their tuition," and also to "an unholy alliance of incongruous sects which have . . . damned each other . . . for many years, as though, forsooth, they were saying among themselves, 'If we don't hang together we shall hang separately.'" It adds: "For 70 years religious intolerance has lain like a blight upon elementary education in this country" with the aim of providing with public funds "nurseries and forcing houses for the benefit of privileged sectarianism and dogmatic superstition." The whole of the article is admirable.

Meanwhile, we should very much like to know what the official, and unofficial, Labour Party is doing in the matter? Surely it is worth while risking a few votes in the interests of national education. Of course, we have a war on hand, but that also applies to this plot, engineered from responsible quarters, to rob the schools of their efficiency and to lower the quality of teachers and education. It looks almost as though the tactics that weakened so much the Labour Movement in the first half of the nineteenth century are again in operation.

One of our sailor readers asks for the exact words of the Admiralty concerning the right of men to alter the declaration of religious belief made on joining the Navy. Here it is, dated May 27, 1940. It is sent to the Secretary of the National Secular Society:—

"I am commanded by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform you that, in accordance with the provisions of King's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions, the alteration of the religious denomination of a man serving in the Royal Navy is permissible."

There is the same freedom of action with regard to the Army and Air Force, and we again stress the importance of Freethinkers insisting on substituting an affirmation wherever an oath is usually required, and to see that their attestation concerning religion—Atheist, Freethinker, "None," or anything else—be taken as given. They should agree to nothing less, and an appeal to a superior officer will usually get justice done.

Mr. J. T. Brighton has taken full advantage of the spell of real summer weather, and reports some very good meetings in his area. A list of his lectures for the week appears in our Lecture Notices column, and local saints are asked for their support, and also reminded that Pioneer Press literature may be ordered through Mr. Brighton at any of his meetings.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

ADAM URQUHART was the full name of our first parent. Surnames remained secret things until, say, the twelfth century. Even until quite recently, men were known, not by their full names, but as *Bill o' Jacks*, *Dick o' Neds*, *Jack o' Getts*, and such like. Just as Bishops and Lords ignore their God-given names today, and adopt, and revel in, ostentatious signatures.

Full names became legally necessary after civilisation had produced I.O.U.s, promissory notes, bills, cheques, deeds, wills, and many other un-Christian documents!

That Adam's surname, then, remained unknown for so many centuries, should not seem at all an extraordinary thing.

Even so thought Sir Thomas Urquhart (1611-1660), of Cromarty; a great traveller; a philologist (his translation of Rabelais has become a classic); a mathematician; a great enemy of the Covenanters in Scotland; a cavalier and supporter of Charles I., he is said to have died in a fit of laughter on hearing of the restoration of Charles II. He claimed lineal descent from Adam, because Adam was made from red earth. As the word Urquhart, he argues, means red earth, this surname, therefore, must have been given to Adam.

When God had formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, he brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them (Gen. ii. 19). And Adam gave names to all cattle, and not without some reason

for doing so, e.g.: and Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living (Gen. iii. 20); and *a fortiori*, he named the cuckoo and the peewit, etc., from their calls. And as time went on words and names multiplied, their formation being suggested by sounds produced by even inanimate things—*clink, buzz, whiz, etc.* (See Canon Farrar's *Chapters on Language*.)

Sir Thomas, one must admit, was not without reason for his assumption that Adam's surname was a secret name.

Critics, acquainted with very readable authorities like *Words and Phrases*, by Dr. Tylor, and Bardsley's *English Surnames*, may stress the evolution of the surname, by showing how the *nickname* preceded the *surname*, e.g., Ethelred the Unready, Edmund Ironside, Harold Bluetooth, etc.; and draw attention to the end of the fourteenth century, when combinations like Richard Johnson and John Richardson were used and their significance yet leave supporters of Urquhart unmoved.

Facts are acknowledged to be, at best, but stubborn things, yet forever at the mercy of the probable and the credible! As Adam ran a first in the human race, Sir Thomas was surely justified in considering him more of a cert than a mere probable!

