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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Tale of Terror

HOW many men and women were tortured for the assumed practice of witchcraft and wizardry? Figures differ considerably. Lecky, who quotes authorities, tells us that 7,000 were burned at Treves, 600 by one bishop at Bamberg, 900 in a single year in Wurtzburg, 400 at Douay. In Italy, 1,000 killed in a year in the province of Como. In Geneva, 500 in a month. So the story runs from place to place. Luther said he would have no compassion on witches—"I would burn them all." Lecky cites Hutchinson, the author of a famous treatise on witchcraft (1718), who claims to have collected reliable figures that run into thousands. C. H. Lea, cautious as ever in his statements, sums up by saying, with his usual wisdom of looking forward as to the social consequences of religious practices.

"Hideous as are the details of the persecutions for witchcraft which we have been considering (up to the fifteenth century), they were but the prelude to the blind and senseless orgies of destruction which disgraced the next century and a half. Christendom seemed to have grown delirious, and Satan might well smile at the tribute to his power seen in the endless smoke of the holocausts which bore witness to his triumph over the Almighty. Protestant and Catholic rivalled each other in the madness of the hour. Witches were burned no longer in ones and twos, but in scores and hundreds. . . . The spring of 1586 was tardy in the Rhineland and the cold was prolonged until June; this could only be the result of witchcraft, and the Archbishop of Treves burned at Pfalz 118 women and two men from whom confessions had been extorted that their incantations had prolonged the

winter. . . . Parano boasts that in a century and a half (dating from 1404) the Holy Office had burned at least 30,000 witches who, if they had been left unpunished, would easily have brought the whole world to destruction. No wonder Christians thanked God for his goodness in saying that witches must not be permitted to live."

It is useless citing the numbers killed, for no exact totals are forthcoming. Probably as many died from ill-treatment by those who took the law in their own hands as were executed after a formal trial. To run the total into 30,000 from 1500 to the close of the 17th century would be a moderate estimate.

Demonism, it must be remembered, is very deeply imbedded in Christianity, and is more actively expressed in the New Testament than it is in the Old Testament. The Roman Church has never broken away from Demonism. It remains part of its official creed. Its priests have the power of exorcism, and we believe that power also follows the ordination of a clergyman of the Established Church. More will be said on this point when we come to deal with the New Testament—for the moment we wish to illustrate what we have said in connection with witchcraft and wizardism.

Fr. Montague Summers is a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, and has not shrunk from announcing his belief in the real existence of commerce with the Devil. He has written introductions to a number of reprints of the early works in favour of witchcraft. In his "History of Witchcraft" (1926) he has given several examples of the forms of exorcism from which I cite the briefest. The priest speaks before the man or woman believed to be possessed by a Devil:—

"I exorcise thee, most foul spirit, every coming in of the enemy, every apparition, every legion; in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be rooted out, and be put to flight from this creature of God. He commands thee, Who has bid thee be cast down from the highest heaven into the lower parts of the earth. He commands thee, Who has commanded the sea, the winds, and the storms. Hear therefore, and fear, Satan, thou injurer of the faith, thou enemy of the human race, thou procurer of death, thou destroyer of life, kindler of vices, seducer of men, betrayer of the nations, inciter of envy, origin of avarice, cause of discord, stirrer-up of troubles; why standest though, and resistest, when thou knowest that Christ the Lord destroyed thy ways? Fear Him, sacrifice in Isaac, Who was sold in Joseph, was slain in the Lamb, was crucified in man, thence was the triumph over hell. Depart therefore in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, give place to the Holy Ghost, by this sign of the Holy Cross of Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and the same Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end."

This series of notes is in reply to a question: "What is Christianity?" There are so many forms of Christianity we declined the task of answering. But Christianity is an historic religion based upon the Bible. The clergy are crying: "Back to the Bible." We take them at their word, and give the essentials of Christianity as presented in the Bible.

There are other forms of exorcism of greater length, but the surplus matter is really made up by calling the Devil more names. Any one of them might have been summarised by resorting to the vernacular in four words—"Satan, go to Hell," but that would not have been so impressive. Perhaps Satan was too great a character in the Christian mythology to be received with anything but the highest honours.

Dealing with so primitive a phenomenon as witchcraft, many modern readers might imagine that a bare two or three centuries ago the belief in witches would exist only with the more ignorant section of the population. We have already cited a number of cases which should correct that fallacy. The existence of commerce with the Devil by human beings was held by some of the greatest names of the 17th century. Further, it must be borne in mind that such education as existed was then under the control of the Churches. For some years now many have marked the steady mental degradation of German youth since the beginning of the reign of Nazism. But that deals with the current generation only; continue that process generation after generation for 1,000 years, and to shake off ingrained feelings and ideas become an impossibility for the majority of human beings. To-day the more subtle—but perhaps the least intellectual—of our preachers tell us that we must believe in a moralising Jesus. The plain historic fact is that without the supernatural Christ the moralising Jesus would never have existed.

There need therefore be no surprise in finding so many eminent men in England and Scotland as late as the latter half of the 17th century holding firmly the belief in witches and wizards. Sir Thomas Browne, one of our favourite authors, has already been named, and also a very great legalist in the person of Lord Chief Justice Hale. Joseph Granville was a clergyman, but he was also a member of the Royal Society, with some credit as a scientific thinker. His book, "Saducisimus Triumphatus: A full and plain evidence concerning Witches," running to nearly 600 pages, with drawings of some stones that had been placed in a human body by devilish agency, lies before us. Cudworth, a firm believer in witchcraft, could yet write a fine and learned book on Atheism, which almost cost him his church because he was accused of being an Atheist in disguise. He had forgotten to blackguard Atheism and calumniate Atheists. The great Sir William Blackstone agreed with what John Wesley was to say later, that to deny witchcraft was to contradict the revealed word of God. The very learned and subtle Selden defended the laws punishing witchcraft, although it is doubtful if he believed in them. The "gentle" Addison believed that there had been and were such things as witches, although he could give no particular instance of one having existed.

When Christians read or listen to accounts of the good Christianity has done, they might spare a thought for the women who were afraid—if they were spinsters—to grow to old age, and to the many thousands of women who were tortured hour after hour to confess their dealings with the Christian Devil. "Why," asked Topsy, "don't God kill the Devil?" Perhaps the answer is that in such a case the clergy would have gone out of commission.

As is usual, it was the Freethinkers of the day who led the way to a more reasonable view of this witch mania. In this matter no one did more than the great sceptic of his

time, Montaigne. It is curious and suggestive that Montaigne should have discussed both miracles and witchcraft in a chapter headed "Of Cripples," and it is certain that he was not thinking of physical cripples. He says (we are quoting from Hazlitt's translation):—

"The witches of my neighbourhood run a hazard of their lives upon the formation of every new author who will give a body to their dreams. . . . I am plain and dull and stick to the main point, which is . . . Men are apt to believe what they least understand. . . . How much more naturally and likely do I find it that two men should lie than that one man should fly with the wind from east to west? How much more natural that our understanding should be carried from its place by the volubility of our disordered minds than that one of us should be carried by a strange spirit upon a broomstick, flesh and bones as we are, up the funnels of a chimney."