But what's in a name? Let Dr. Tylor reply:—

"Even we, with our blunted mythological sense, cannot give an individual name to a lifeless object, such as a boat or a weapon, without in the very act imagining for it something of a personal nature."—(*Primitive Culture*, (1891) Vol. i. 302.)

This fact lies at the basis of all great art and literature. Names of Gods became essential to give a sense of reality to religion's wildest dreams. Some of the leading men and gods in the literature of the world are fictitious characters. And in every name we ought to be able to trace our idea of the thing named.

At birth we are first washed, and then given a name. To the child, in some countries, was reserved the right of choice—"the priest repeating ancestral names until the child chose one itself by sneezing at it." (*Ibid*, Vol. ii. 431). In other lands, where hair must be a speciality, the child is not only washed but it has its hair cut. "When a Mandingo child," says Tylor, "was about a week old, its hair was cut, and the priest, invoking blessings, took it in his arms, whispered in its ear, spat thrice in its face, and pronounced its name aloud before the assembled company." (*Ibid*, Vol. ii. 431.)

That *Christ* will grant us that thing, which by nature we cannot have (see *Public Baptism of Infants*), we must partake of sufficient Holy Ghost diluted with water so that we may become *lively members!* of the Church of England by law established, because the baptismal name is the real name—the name registered in heaven—in civilised countries!

Two names used to be given at birth, one secret and used only for ceremonial purposes, the other for ordinary use. The name was kept secret to safeguard it from the evil charms of witches.

Nowadays, as most of us have outgrown the witch delusion, one name only is given by the priest, who sprinkles a little water, during the ceremony of Baptism, in the face of the infant—in Guinea, the headman, on giving it a name, sprinkles it with water from a basin, other friends follow suit, doing likewise, till the child is thoroughly drenched. (*Ibid*, Vol. ii. 431.)

The object of these dramatic acts of ceremonial purification or lustration, amongst primitive peoples, was not only cleansing and purification in a material sense, but the transition from practical to symbolic cleansing. Says Tylor:—

"With all the obscurity and intricacy due to age-long modification, the primitive thought which underlies their ceremonies is still open to view. It is the transition from practical to symbolic cleansing, from removal of bodily impurity to deliverance from invisible, spiritual, and at last, moral evil." (*Ibid*, Chap. xviii.)

Primitive man evidently acted from a moral motive.

To-day, after many thousand years, form and ceremony are meaningless, save for their social significance, what they lack in moral aim being supplied by their thoughtless, fashionable observance.

That moral evolution is questioned by many, and entirely denied by some, need not be wondered at!

"To him that overcometh—the winner—will I give . . . a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving" (Rev. ii. 17) —students of Palæobotany.

White stones were given, to winners of games, as prizes.

The New Name written therein—a weird monogram—being, when microscopically examined, the fossil remains of a gymnosperm.

The poet, when writing a woeful ballad made to his mistress's eyebrow, may still make use of the "White Stone." Why shouldn't he use the metamorphic, metaphorically?

A holy man in Persia finds it necessary to wash his eyes, when they have been polluted by the sight of an infidel! What such a one would do after looking through the above article I dare not imagine!

GEORGE WALLACE.

THE INNER LIGHT

RELIGIONISTS of all sects, and those who attached themselves to no sect, have often stressed their approval of that type of illumination which God has vouchsafed to them specially. This kind of revelation has the advantage of being particularly gratifying. It helps to swell the large opinion the person already possesses of him or herself. Large enough this opinion is, in the vast majority of cases, in the first instance. But when God has enhanced this by extra attention given to certain individuals, this personal vanity often has, and often does, become a positive social menace. To trace the vagaries of such persons, to learn how perfect faith in God's guidance has resulted in those so obsessed becoming dangerous nuisances, is much more than entertaining; it is almost a duty. Men like Cardinal Manning believed in their being led by the Holy Ghost with earnestness. Those who wish to know the details of the divine activities in the Cardinal's case should read with patience (for it will repay them) Purell's "Life of Cardinal Manning." The book is of extraordinary interest, and the fact that it is practically never referred to nowadays should be sufficient to inform Freethinkers of the quality of its contents. No more damning exhibition of ineffectiveness (judged by earthly standards) of the special work of the Holy Ghost is procurable. The book should be obtainable at most public libraries.

Another case of special attention by the Holy Ghost to the individual can be studied in the "Eccentric Life of Alexander Cruden," the little-known author of the well-known "Concordance of the Bible." Alexander believed in the Inner Light as fervently as any Buchmanite, but, ah, the pranks the Ghost played with Alexander. Edith Olivier's book should not be neglected by Freethinkers. Its grudging recognition by a timid Press on its appearance should, again, be full of meaning to them. The Buchmanites could have made it a best seller if they had been really interested in this outstanding example of "leaving everything to God." Apparently, when God said to the Buchmanites "Leave everything to Frank," he gave them the one important piece of personal advice. Nothing else mattered quite so much.

Another gentleman (and there are thousands of such useful cases) who had a divine mission was

Anthony Comstock, that pious person who thought the Lord had inspired him to "clean up" American Morality. Probably American Morality could do with improvement; there is something in the state of this old planet to-day which, even outside of America, suggests a slightly defective ethic. But Anthony thought that what he thought was impure was impure, and what he thought was pure was pure. It is a dangerous idea to hold. To think that you are specially gifted by God to pronounce upon such difficult themes can be a specially dangerous and anti-social type of vanity. For it sticks at nothing. Yes, pure minded manhood which is dependent upon the Inner Light sticks at nothing.

Anthony Comstock believed that moral devastation was the result largely of the prevalence of nude pictures and printed improprieties. This is not the case, but he thought the Lord had given him this special piece of information and, arising from it, his mission in life. Printed impropriety to such a man included blasphemy. Because of that he included men like Ingersoll in his attacks. In this he was a failure, but the surprising thing about a man like Comstock is the number of people who think—or rather feel—with him. Their purity is of this type. On behalf of it they will sally forth with a hatchet and attempt to brain and batter all opposition. What they will stoop to is almost incredible. Let us grant their purity for the moment and only for the moment. It then becomes very evident that purity is not enough.

No one with a sense of humour could have been found in that galley. Trumbell, his semi-official biographer, tells us that Comstock was fond of a joke, but, in their volume "Anthony Comstock: Roundsman of the Lord," Heywood Brown and Margaret Leech tell us:—

The only jokes that these collaborators were able to discover were of a practical nature. He was fond of April Fool's Day, and would try to trap the people in his office by innocent little idiocies, in which they humoured him. Then there were those rare occasions of ebullient spirits in which he would feign intoxication. And it is said that during a trial he once handed a juror an exhibit, consisting of a book, which exploded when the unfortunate man opened it.

A pretty wit, forsooth! But can there be any house-room for wit or humour when it is believed that one is tenanted by the Holy Ghost? When one suffers that misfortune one's peculiarities take other shapes.

An expressman engaged in the transportation of certain obscene stocks, and a manufacturer of indecent rubber goods were both cut off, shortly after their paths crossed that of the reformer. All five of these fatalities were included in the statistics of his accomplishments which he issued to the press. It is startling to observe, listed with figures for obscene books destroyed and stereotype plates broken the item:—

Expressman dead 1

The "Christian Weekly," hailing Mr. Comstock as a "single-hearted, determined, indefatigable Christian man," called attention to this series of fatalities in the following terms: "It is a fact of strange impressiveness that three of the principal publishers and manufacturers who were engaged in this vile business have since their detention been called from the earthly tribunal before the Great Judge to give up their account."

Comstock made a list of those whom in the name of purity he had caused to take their own lives. A man named Restall was the fifteenth he had driven to self-destruction. When, later, Ida Craddock claimed the right to die by her own hand as she chose

because a judge, at the instigation of Anthony Comstock has declared me guilty of a crime which I did not commit—the circulation of obscene literature

it is not recorded that he "listed" her death, for Comstock had left off bragging about suicides. Possibly he had come to realise that in most people such boasts had awakened something very like horror. In any event, the Craddock case needed no advertisement. The condemned woman's last letters, in which she stated that Comstock had persecuted her and made false statements about her, had taken care of that.