Montaigne's influence was great in both France and England. He reminds us of the work of his great follower, Peter Charron. Lecky has well said "that which Montaigne had thrown into the form of a doubt, Charron almost threw into the form of a denial." Perhaps his having been a priest caused him to hate the Christian superstition more heartily. His chief book, "On Wisdom," was translated into English and ran through several editions—certainly a dozen. Our own copy, a work of nearly 600 pages, small quarto, is dated 1670, but it is a late edition. To-day, while most readers know Montaigne, few appear to know Charron. He left no doubt as to his attitude towards such stupidities as witchcraft. Here is an outline of his position which will give the reader some idea of his breadth of thought. It was written at the very beginning of the 17th century. With Coleridge, he sees that "Atheism cannot lodge but in a strong and bold soul."

"The nation, country or place gives the religion; a man possesseth that which is in force in that place . . . wherein he is born. He is circumcised, baptised, a Jew, a Christian, before he knows he is a man. . . . They make themselves believe they believe it, but it is nothing."

Of those who base morality upon religion he says:—

"They pervert all order. . . . They think that religion is a generality of all goods and all virtues. . . . These men assert that a man is an honest man because there is a paradise and a hell, so that if they did not fear God or fear to be damned, they would not make a goodly piece of work. Oh miserable honesty. . . . Thou keepest thyself from wickedness because thou darest not be wicked. . . . Now I desire that thou be an honest man, not because thou wouldst go to paradise, but because nature, reason and general policy of the world requireth it. . . . He that is an honest man by scruple and a religious bridle, take heed of him and account him as he is. And he that hath religion without honesty, I will not say he is more wicked, but far more dangerous than he that hath neither one nor the other."

We fancy this will be read as something apart from witchcraft, but we have been tempted to print it because so few appear to have read Charron, and because of the influence

he exerted in the 17th century. "On Wisdom" ran through a number of editions—must have influenced many. At any rate, it comes as a welcome ray of light, a clean, healthy atmosphere, after having said so much concerning Christian witch-hunting and brutality—one of the vilest things that darkens modern history. Yet it was the Christian God who said "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." What has Christianity to set down as adequate compensation for the evil that was wrought, and is still being wrought, by those eight words delivered to man by God himself?

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE INVENTOR OF THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR

CARL VAN DOREN'S biography of Benjamin Franklin is a monumental volume of 784 pages with an additional bibliography and index. This elaborate work (Putnam, London, 1939; 15s.) is the product of patient research, and contains important matter printed for the first time. It is likely to rank as the definitive study of the career of one of the most illustrious American authors and statesmen, a man, indeed, of liberal outlook in social and religious realms whose freethinking seems more pronounced than that of many of his Deistic contemporaries.

The Franklins were early English emigrants, and our hero was born at Boston in 1706. He was apprenticed as a printer to his elder brother James, and was indentured to serve until he came of age. His progress in the printer's craft was rapid, and he retained a great pride for his early avocation throughout his long life. Franklin was very fond of reading, and Locke and the sceptical Shaftesbury and Anthony Collins were among his favourite authors. He lived frugally in order to save money for the purchase of books and, to reserve time for study, absented himself from church. But, we gather, "he could not avoid the family prayers at home. Once when the winter's provision of meat has been salted, he proposed that his father say grace over the whole cask, once for all. At morning and evening prayers, the restless apprentice taught himself geography from the four large maps which hung on the walls of the solemn room."

The Boston news-sheets were sanctimonious, but there arose a demand for more secular papers. To meet this requirement, James Franklin decided to publish the "New England Courant." Van Doren notes that "Episcopalians and deists alike resented the stubborn power of the Congregational Churches. To men of easy temper the Puritanism of the Mathers and the magistrates seemed as old as Cromwell." Thus appeared a paper more progressive than any of its predecessors, and Benjamin was deputed to distribute copies to the newsagents.

While still a boy, Benjamin secretly thrust written contributions under the printer's house door, but although the "Courant's" readers signified their appreciation, Franklin kept silence concerning their authorship. Still, the satirical character of these effusions enraged the magistrates, and Franklin's brother, as printer and publisher, was arrested and consigned to the stone gaol, but after a month's detention he was liberated on promise of amendment. Yet the authorities were soon again assailed in the "Courant," and the incorrigible Benjamin averred that: "There are many persons who seem to be more than ordinary religious, but yet are on several accounts worse by far than those who pretend to no religion at all." This gibe infuriated the Council, and James Franklin was ordered to suppress his pestilent print and not to publish "any other pamphlet or paper of the like nature, except it first be supervised by the Secretary of the Province."

The "Courant's" supporters advised James to transfer its printing to his apprentice, under whose auspices it prospered. But Benjamin needed ampler scope for his energies; his brother incommoded him, and he left Boston for New York.

After various adventures, Franklin crossed the Atlantic and arrived in London. At the age of 15 he had adopted Deism after examining the arguments against it, and now he embraced Pantheism. He was introduced to Mandeville, the author of "The Fable of the Bees," and he successfully sought the acquaintance of Sir Hans Sloane, the scientist. He became proficient as a printer, and his superior ability attracted considerable attention. Then he accepted business employment in Philadelphia. Once more in America, Franklin returned to journalism, and under his direction his first issue of "The Pennsylvania Gazette" appeared in 1729. He invited outside assistance, but for some time Franklin was both editor and contributor. His biographer intimates that "He wrote or rewrote the foreign and domestic news. He wrote letters to himself and answered them. He wrote humorous squibs and advertisements. . . . In matters of religion the 'Gazette' was neither scoffing nor partisan. Yet Franklin was always insistent on the freedom of the press, and in 'An Apology for Printers' he made this position clear." Men naturally differ in opinion, he said, and it was a printer's duty to publish every point of view without fear or favour.

The "Gazette" flourished and Franklin began the issue of his famous Almanac. Thus Poor Richard and his proverbial sayings soon became household words. By 1732 he was a Benedict; his business increased, and he secured Government printing. Nor did he restrict his attention to his varied avocations, as postmaster, printer and retailer. He was much concerned with the loss of life and property occasioned by fires. Indeed: "The Union Fire Company, formed by Franklin in 1736, was the first of the companies which made Philadelphia, so far as fires were concerned, one of the safest cities in the world."

Of Presbyterian upbringing, Franklin's interests were predominantly secular, and he rarely attended church, as he reserved his Sundays for study. He was once persuaded to attend a pastor's conventicle, but after a few trials he found the sermons "very dry, uninteresting and unedifying, since not a single moral principle was inculcated or enforced, their aim seeming to be rather to make us Presbyterians than good citizens." Then there was another preacher from Ireland, who stressed the value of moral conduct, but he was anathema to the orthodox, although he won Franklin's regard. But the philosopher was more interested in Freemasonry than theology, and he was one of the earliest members of the first lodge—St. John's, in Philadelphia—that appears to have been founded in America.

Dr. Spence visited America in 1746, and showed Franklin his electrical experiments. These phenomena were entirely new to Franklin and so enthralled him that he bought the doctor's apparatus and became completely engrossed in experimental research. Crowds assembled at his house to witness these wonders, although in our day it is hard to realise the sensation they caused. But the novel nature of electricity was soon succeeded by its utility. Franklin's papers were sent to the Royal Society in London, several continental scientists repeated his experiments, and the relationship of lightning to electric discharges was established. The lightning conductor followed, and, as Loecky so well said, the wire invented by the sceptic Franklin, protects the crosses on our churches and cathedrals from the lightning stroke of heaven. Many pious people at the time, however, deprecated its employment. But, as Van Doren declares, Franklin "had applied his knowledge to making men's houses, barns, ships safe from an incalculable danger. . . . Here was another hero of the human race, even against the terrifying gods. Franklin, Kant said, was a new Prometheus who had stolen fire from heaven."

His career as a public man had rendered Franklin familiar with those diplomatic methods which played so conspicuous a part in his later activities as the American Colonies' representative in their contest with the Mother Country. Before that catastrophe occurred, Franklin merely favoured legislative independence for the Colonies linked in close union with Britain. He long believed that George III. was a benevolent prince and that the grievances of the Colonies would be remedied when once the King was released from the toils of his corrupt and not too intelligent Ministers. He predicted that in a few generations the English-speaking peoples of the New World would greatly outnumber those of Britain, and that those in the Colonies would become the brightest gem in the Crown of the British Empire. The plea for separation from the Motherland was to him indefensible, although at a long and bitter last, he, as a disillusioned octogenarian, was a signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Before and after the calamity, Franklin had many friends in Britain who deeply deplored the obstinately obscurantist policy of George III. and Lord North. Indeed, had the pacific procedure advocated by Franklin and his English sympathisers been adopted—and these supporters included Chatham, Edmund Burke, Shelburne and other prominent statesmen—it is quite conceivable that what are now the United States might have remained as much a part of the British Commonwealth of Nations as the Dominion of Canada is to-day.

When Thomas Paine was driven to seek shelter in the States, Franklin introduced him to his son-in-law. "I request you," he intimated, "to give him your best advice and countenance, as he is quite a stranger here." While bitter controversy raged in New England regarding independence, Paine's "Common Sense," avers Van Doren, "rose above the confusion like a trumpet, giving every reason for independence its most infectious statement." Paine himself says that he sent Franklin the first copy of this explosive pamphlet that was printed. Later, when Paine was about to voyage to France, Franklin furnished him with introductions to his numerous influential friends, and subsequently expressed his gratification with Paine's services in Paris.

Towards the close of his busy career, the President of Yale, Ezra Stiles, invited Franklin to outline his religious beliefs. In his reply, Franklin stated that he believed in one God, "and that the one acceptable service we render Him is doing good to His other children. That the soul of man is immortal and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this." He regarded Jesus as a social and religious reformer, and thought there could be little harm in a belief in his divinity if this led to his pacific teachings being better observed, especially, Franklin observes, "as I do not perceive that the Supreme [Being] takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in His government of the world with any peculiar marks of his displeasure."

During the stormy session of the Convention assembled to frame the American Constitution, Franklin spoke little. At last, when party passion delayed all agreement, he suggested that, as evidently so little reliance could be placed on human wisdom, the Convention open its later sessions with prayer. Unless the Divinity concurred in their findings, he said, "we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

Franklin's biographer remarks that: "Though the proposal may have seemed strange from the freethinking Franklin, it was sincere. He had seen the Revolution triumph against such heavy odds and in spite of so many blunders, that he had come first to wonder if Providence had not a directing and favouring hand in it, and then to believe that it had. But there was an immediate reason for the motion. It looked as if the smaller states might either force a return to the former system of representation or else a dissolution of the Convention." Franklin wished to calm

the atmosphere. Still, while his suggestion was treated with respect, it was not adopted. "The Convention," Franklin recorded, "except three or four persons, thought prayers unnecessary." The vast majority, therefore, were willing to dispense with divine guidance.

T. F. PALMER.

WAS THERE A CRUCIFIXION?

III.

THE word "stauros" in the Greek Gospels is translated "cross," with the avowed object of making the reader believe that this cross is the one commonly represented in our crucifixes. It must be said at once, that is quite untrue. "Stauros" means a stake and not a cross at all. Not, of course, that the pious Christian translators cared two hoots about being accurate when it was a question of doctrine and tradition. Jesus had been represented as crucified on a cross in picture and story, and to say that the Gospels have nothing about a cross at all would have proved such a shock to believers and those in the habit of wearing crucifixes, that at all costs a lie must be perpetuated. Even Robert Young, who prided himself in giving us a literal translation of the Bible, did not dare to alter the word cross—or even the word crucifixion. Yet such a linguistic scholar knew perfectly well what the Greek words meant.

It is possible that when the Greeks used the word "stauros" they may have meant what we mean by "cross." But as far as many investigators have studied the question, it nearly always meant a stake upon which the unfortunate victim was impaled or upon which he was affixed in some way. There is no evidence whatever that the "cross" of Jesus, the "stauros" of the Gospels has a cross bar—and a good deal of evidence it had not. The curious reader will find in Mr. J. D. Parsons' "The Non-Christian Cross" a very full discussion of the meaning of the word. He points out that both in the Iliad and the Odyssey the word "stauros" signifies "an ordinary pole or stake without any cross bar; and it is as thus signifying a single piece of wood that the word in question is used throughout the old Greek classics." He proceeds: "It need only be added that there is not a single sentence in any of the numerous writings forming the New Testament which, in the original Greek, bears even indirect evidence to the effect that the stauros used in the case of Jesus was other than an ordinary stauros; much less to the effect that it consisted not of one piece of timber, but of two pieces nailed together in the form of a cross." As Mr. Parsons was a "true son of the Church," his remarks should be accepted.

The real cross was a much used pre-Christian symbol. It has been found, like the swastika and other symbols, all over the world, and the evidence is overwhelming that it is purely pagan. Although Baring-Gould hotly denies it, there can be little doubt that the cross was originally a phallic symbol, however much the idea behind it has since been changed and "spiritualised."

It is very instructive to study the way in which it became gradually adopted by the early Christians. Certainly for centuries it was not their symbol at all—whatever Christian writers may say to the contrary. And if the cross was not a Christian symbol, what justification is there for such words as "crucify" or "crucifixion"? Mr. Parsons contends that not one of the four Greek words rendered thus are correctly translated. They mean either affixing or impaling on to a stake. He claims that:

"No cross-shaped symbol of wood or of any other material had any part in the Christianity of the second and third centuries; and the only cross which had any part in the Christianity of those days was the immaterial one traced upon the forehead of the non-Mosaic and originally pagan initiatory rite of Baptism."

There is a passage in Ezekiel which refers to a sign put upon the forehead and which perhaps means a tau or a cross, and which was also put upon Mithra worshippers—an imitation, says

Tertullian, of Christians; which is too much even for Christians to swallow. But another Church Father in the third century, Minucius Felix, denounced crosses which, he cried, "We Christians neither venerate nor wish for," though it was certainly in use in some way then. The crucifix, however, appears to have been slowly introduced and was not in general use till about the sixth century. Actually the symbols Christians were allowed at the beginning of the third century do not include the cross, but do include both the Fish and the Dove.

It is when we come to the very positive statements of Irenæus, who claims to have known Polycarp, who was a pupil of John, and had met other Apostles, that "makes you think," as a B.B.C. popular comedian puts it.

Irenæus, who wrote in the latter part of the second century, and was therefore much nearer to New Testament events than our modern defenders of the Crucifixion, be they Jew, Christian or Rationalist, throws it overboard altogether. He definitely asserts that Jesus did not die until he was over 50 years of age, and as far as his statement means anything, Jesus died an old man in bed. He cites John and the other Apostles as his authorities:—

"From the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while he still fulfilled the office as a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify, those who were conversant in Asia with John the disciple of the Lord affirming that John conveyed to them that information. And he remained among them up to the times of Trajan. Some of them saw not only John, but the other Apostles also, and heard the very same account from them, and bear testimony as to the statement." ("Against Heresies," II. xxii. 4-5.)