Even Christian sentiment was roused. The Rev. Dr. Rainford wrote to him: "You hounded an honest, not a bad, woman to her death. I would not like to answer to God for what you have done."

But Anthony Comstock, The Roundsman of the Lord, knew better. The man who could raise (with not ignominious failure) an outcry against the playing of "Mrs. Warren's Profession" in New York, the man who succeeded in getting deplorable "Comstockery" legislation on to the Statute Book of the United States, knew better. For he possessed the Inner Light. To him, if to no one else, Anthony Comstock was convinced that God spoke plainly.

T. H. ELSTOB

MR. CUTNER ON THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS

(Concluded from page 303)

ACCORDING to the undoubtedly genuine report of Pilate, Jesus died in A.D. 22 (not in A.D. 30, as my traditionalist Freethinker opponent believes on the authority of Luke, whose dates I have shown to be derived from calendaric calculations and devoid of any historic value). 'Aqiba was a man of hoary old age when he died a martyr, but not yet 60 when he heard this story from Eli'ezer b. Hyrkanos, who was then a very old man. It is true that R. Ishma'el was roughly contemporary with R. 'Aqiba; but Mr. Cutner seems to believe that the year of a man's death is roughly identical with the duration of his whole life. Otherwise, he could not conclude from the—quite unreliable—assumption that R. Ishma'el died in the same year as R. 'Aqiba (the Ishma'el in question was a high priest of the time of Bar Kokhba!)—that the incident of the snake bite must have occurred "in the year A.D. 130" (sic! p. 277, line 19 from the bottom of col. a). And what absurd nonsense is it to say "he" (Eli'ezer ben Hyrkanos) "could not possibly have wanted to cure anybody of a snake bite in the year A.D. 130, and also in adult age had" ('read "have") "discussed Deuteronomy with a Jesus in the year A.D. 30," when it is not claimed at all that Eli'ezer discussed Deuteronomy with Jesus, and when the text says with perfect clarity that it was Jesus' disciple, Ja'aqob of Kephaz Zekhaniah, who had heard the saying from his master's lips, and told it—obviously long after Jesus' death—to Eli'ezer b. Hyrkanos, who had been a disciple of R. Johanan b. Sakkai before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? Why cannot Ja'aqob of Kephaz Zekhaniah have lived as long as Jesus' disciple Simon Peter, crucified in A.D. 63, or even much longer? What is improbable about a disciple of Jesus (A.D. 22) being at the time of Jesus' death a student of the Law in his 20's or 30's, living on until the 60's or 70's of the 1st century, and telling in his old age a story to a rabbi who was an old man in A.D. 106/7, and who may have been in his 20's or 30's when he heard the story from this Ja'aqob?

I leave it to the reader to judge for himself whether a critic, guilty of such deliberate falsehoods or in-

advertent confusions — whichever may be the more charitable view to take of such gross misstatements — is entitled to print a malicious insinuation of bad faith against Mr. Archibald Robertson such as the following lines (p. 272): "To quote this passage . . . proves . . . the hope that statements regarding the Talmud by a 'learned' Jew will not be looked at too closely." Whose statements do not bear to be "looked at more closely" — Mr. Cutner's, or those of an historian free from any religious prejudice whatsoever and to whom nothing matters but the truth, and who can therefore look upon his sources with the most complete detachment?

And what are we to say to the question "have we the Talmud as compiled in the year A.D. 500" (sic!), and to the mention of the well-known *deletions* of the Jesus-passages which the Jews were forced to make in the printed copies, when nothing could help Mr. Cutner's argument but the proof that the Jews, on the contrary, inserted the passages in question? And what a vicious insinuation to suggest that it is "not known — or, if known, not allowed to be definitely said — whether the first printed copies of the Talmud contain the 'insulting' references or the revised ones." All that *is* known, and *was* freely said in great detail by Laible, Strack, Billerbeck, Klausner and the present writer, and is unknown only to those who are too lazy to read the available literature and too ignorant ever to know that one cannot write sensibly about a subject of which one ignores the first elements (e.g., the fact that *Jeshu'a*, Greek *Jesus*, is one of the most frequent Jewish names, and that therefore there is not the slightest reason for connecting the *Jeshu* of the time of Jannai with the Jesus crucified under Tiberius). There is no question of a "high old game of speculation" in this case. Nothing but a little common sense and ordinary honesty is required for deciding the problem.

As to the text of the dialogue between Justin Martyr and Tryphon, a literal quotation of the Greek text — which Mr. Cutner very wisely does not give — would be quite sufficient to show that the text will not bear the interpretation that he and his ilk try to put upon it; but that has been shown time and again in books which, let us hope, he "will read one day."

It may be an over-optimistic view to take of his readiness to acquire some knowledge on the subjects he likes to write about if I suppose that he may "one day" progress so far as to read my book "Orpheus — the Fisher: Comparative Studies in Orphic and Early Christian Cult-Symbolism" (London, Watkins, 1921), or even the enlarged and improved edition of this book published as a volume of the Warburg Institute Lectures in 1925, in both of which I have treated the mythological and mythical elements which were gradually introduced from the cult-legends of the suffering corn- and vine-gods of the John Barleycorn type into the Christian cult-symbolism of the ancient and the medieval church — more fully and, I trust, on the basis of a greater wealth of texts and monuments than are available to the second hand retailers of the contents of old mythological dictionaries who had stated before what Mr. Cutner calls "the mythological argument."

To say that "Eisler, Klausner, Dr. Claude Montefiore . . . seem unable to understand the mythological argument, just as they so often deliberately suppress (!) the argument from allegory or esotericism" is, as far as Dr. Montefiore is concerned, a contemptible slander of a dead scholar who cannot defend himself and whose well-deserved reputation is too high to be reached by a man of Mr. Cutner's stature. Nowhere in any one of his books had Dr. Montefiore any occasion to go into the question of the mythical and symbolical accretions which tended to overlay the story of the Davidic king-pretender of

the Jews with the myth of the suffering Tammuz-Adonis or Dionysos-Zagreus. Nor could anything of the kind reasonably be expected from Dr. Klausner.

As to myself, this accusation is just one more proof of Mr. Cutner's ignorance of the many and precious presents I have made to the upholders of his mythological creed; but their unwillingness to read anything but their own boring books and articles has prevented them — with the one exception of that most extraordinary upholder of the non-historicity theory, the Dutch protestant parson Dr. van den Bergh van Eysinga, preaching a wholly gnostic mythical Christ to his devout community of Sandport — from availing themselves of such glorious opportunities as those I gave them when I published, e.g., a 3rd and 4th century gem of the Berlin Museum, showing the crucified god on a cross surmounted by the sickle-moon and the seven stars of the Pleiades, inscribed "Orpheos Bakkikos," "the Bacchic Orpheus," and when I called attention to the mocking jibe of the rhetor Pytheas about "the Vine hanging on the cross."

I have often wondered in the last 20 years why none of the mythologists has ever asked for permission to reproduce this Plate XXI. of my Orpheus book — a line engraving which could easily have been printed in "The Freethinker" or the "Literary Guide" — or the engraving Pl. XV. 2, showing the divine Fisher angling the Leviathan and using the crucifix as a bait from the "Hortulus deliciarum"; and many another illustration which would have been grist to their mill. The answer is, as I see now, that they prefer slinging mud at their adversaries, accusing them of "suppressing deliberately" the very information that has been supplied to them far beyond what they could hope for.