Of course, there is only one way in which Christians can do away with this evidence from a very respected Christian Father, and that is to call him an old fool. I leave it to readers to settle the question for themselves. But here it is necessary to point out that in the face of this statement the theory that Jesus was never crucified, at least has the weight and authority of Irenæus, and if he had, as he claims, our four Gospels in front of him, especially that of John (which is quite against him) what can we say?

Those who believe that at the back of many of the stories of Jesus, just as with other gods, we have a fiction describing the Sun God (as I do), give an explanation of the Crucifixion which fits in with the accounts in a perfectly reasonable way. J. D. Parsons puts it like this:—

"Its story is an illustration of the old-world promise, hoary with antiquity, and founded upon the coming, ushered in every year by the Passover or crossover of the equator by the sun at the Vernal Equinox, of the bounteous harvests of summer after the death of devastating winter; bidding us ever hope, not indeed for the avoidance of death, and therefore of defeat, but for such victory as may happen to lay in survival or resurrection."

One could write many pages in illustration of this, but space forbids. Yet I wonder how many Bible readers have noticed that according to Revelation xi. 8, "our Lord" was also crucified in Egypt? At least, it says so in the A.V., but the R.V. silently alters this to "their" Lord. Dr. Young gives "our," but Dr. Moffatt, "their." It's a pretty picture, this battle of authorities, as to whether God meant "their" or "our," the truth being that "out of Egypt" came a great deal more of the story of Jesus than Christian authorities admit. Gerald Massey has settled that point once for all.

Just a final word. In his broadcast last Good Friday, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is showing himself as a determined opponent of anti-Semitism, was very careful in omitting all reference to the Jews when he denounced the Crucifixion as the blackest crime of all time. He put the blame on to the

"priests" and Pilate. But all his hearers knew he meant the Jews and the Jews alone, born and unborn. He seemed rather unhappy in trying to explain why the day is called "Good" Friday when it ought to be "bad" Friday, considering it meant the death of Jesus; but not getting any revelation on the problem, he came to the conclusion that it was "good" because God came specially from "heaven" to die for us—poor sinners that we are (including the Archbishop).

On the other hand, Miss Dorothy M. Sayers, in "The Man Born to be King"—so much liked by the B.B.C. religious director that it has been twice broadcast—could hardly restrain herself in attacking the terrible Jews who put her Lord to death. I could not help feeling, listening to very few extracts, that even Hitler's great friend, Julius Streicher, would have strongly approved of the play.

The reader can rest assured that Good Friday was a "good" day because it ushered in bounteous and beautiful Spring. No nonsense even from an Archbishop can alter that fact; and the date of Good Friday is forced to change because of the sun and moon and the reckoning therefrom. That is surely evidence enough to prove the essential astro-myth behind the Crucifixion.

H. CUTNER.

ACID DROPS

"HOW can Catholics be so narrow-minded as to claim that they alone possess the truth?" asks a reader of the "Catholic Herald." "They don't," replies the genius who presides over the "Answers" column. "Their claim is that they alone possess the whole truth (his italics) about matters of religion so far as God has revealed it." This reminds us somewhat of the story of the lying competition, in which the prize for the biggest lie went to the man who said he had never told one.

The "Glasgow Herald" (R.C.) reports that Italy is swept by a religious revival. It also gives the places—Genoa and "small towns and villages." As the position of Italy is getting desperate we can accept some degree of truth in the report. Notoriously the small villages are less cultured than the larger centres of population, and religious advocacy is more likely to reap recruits there than elsewhere.

Says the Bishop of Bradford: "Christians are called on to be tough guys. Jesus and the early Christians were tough guys." Sez him! If Dr. Blunt is not more careful he may be receiving a "call" to a prelate in Chicago.

But surely there is some mistake! Christians always have been tough guys—the toughest of guys, if history be any guide. Christianity possesses the most remarkable record of "thuggery" and "tough guyism" in the world's history, from the time of the early Christians, the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the Inquisition, St. Bartholomew's night, Jewish persecutions, witchcraft murders, and much more, to the recent Papal blessing of guns and planes in the Spanish Civil War.

Almost within the Bishop's own recollection there occurred in this country the brutal manhandling of Bradlaugh, when fourteen Christian "toughs" threw that great figure forcibly out of the House of Commons at the behest of a Christian Parliament, which included a House of Lords with forty or so Christian bishops from Dr. Blunt's own school. There is no need to plead for toughness in Christianity, Dr. Blunt. It seems to be a genetical characteristic of the creed.

There are political truths, religious truths, and just plain everyday scientific truth. As a sample of political truth we may take an answer given to Mr. Tom Driberg in the House of Commons by Sir Kingsley Wood. The question was the amount paid to Service and prison chaplains. The reply was £1,160,000. An additional question was whether the questioner might take it

that none of the bishops and clergy are paid by the State. The answer was that this was the case.

That, of course, was a political lie—touched with religious conviction. Otherwise one would have to bear in mind that the churches pay no rates and taxes, which is equal to many millions per year. In addition, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners acknowledge the receipt from mining royalties, investments and land, three and a half millions per year. (Anyone may work out how many millions of capital that represents.) And even though some of the sources of income no longer exist, still the Church was bought out, and the people have paid and continue to pay the value of the sum taken by the Church. And there are still some Church taxes left which must be paid by people irrespective of whether they are Christians or not. So we must call the reply not a lie, but religious-cum-Christian-cum-political truth.

The income of the Archbishop of York has been cut from £9,000 to £4,500, £800 for travelling expenses and hotel costs when away from home, and the upkeep of the Bishop's Palace. It should be said that the Archbishop himself asked for the cut. The £800 allowed for expenses is equal to a taxable income of £1,965. Really, the Archbishop does not appear to have made so bad a bargain as might be. And it looks better, so far as the public are concerned. Things remain much as they were. But they seem different. What will the Archbishop of Canterbury do?

A Fellowship of Prayer has been formed in the City of London. This adds one more to the chain of prayers that have been formed, and we imagine at the instigation of the clergy. The motive is obvious. It is for each group to persuade the other group that they are helping God. The puzzling thing is why God should need so many public resolutions to get him to do what he really ought—if he can do anything—to do without waiting for men and women to grovel before him and offer suggestions. After all, there is no evidence up to date that he has ever done anything—not even that he exists.

The courage—spiritual courage—calls for recognition, if not for admiration. The Rector of Wanstead, Essex, called the attention of his congregation to the Archbishop of Canterbury's challenge to Christians. The Rector said that Christians must "give a much greater place to women in the work of the Church," but it is quite evident that Christians must not be too daring, because he assured the timid (male): "I make it quite clear that I am not for a moment advocating women should be admitted to the priesthood of the Church." There's courage and decision for you! Women are good in peace or war—they may make shells, nurse the wounded, enter Parliament, sit on local Councils, even manipulate guns. But they must keep out of the pulpit. Does not the New Testament say that women must keep silent in the church? They must not even gossip in church while the sermon is being preached—at least not so that others may hear them.

It will be remembered that some time back the Churches in this country had a day of prayer for Russia. The Russian people did not ask for it, the Government of Russia did not need it. The Russians were then holding their own against the Germans, and had the Russian leaders been as foolish as the British Christians who carried out the ceremony of days of prayer, they might have treated it at least as a piece of impudence, and at most a designed insult. The rebirth of Russia, one of the most striking in the history of the world, was accomplished without God. It is that which makes the Churches feel uneasy.

It will also be remembered that when the day of prayer was mooted the late Cardinal Hinsley said there was no need for the Catholic Church in England to pray for Russia, as it did so every week by order of the Papacy. That was a falsehood—in fact if not in form—for the weekly prayer for Russia had no reference to the winning of the war, but was a mere prayer that Russia might come back to the Christian fold. Now the Vatican Radio has informed Russia that those "people who in their human vanity intend to arrange their earthly life without Christ

are mad." The Russians will, properly, treat this verbal hooliganism with contempt. But when the war ends we shall do well to keep an eye on the Vatican in both Britain and elsewhere. Atheistic Russia will never suit the Christian part of Britain.

In spite of the tremendous energy put in by the inspired servants of the Lord, people appear to be so ignorant of Christianity that those who love adding to our Ministries are doing their utmost to rope in another one.

Lord Hankey says he would like to see a Ministry of information for Christianity. But what are all the many thousands of parsons and preachers doing? And the lay preachers that are paid by the B.B.C. and who preach under the guise of lecturing? In this war we have been fighting for our lives. Now that we have reached a certain degree of safety we have still to work hard and strain every effort to inflict such a defeat on the enemy that there shall be small likelihood of humanity having to face such an ordeal again. That is the message given to the people from the Prime Minister downwards. If we relax our efforts on the battlefield or in the workshops we may still face disaster. This is particularly true of the workshops of Britain. For never were the fighting section of the community so dependent upon the home folk in the workshops and shipyards of Britain as they are to-day. So great is our dependence that it is a punishable offence for a man to come late to his job, to in any way prevent others fulfilling their tasks, or to loiter over one's work. Men have been fined and sent to prison for standing in the way of the war effort.

But there is an exception. The clergy are a privileged body. They may withdraw a man or woman from their work and then trumpet the news of their having done so. For example, there lies before us two newspaper cuttings, one from the "Church of England Newspaper," the other from the "Tiverton Gazette." The first describes the visit of a clergyman to a factory in Worcestershire. The other of addresses delivered by the Archbishop of Canterbury at "a Tiverton factory." In both cases we understand that the clergy are regular visitors, and during the visits work is suspended. Both the preachers mentioned say the workers agreed to the preaching. That the workers were unanimous we know is not the fact, and there are ways of dealing with those who strongly protest against knocking off work to listen to even an Archbishop. Some may think that in any case it gives a half-hour's rest more than they would otherwise get.

We mention half-an-hour, for that is the time spent in each workshop, as explained by the Bishop of Exeter. The preacher went from one large factory to another. He explains: "From 10 a.m. to nearly 1-30 p.m. I went from one factory to another. Each service lasted half-an-hour." Allowing very little time for dislocation of leaving work and beginning again, we may certainly say two hours. Assume that the factories visited numbered only 500 workers—a ridiculously low figure—we must count at the lowest 1,250 working hours. But this is going on all over the country. Why summons a man who takes an hour or two off? Or why permit the war work to be interrupted by the clergy? Has anyone courage enough to ask a question in the House of Commons? Evidently the Ministers have not the courage to act on their initiative.

Congratulations to the National Union of Women Teachers. After a long discussion the following resolution was passed by a large majority at their Conference: "The N.U.W.T. is of the opinion that Dual Control is incompatible with an efficient system of education and advocates a unified system of State-aided schools. Within this unified system it would incorporate the public and private schools which are undemocratic, since they give a privileged position to children whose parents have financial advantages. The unified system of education should allow for elasticity and encouragement of new developments so that the vital principles of education may be constantly tested in the light of experiment." That is a step in the right direction, which we hope the ladies will follow with a direct lead for secular education.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. J. K.—Thanks, but not quite up to standard.
C. SOMMERVILLE.—The Apocryphal Gospels have just as much authority as the New Testament possesses. They are very good material for forming a judgment of the value of Christian doctrines. Both should be read if one wishes to form a reliable picture of the quality of early Christianity.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2-3, Furnival Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three months, 4s. 4d.

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

WE again call attention of those who intend being present at the Annual Conference of the N.S.S., which is to be held in London on Whit-Sunday, and who wish to secure accommodation over the week-end to write to the General Secretary as early as possible. It is not easy to secure rooms nowadays, but all that can be done will be done. But *write at once*. Any offers of private accommodation for delegates would help considerably. It would have to be in or near London.

Mr. Wendell Willkie, whose travels are being published in the "Daily Telegraph," suggested what we have just said. Of China he says:—

"Three brothers and three sisters, all trained by Methodist missionaries and in American colleges, have given China an aristocracy of talent, political skill and unswerving devotion to the cause of the young republic."

We have no doubt that China would admit that it has learned much in the shape of mechanical machinery, science, etc., from America and elsewhere in the western world, but it never appears to strike Mr. Willkie that the Chinese who went to America or England went to study other forms of life that did not of necessity deal with the higher side of social existence, and came back but little impressed by the ethical culture of either people. China had its own philosophers and teachers long before a single white man trod American soil. But the Chinese are a courteous people, and we have no doubt that Madame and General Chiang, with whom Mr. Willkie was dining, would smile inwardly on the picture of China having to look to America for a better way of life than it possessed. But the smooth, unconscious impertinence of Mr. Wendell Willkie was amusing, even if it was not impressive. The General and his wife must have smiled when the visit came to an end.

There was another expression of this "great" traveller worth recording. Of Russia he says:—

"The Russian individual, like all individuals, naturally finds some good in a system that has improved his lot, and has a tendency to forget the ruthless means by which it has been brought about."

The Russian, not having the suave courtesy and self-control of the Chinese, would probably reply:—

"Mr. Willkie appears to be shocked by the rough way in which our freedom and betterment has been achieved, and he has a tendency to forget the state of things that we have

destroyed. Our reign of terror lasted for a few brief years, but the system we destroyed went on generation after generation. The Czarist system of greed and cruelty and superstition condemned many millions to a life of semi-starvation, to an ignorance more profound than anything that existed in Europe, to a tyranny as cruel and as great as that held up by the historic Church, to a life that was strongly veined with injustice and brutality."

We think rebellious Russia might remind Mr. Willkie of some comments made by Thomas Carlyle in the closing passages of the "French Revolution." Replying to the exaggerated "Reign of Terror," Carlyle says:—

"It was not the dumb millions that suffered here; it was the speaking thousands and hundreds and units, who shrieked and published and made the world ring with their wail. . . . If the gods of this lower world will sit on their glittering thrones . . . with the living chaos of ignorance and hunger weltering uncaared for at their feet, and smooth parasites preaching peace, peace, when there is no peace, then the dark chaos, it would seem, will rise."

Revolutions are ugly things to all who benefit from their non-existence. But when the wrongs of a people exist generation after generation for so great a time that millions have learned to look upon their misery as an inevitable and immovable thing, then revolutions come, and they who make them are not uncommonly justified. England had its revolution three centuries since, and it has been justified. More than a century and a half ago America staged a revolution, and justification was prompt. France had its revolution in 1789, and again history cries "Well done!" But never was a revolution more urgently needed than that of Russia. Here also was a revolution that was eagerly called for by all who felt the common brotherhood of man. The roots of that revolution were watered and nurtured by many centuries of brutal Czarism. Its fruit for better or worse is growing all over the world. There may be, there will be, many varieties as a result. That way runs evolution.