Has any one of the "mythologist" school ever noticed the splendid book on the "Revelation of St. John the Divine," by the late Professor Franz Boll of Heidelberg, analysing the astrological and astro-mythical background of this apocalypse fathered by the gnostic Cerinthus upon John of Ephesus? Or has it been he, whom Mr. Cutner accuses of "deliberately suppressing" such evidence, who has called the attention of English readers to those facts in his book, "The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel" (Methuen, 1938) — another book which Mr. Cutner might read "one day" with profit? Why not do so now, before this too is out of print, and tear it to pieces in "The Freethinker" or the "Literary Guide," both of which papers have, so far, failed to inform their readers of the very existence of a book which claims to have finally identified the real author of the gospel, written by a former high priest of the Jews who had "seen, heard and touched" the very man Jesus the Nasorean who — curiously enough — never lived according to Mr. Cutner; and to have equally identified as an historic personality the Beloved Disciple of Jesus — Lazarus of Bethany, known to Jewish sources as Eleazar ben Damaiah, the brother of the Jewish high priest Jeshu'ah ben Damaiah, the chief of the Messianist revolutionaries who rose against Rome under Gaius Caligula, who was captured by the Roman procurator in A.D. 60 and died in prison in Rome after many, many years, although Jesus had told him to "tarry till I come again."

One would think that all that ought to interest Freethinkers, not only of Mr. Cutner's persuasion; but apparently the publisher was right who said to me, "Unorthodox books on Christian origins cannot be sold because the orthodox dislike them and the unorthodox do not read. You say you can show who wrote the Fourth Gospel. Can you show me who cares — nowadays?"

ROBERT EISLER

Oxford, May, 1941.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON

Outdoor

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead): 11.0, MR. L. EBURY. Parliament Hill Fields, 3.0, MR. L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 7.30, Thursday, MR. E. C. SAPHIN. Sunday, 6.0, MR. W. BARKER.

Indoor

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1): Sunday, 11.0 a.m., C. E. M. JOAD, M.A., D.Lit. "The Religions of the World: Some Comments."

COUNTRY

Chester-le-Street N.S.S. Branch (Bridge End), Saturday, July 5: 7.30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Newcastle - on - Tyne (Bigg Market), Sunday, July 6: 7.30, Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Kingston and District N.S.S. Branch (Market Place), Sunday: 7.30, Mr. E. C. SAPHIN.

Lamb-in-Rossendale, Friday, July 4: 7.30, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

Burnley (Market), Sunday, July 6: 7, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

Colne, Tuesday, July 8: 7.45, Mr. JACK CLAYTON.

GOD AND EVIL

(THE following letter contributed to the "Bulawayo Chronicle" will be read with interest as an instance of what may be done when opportunity offers.—EDITOR, "Freethinker.")

SIR,—May I draw the attention of your readers to three quotations from writers of some repute which bear on the question raised by Mr. A. L. Jones.

THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK: "The Christian doctrine of Divine Fatherhood asserts that Holy Love has absolute sway over the Universe. The love is universal and indiscriminating: the holiness is absolute and uncompromising: the control of this love is all-pervasive. Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from it; the very hairs of our head are numbered. From the watchful care of that holy love there is no escape."

THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER": Divine love controls all! It controlled the world during the European War (and now the second war in 25 years.—C. E. O.); it controls when a human being is being slowly tortured to death in the clutches of proliferating cancer cells; it stands by while the child is being choked with croup or poisoned with diphtheria; it is unceasing in its watchfulness while one-half the animal world lives by slaughtering the other half; it stands by while men, women and children die deaths of torture, starvation or disease; nothing happens apart from it; everything is calculated—it is all part of the Divine plan; it is all an expression of Divine love, universal and indiscriminating. Well, well, Christians may believe it, but it is at least to the credit of human nature that many millions do not. We may not be able to prevent torture or wrong, we may have to submit to injustice and to the ravages of disease, but at least it is something to decline to worship or praise a being who has made all this part of his Divine Plan, and who, knowing all, with the power to prevent all, yet permits all.