Only one thing more will we say. When the news of the seizure of the palace in St. Petersburg was reported in the English House of Commons, one question only was asked: "Is the Czar safe?" Did it matter? That member deserves immortalising. To him, the important thing when the news came of the downfall of a monarchy that Joseph Conrad described as being—

"the negation of everything worth living for. She is not an empty void—she is a yawning chasm open between east and west; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of merey, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience. . . ."

It is safe to say that tyranny will remain clinging to her struggles for a long time before her blind multitudes succeed in trampling her out of existence under their millions of bare feet."

"Is the Czar safe?" Did it matter?

Injustice is everywhere, and naturally backed up by deliberate lying. The "Chorlton Guardian" (Lancashire) for April 23 printed a report of a meeting held in which the speakers demanded stronger Christian teaching in the schools, and a Mr. Turner, headmaster of Weld Bank School, said that the war had awakened people "to the fact that the child who had received a religious education would naturally turn out to be a better citizen." We know that this was one of the suggestions made after much bombing of slum areas, and it was popularised by highly placed clerics. All the same, we have no hesitation in saying that the statement was and is a lie. On any fair test, that is, allowing for differences of home life—decent homes against bad homes—and a proportion in numbers is considered, the balance lies in favour of the non-religious. Decidedly our "brave new world" does not seem so certain as one would wish.

We should be obliged if any reader could supply us with a copy of the late J. T. Lloyd's "From Christian Platform to Secular Platform."

THE MEANING AND MISSION OF "RATIONALISM"

(Concluded from page 200)

It follows from the preceding that "rationalism" is not to be regarded as signifying a further "system of philosophy," definitive in its pronouncement on questions of the kind we have reviewed; superseding previous systems which have aimed to explain the inexplicable. Rather may it stand for a general attitude to such issues in the light which avails from expanding knowledge. It can offer no complete thesaurus in lieu of erroneous suppositions valid science discredits, beyond guiding the seeker towards the land of promise by the path of personal adventure. Reaction to these transcendent issues must remain largely one of individual temperament. A famous passage recurs in this connection:—

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

Therein the patient

Must minister to himself.

So with disorders that affect the mind under other categories in the pursuit of a causal *fata morgana*, it must recover health and sanity through availing illumination—won by each alone. Neither is it part of its mission to promote one more order of "peculiar people," dogmatically convinced of being *facile princeps* in the egoistic contest of faith and creed; and, world-wide in its scope, our organon, beyond purifying the atmosphere from the malaria of primal superstition, must exert equally a corresponding influence over the heart—to cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous sectarian malignity which has weighed so dreadfully, and weighs still, on the course of human affairs.

Then rational humanism is at one with the finer culture of our day which ministers to the soul. The comprehension of natural law during the last two centuries went with an enhanced sensibility to natural beauty on land and sea; witnessed in England by the rise of our great school of landscape painting in oil and water colour. A body of nature poetry has been evoked by these fresh sympathies and perceptions; together with lyric verse that voices the whole gamut of emotion, aspiration, experience; paralleled in music, among others, by the panurgic figure of Beethoven and his vibrant expression of the modern spirit. In another sphere, the garnered data now classed under Anthropology, not simply exhibit the variety of peoples and psychosis constituting our species; but help to enlighten the more excellent way of dealing with relations between the "advanced" and more primitive representatives of the Race. Historic archaeology illustrates the devious route through which these advanced folk came to reach the ground where they now stand. Though the valid evidence of this ascent is fragmentary, it further bears on the mode by which this process may be expedited.*

Of such are considerations which enter into the purview of a movement of free thought in the widest sense. Its protagonists are trustees for the maintenance and expansion of this cultural achievement. How best to stimulate heightened interest therein from all quarters is the gravamen of the situation. One or two things may be indicated in passing.

When the fourth centenary of the "open Bible" in England was celebrated a while back, regret was expressed that the Book which then had stirred such popular regard should, in these days, have fallen into neglect. Considering the prestige of the Bible

(better known in the Middle Ages as "the Library," *Bibliotheca*), its assumed Divine Revelation, this neglect has a peculiar significance. It implies that a widespread scepticism has arisen meanwhile respecting this claim in the public mind, though it is still read as such in the schools and churches. It suggests also that open discussion thereon for the last hundred years has created a mental climate wherein the older form of challenge to its authority calls for revision and a new synthesis. The question of import, on which much remains to be said, is rather how this ascription of God's Word arose in the first place; its varying interpretation among Jews themselves; in the early Christian Church; by Medievalists; and Protestant Reformers. . . . Treated as a "human document" removed from these attributions there is its residual value to be appraised for our age, its ethic or wisdom of experience, the literary quality of its more poetic inspiration, much prized by some. And how far this may be due to the English of the A.V. as compared with the "originals"; rendered at a time of singular developments in our native language itself:—

Set me as a seal upon thine heart,
As a seal upon thine arm;
For love is strong as death;
Jealousy is cruel as the grave. . . .
My beloved is mine, and I am his,
Until the daybreak, and the shadows
flee away.†

It is doubtful, too, whether fine spun logomachies respecting the Universe, the Existence of God, make any general appeal apart from a particular few. The strength of Theistic belief, Christian or non-Christian, lay in its connection with the sense of a Divine helper, open to prayer:—

O God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come. . . .

To reduce this warm sense to a cold abstraction, an inscrutable Power from whence all things proceed, and, apparently, with little regard to human need or aspiration, can offer no return sufficing to sustain further divine curiosity!

But the living Cosmos, Nature, continues—a subject for endless exploration; wherein knowledge comes alike as illumination, and as a vital factor in human amelioration. . . . And we may take leave of our parable here, with some lines of mystic intimation:

O we can wait no longer,
We, too, take ship, O Soul.
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy
to sail,
Amid the wafting winds. . . .
Caroling free, singing our song of God,
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

O thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,
Light of the light, shedding forth universes,
Thou centre of them.
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space and
Death,
But that I, turning, call to thee, O Soul, thou
actual me,
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,
And fillest, swellest full, the vastnesses of Space.

* Throughout this survey we are concerned with intellectual relations and phenomena. . . . The application of the principles involved to conduct and action requires a separate examination.

† Despite, also, the wealth of attention given to Christian origins by its pundits (not without acerbity), a convincing exposure of the genesis of the organic Christian *ecclesia*, is to seek.

Away, O Soul, hoist instantly the anchor!
 Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!
 Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only.
 Reckless, O Soul, exploring, I with thee and
 thou with me,
 For we are bound where mariner has not yet
 dared to go,
 And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
 O my brave Soul!
 O farther, farther sail! †

AUSTEN VERNEY.

† Walt Whitman.

INSIDE EUROPE

Underground Europe Calling. (O. Paul, 1942; Gollancz.)

This Austrian Socialist wants a federation of free peoples in the emergence of a Socialist Europe. Military defeat of the Nazis and a mass revolt in the occupied countries must go together, and not be bound by national frontiers. He cannot entertain the idea that there should be what he terms a Stalinist monopoly of the revolution, since Russia is not a democracy. "Even a victorious Premier may be removed from office. A victorious Stalin may not."

He is alive to the perfidy of the Catholic Church in the countries of Europe.

Turkey. (Barbara Ward, 1942; Oxford University Press.)

It is pointed out that from the Turkish standpoint the Ankara Agreement covering mutual aid in the Mediterranean became inoperative after its basis of Anglo-French solidarity had disappeared with the defeat of France, and as for her Balkan commitments, it was "too late" to do anything when Yugoslavia was invaded, since by then the Germans had forces massed on the Turkish frontier. Turkey, she says, was too much encircled to have freedom of action, and she concludes that so long as Turkey's neutrality, like that of Sweden, has some advantage to Germany, she will not be attacked.

There is also an account of the origins of modern Turkey, westernised by Ataturk.

The Rape of the Netherlands. (E. N. van Kleffens, 1940; Hodder and Stoughton.)

This book by a responsible Dutch Minister (for Foreign Affairs) is alarmingly governed to some extent by a hatred of Russia. "Bolshevik hordes" is his reference to the Red Army (in the Finnish campaign, of course. To-day it is more fashionable to speak of them as the saviours of civilisation).

On the other hand, he greatly admires the Vatican, and writes as an unashamed supporter of the appeasement policy. He pleads that, before his country was invaded, Holland could not have had any agreement with Britain because Germany would have found out!

And, no doubt, if Germany had found out, Rotterdam would have been blitzed, 100,000 of the Dutch Army lost and Winkelman forced to capitulate after four days. And so, by simply relying on Hitler's good faith, all these things were avoided. Or were they?

Is van Kleffens any wiser now? Apparently not, for he says it is "greatly to be deplored" that the British Government did not listen to "Herr Hitler's peace speech" (October 6, 1939) (the "peace offensive").

Europe Speaks. (International Publishing Company, 1942.)

A collection of first-hand reports and accounts of life in the occupied countries, the sources being mostly anonymous.

Pall Over Europe. (Dutch, 1942; Gollancz.)

There are useful figures regarding the migration of workers from the occupied countries to work for German militarism, and also details regarding the food situation, which appears to be worst in Greece and best in Denmark; the latter is, in fact, a great deal better off than Italy. One obvious effect is that Denmark, of all the occupied countries, gives her masters the least trouble.

There are many other facts about conditions in Europe and, without wishing to throw any doubts on his sincerity, it is hard to see how some of his reports can have been verified. Some of the anecdotes, if not entirely unfounded, have surely been rounded off for display. It is better, perhaps, to give stories as stories, and not as happenings. The following are among his best: A fish salesman in Norway was caught shouting, "First-class mackerel—fat as Goering." After serving two weeks in prison he took up his old stand shouting, "First-class mackerel—fat as they were a fortnight ago."

A Norwegian boatman hauled two airmen out of the sea. The crowd on shore saw him throw them back again. When he returned they asked him whether the airmen were Germans. "Yes," he replied. "Were they alive?" he was then asked. "They said so," he replied, "but you know what liars they are."

G. H. TAYLOR.

A GLANCE AT MOHAMMEDANISM

IT is difficult for Europeans to get a logical conception of the large religious systems prevailing in other parts of the earth. One can, of course, obtain books describing them, but it is hard to discover an *impartial* account: they are generally the work of biased Christians on the one hand, or of equally biased sympathisers on the other! Yet some knowledge of them is essential to an understanding of world problems and, with the drafting of men to Africa and Asia, these matters have recently acquired a new interest.

Mohammedanism—the nearest to us—is perhaps most likely to be misunderstood, for our school history books hopelessly misrepresent it in attempting to conceal the crimes and follies of Christianity. Children still imagine the Crusades as a fight between the white-clothed, red-crossed, heroic and merciful defenders of the right, and the dark and ruthless Saracens—the very word conveying horror and all that is bad. This is not to be wondered at, because it is precisely what they are taught, and their picture books confirm it. Unfortunately the majority of them get no opportunity to correct this terribly wrong idea. Likewise, they know nothing of the part played by Mohammedanism in the Renaissance in Europe, or the state of culture reached in Moslem countries while Christian lands were still immersed in the filth of the Dark Ages. In fact, it may truly be said that all the average Christian does know about Mohammedanism is that it allows polygamy! In return, the Koran instructs true believers not to make friends with Jews or Christians!

The Freethinker is the one person who can examine each and every faith without bias. He knows that all religions have evolved from a common origin in primitive man's attempts to explain natural phenomena and, considering them all to be founded on error, he favours none. He may—like Ingersoll—prefer Jupiter to Jehovah, whilst believing in neither, but this preference is itself based on an examination of the "record" of each, as laid down in the respective mythologies; and, after studying Mohammedanism, the Freethinker finds that there is virtually nothing to choose between it and Christianity.

Mohammed himself—sincere as he may have been—does not deserve the position, that many writers have given him, among

the greatest men that have lived! Great stress is laid on the fact that he substituted monotheism for polytheism, but, as J. M. Robertson said:—

"That idea he held as a kind of revelation, not as a result of any traceable process of reasoning; and he affirmed it from first to last as a fanatic. One of the noblest of fanatics he may be, but hardly more."

It is equally wrong to attribute the *spread* of Mohammedanism to the "personality" or "attractive power" of the Prophet. Conditions were favourable to its spreading, for—as in the case of Christianity—the old polytheism was becoming very weak; but it owed its great success to the conquering powers of its armies! So great were these that, after subduing Arabia, Syria, Asia Minor, Persia and the neighbouring regions, Europe was invaded and the Iberian Peninsula taken. Gibbon, in his inimitable style, imagined what would have resulted if the Moslems had not been defeated in 732 on the Loire. A similar advance to the one they had already accomplished would have brought them to Britain, and the great historian suggests: "Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet."

As Gibbon implies, this would have made little difference, for Mohammedanism contains many bad elements, similar to those of Christianity. The following is a typical example of several descriptions of hell, in which unbelievers shall continue for ever.

"And they who believe not, shall have garments of fire fitted unto them: boiling water shall be poured on their heads; their bowels shall be dissolved thereby, and also their skins; and they shall be beaten with maces of iron." (Sale's Translation, Chapter XXII.)

Like the Bible, the Koran is full of contradictions, and Islamism soon split up into many warring sects, but it always taught a hatred of infidelity, and Chapter II. instructs Moslems to make war against infidels, while idolators are classed with whoremongers, and they, too, must be fought.

Another tenet, common to both Christianity and Mohammedanism, is the superiority of the male sex—the Koran allowing each man to have four wives, with easy facilities for divorcing them. There is, indeed, a great deal of nonsensical teaching about women, and it was this that Kemal Ataturk had to fight and break away from when building Modern Turkey.

The Koran, of course, contains many good principles, but the evidence of fanaticism is everywhere. I have not even touched upon the miraculous parts—Mohammed's lightning nocturnal trip through 90 heavens on that strange animal the "borak," his many encounters with the angel Gabriel and the transmission of the text leaf by leaf, etc.—but the American historian, Professor J. W. Draper, summed up the book splendidly in "The Intellectual Development of Europe," when he said:—

"The Koran . . . has exercised a great control over the destinies of mankind. . . . Such a work, noble as may be its origin, must not refuse, but court, the test of natural philosophy, regarding it not as an antagonist, but as its best support . . . it should furnish us at least the foreshadowings of the great truths discovered by astronomy and geology, not offering for them the wild fictions of earlier ages, inventions of the infancy of man. It should tell us how suns and worlds are distributed in infinite space, and how, in their successions, they come forth in limitless time. . . . Tried by such a standard, the Koran altogether fails. In its philosophy it is incomparably inferior to the writings of Chakia Mouni, the founder of Buddhism; in its science it is absolutely worthless. On speculative or doubtful things it is copious enough; but in the exact, where a test can be applied to it, it totally fails. Its astronomy, cosmogony, physiology, are so puerile as to invite our mirth."