EPICURUS, A PAGAN, B.C. 342: "Either God would remove evil out of the world, and cannot: or he can, and will not; or he has neither the power nor will; or, lastly, he has both the power and will. If he has the will and not the power, this shows weakness. If he has the power and not the will, it is malignity. If he is neither able nor willing, he is both impotent and malignant. If he is

both willing and able, whence comes evil, and why does he not prevent it?"

Whence comes evil? They who believe in a Divine Fatherhood are at a serious disadvantage with the Atheist. They are faced with the existence of natural facts so horrible that to attribute them to the will of God is to make God a demon. The Devil, it seems, is getting out of date, but is he not an essential part of the Christian cosmogony? Not that reinstating him gets rid of the difficulty; either God is not strong enough to overcome the Devil, or God is morally responsible for everything he permits the Devil to do.

In the religion of humanity, both God and the Devil are out of date. It is man, and only man, who helps man; man, and only man, who pities; man, and only man, who tries to save.

I am, etc.,

CHARLES E. OLIVER.

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Secularism affirms that progress is only possible on the basis of equal freedom of speech and publication; it affirms that liberty belongs of right to all, and that the free criticism of institutions and ideas is essential to a civilised State.

Secularism affirms that morality is social in origin and application, and aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind.

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P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause.

TACITUS AND CHRIST

MR. CUTNER, with his customary courtesy, insinuates that I fabricated the statements that Tacitus was a Roman of good position, held public office, had access to official records and despised and loathed the Christians. I do not ask Mr. Cutner to take my word for this or anything else. It should be perfectly easy for him to verify the facts. According to Brodribb and Godley in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," Tacitus was an eminent pleader at the Roman Bar, held office as prætor in 88, and as Consul in 97, wrote his "Histories" about 115-116 and his "Annals" a few years later. As a public official in Rome he would know the official view taken of Christianity, and have access to the records of his office. The idea that Tacitus was dependent on what Christians "told" him is too ludicrous to deserve refutation. He has left his opinion of Christians on record in the "Annals." Does Mr. Cutner suppose that this busy, prejudiced and fastidious Roman gentleman "snooped" round the ghetto and the catacombs for information which he had had every opportunity to collect in his public career?

Tacitus tells us that he began his official life under Vespasian (69-79). He was therefore old enough to remember the proceedings against Christians in 64. Mr. Cutner suggests that the fact of those proceedings is "nowadays denied." It cannot be denied by anyone who knows anything of the subject. We have not only the evidence of Tacitus, but of Suetonius that under Nero "punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."

Mr. Cutner thinks it inconceivable that the Roman mob should have pitied the victims. Why not? In 61 the mass execution of the slaves of Pedanius Secundus, murdered by one of his household, had to be carried out under a military guard to prevent rescue by a "dense and threatening mob." The people of Rome were not all thugs. It takes all sorts to make a world.

Mr. Cutner misrepresents Tacitus's statement in his "Histories" about the Jewish religion. Tacitus mentions the image of the ass in the Temple as one of the stories current; but he records the fact that Pompey, on entering the "holy of holies" after his capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C., found no image at all. He was an honest historian.

Mr. Cutner resurrects the hoary theory that the "Annals" are a forgery. This theory was advanced in 1878, the forgery being credited to Poggio Bracciolini, the Renaissance scholar. But the genuineness of the "Annals" is proved by their agreement in detail with coins and inscriptions not discovered till after Poggio's time. No scholar of importance any longer upholds the forgery theory. Sixteen books in the style of Tacitus are not easy to forge.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE

The people is a beast of muddy brain

That knows not its own force, and therefore stands
Loaded with wood and stone; the powerless hands
Of a mere child guide it with bit and reins.

One kick would be enough to break the chain;
But the beast fears, and what the child demands
It does; nor its own terror understands,
Confused and stupified by bugbears vain.

Most wonderful! With its own hand it ties
And gags itself, gives itself death and war
For pence doled out by kings from its own store.

Its own are all things between earth and heaven;
But this it knows not, and if one arise
To tell the truth, it kills him unforgiven.

—TOMMASO CAMPANELLA (1568-1693).

(Translated by John Addington Symonds, 1877.)

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