It will thus be seen that the Koran is no better than the Bible as a "guide and discriminator"—as its name claims—and it was fortunate for the world that Arabian science and philosophy threw off its religious shackles at an early date, and thereby paved the way for the revival of learning in Europe.

C. McCALL

THE ADVANCEMENT OF BACON

BACON has stood upon my shelves for many years; and, like a number of others decreed by convention and awaiting their turn for that elusive thing called leisure, has stood there unread.

It was just a chance the other day—and probably a touch of envious annoyance at the facile phrase—that sent me to his essay "Of Atheism" as the source of his oft-quoted "A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion." Pope had started it all off by his:—

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.

Looking up the one, I was led on to the other, and thence to Bacon's short essay on Atheism to see whether therein the author of "The Advancement of Learning" displayed such persuasive arguments and depth of philosophy as would bring my own mind "about to religion." I was sadly disappointed. I expected much, and found practically nothing.

The well-rounded phrase so often quoted is the best part of the essay, nor is its verdict substantially supported by the remainder. Nor is it really worth while examining those arguments put forward. The essay was written centuries before the "Darwinian Era," and there is little point in going back across the bridge of the Theory of Evolution to argue solemnly the pros and cons of "fortuitous concourses of atoms." Nor does Bacon's appeal to the suggested ennobling part of religion receive much favourable backing from the evidences of his own character.

Indeed, it is in Bacon's psychology rather than his philosophy that we gain the clue to his opinions. Courtier, lawyer, politician, lover of pomp and luxury and power, Bacon was a persistent and unashamed place-seeker, ever ready to temper his duty and behaviour to his own worldly advancement, and marked by extreme subservience and moral cowardice. Hardly the character to risk endangering himself or his worldly possessions by advocacy of unpopular opinions, least of all the fatal taint of Atheism! The leaders of the fight against superstition usually have to be made of sterner stuff.

Bacon was a worldling who enjoyed the pleasures of philosophy, rather than a philosopher who enjoyed the pleasures of the world; and his choice of orthodoxy can be well understood in an age when religion not only claimed the monopoly of the next world, but saw to it that as far as possible it enjoyed also a monopoly of the good things of this world. Bacon knew and wrote much of law, but where the advancement of his own interests was at stake, knew or cared little of justice, of gratitude, or of that moral courage which is always a necessity for those who would go their way without subscribing to the vested superstitions of their age.

Fortunately, however, as with so many others, his worldly failings and his defects of character are far outweighed by the debt we owe him for his immense efforts on behalf of knowledge and the impetus he gave to England's revival of learning. It is a debt for which we shall always be grateful, and one for which we can even forgive him for having given Christendom a too-facile phrase which, for long yet, will probably continue to be used as an easy substitute for that depth of wisdom to which it superficially pretends.

RONALD STANDFAST.

"LOV'ST THOU ME?"

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—MATT. xxii. 37.

Fear God.—1 PETER ii. 17.

There is no fear in Love: but perfect Love casteth out Fear.—1 JOHN iv. 18.

IT is generally agreed amongst lovers and others that it is "love that makes the world go round." It is agreed also—although not so generally—that "God is Love." From these premises, sound and otherwise, it is but natural for believers in the Scriptures to assume that it is God that makes the world go round. This seems very simple, according to the simple, for the statement merely confirms, seemingly, the story of the Creation as narrated in the first chapter of Genesis. And so in the beginning was the "Word," and when the earth was made more or less shipshape the Word (God) was made Flesh (Jesus Christ), attended by the Spirit (Holy Ghost). The latter was given roving commissions, and some interesting ones at that. At this point it is interesting to point out that this eminent trio was responsible for the following mathematical conundrum, a sort of religious *pons asinorum*, i.e.: If three is one, is one three, too?

A certain traveller, weary with travelling, was content to see Naples and die, but nobody could see God and live, except Moses who, it is recorded, did so in most peculiar circumstances, to say the least. In the absence of an authentic and first-hand picture of God the Father, worshippers must be satisfied with the next best thing, and that is the pictures and images of Jesus Christ the Son. These products of man's fertile imagination have been expressly forbidden by the divine injunction, "Thou shalt not make any graven image nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above."

We have heard of a young man who, seeing a picture of a girl, immediately fell in love, and did not rest until he had found the young lady. There is a likeness of Jesus Christ, but worshippers have no need to go in search of him. He is everywhere. Moreover, he is the inspiration of so much affection that hymn writers have vied with one another to produce the most amorous effort. This "Gentle Jesus meek and mild" is the only one of the Holy three who is able to play on the heart-strings of his adorers. Listen to some of the titles of their love songs: "Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast"; "Safe in the arms of Jesus, Safe on his gentle breast"; "Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly"; "Beloved, let us love"; "I need thee, precious Jesu"; "Bride of Christ," and "Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts." A sweet selection!

Now Matthew said, "Love God." But Peter said, "Fear God." John, acting as a sort of chairman, said: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear." One of the principal aims of a conjuror is to keep his audience guessing, for it is written, "What the eye doesn't see it believes, and what the eye does see it disbelieves." The consequence is that the audience, worshipping at the shrine of Legerdemain, remains mystified yet happy. "My God!" they say, "how wonderful thou art!"

Indeed yes. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This charming and pathetic story has an irresistible appeal to God lovers. Such slick salesmanship was lacking in the traders of pagan gods, and it is a matter for speculation whether Jupiter and Company would have retired from business had they adopted more up-to-date sales methods.

Again, the earthly choir joins with the heavenly choir in singing "Jesus loves me" and "O Perfect Love," and their love is intensified and becomes quite passionate when they behold the picture of Jesus carrying a lamb. Later, this same lamb is personified in "O Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." So great is the love of Jesus for mankind that it

transcends the love a mother has for her child. The tender care she lavishes upon her infant is insignificant when compared with the loving care which Jesus has for his children. "He died to save me because he loves me so," sings the child, with eyes gazing at an image of the crucified Lord.

The calf-love, as it were, of religious-minded youth encounters strong opposition in the adolescent age, when love for one of the opposite sex finds its expression. Then a lover may be heard to sing, "Love me and the world is mine," thus embracing everything—gods and all!

Time was when ardent disciples gave their lives for their Lord, loving him and beseeching his loving-mercy to the last breath. Nowadays ardent disciples can, if they wish, go on loving him safely to the last without let or hindrance, "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." We wonder whether the present-day lamb-like devotion will one day become tiger-like in its ferocity as in days of old? In the unhappy event of a recrudescence of religious persecution would the faithful to any particular creed suffer martyrdom? We are inclined to believe that a return to such conditions would be of very short duration, for Man "wins fresh victories as the sea wins his, for though its advance is sure, it will, after a mightier wave than usual, seem to roll back so far as to lose all the ground it has gained." (George Eliot.)

If it is true that "Love makes the world go round" (and round), it is possibly the reason why lovers become so giddy, especially during the time of full moon. Whatever the reason, one would prefer to be associated with the moon-struck rather than the god-struck.

S. GORDON HOGG.

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