

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVI.—No. 8

Sunday, February 24, 1946

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christianity's Outlook

ONE of the religious weeklies dealt recently with the reasons given by various people for the declining membership of the Churches. It had no explanation of its own to offer, but it pointed out that the reasons given neutralised each other. There is no denying the truth of this. One man says that the decline is due to a departure from the "old Gospel"; another puts it down to the preaching being old-fashioned and out of date. On the one hand, we hear there is too little of the social element in the preaching; on the other, that there is too much. Others talk vaguely about the general indifference to religion, or to the "Materialism" of the age; although, as the article referred to had said, preachers in every age have been busy with exactly the same complaint. The only clear and certain thing is that people are drifting away from Christianity.

And in all this the vital point is quite overlooked. Beliefs—whether social or religious—if they are to possess the note of vitality, must spring from current life, and in some way or other receive confirmation in daily experience. If we go back far enough, we find that of all beliefs, religious beliefs are the ones most firmly held. There is nothing that man then stands more in fear of than his gods; nothing he dreads more than their displeasure. He needs no priests to teach him religion; that is forced on him by the general environment—the function of the priest being that of interpreter of the will of the gods. Under such conditions, religious beliefs are not absurd; they are simply untrue. One no more laughs at a tribe of savages trembling before their gods than one laughs at a child's belief in Santa Claus or fairyland. Absurdity attaches itself to religion when it no longer has any support from the intellect. Then religious beliefs are not merely untrue; they are, in addition, ridiculous, and one laughs at them exactly as one would laugh at an adult who shared the child's belief in the reality of fairyland.

Earlier generations could be sincere about their religious beliefs because there was little or nothing in the intellectual environment with which they were in flagrant contradiction. Two or three centuries ago it was still possible for an educated and intelligent man to profess Christian beliefs without a number of dishonouring reservations and qualifications. If the actual facts in support of religion were not always so strong as they might be, still there was not at hand a mass of positive knowledge with which it was in positive antagonism. There was uncompromising bigotry, torture for heresy, and the sacrifice of much that might have made life better. But there was at least sincerity. Even the deadly blight of seventeenth century Puritanism

possessed this quality. And one could hate the creed while still retaining one's respect for the man. Where opposite opinions are held with sincerity, both victor and vanquished are the better for their conflict.

But to-day Christianity is rapidly becoming an impossible creed for intellectual men and women with honest inclinations. I am, of course, referring to Christianity proper, and not to any of the refined ethico-sociological articles that do duty as such. There is not one of the orthodox Christian doctrines that can now stand serious examination, and all intelligent Christians know it. The whole of modern science is in direct contradiction to the cosmic theory upon which historic Christianity was based. Its heaven has vanished into infinite space, its flat earth has disappeared, its hell has ceased to terrorise, and awakens nothing but disgust. If a Freethinker cites these things he is told that they are not Christianity; he is insulting Christians and caricaturing their beliefs. Well, but they, with the belief in miracles and in prayer, were all part and parcel of orthodox Christianity; and if people do not believe them, by what moral right do they continue to call themselves Christians?

There is a constant complaint both in England and America that men of recognised ability and worth will not enter the ministry. How can one expect them to? Consider their position. A clergyman of position said the other day that in the present crisis the country stood sadly in need of prayer. I do not believe that things are so critical as that would imply; but whether or no, it is certain that prayers will not help. Whether all the clergymen in this country pray or curse will not make the slightest difference to the course of a war. Men will, guns will, shells will, money will; but prayers will have as much influence as they would have on the course of an earthquake. Now, I do not say merely that the majority of the clergy ought to know this as well as I do; I say deliberately that the vast majority do know it, and know also that their exhortation to prayer is a piece of senseless mummery.

How does a clergyman excuse himself for saying prayers for this, or that, or the other? Prayer, he will tell you, is not offered up now in the belief that it will effect any alteration in the course of nature, but in the belief that it has an elevating influence on the mind. If one is in trouble, prayer soothes; if one is in difficulty, prayer comforts—if we believe in it. So will a quack medicine cure—if one believes in it. There is much virtue in the "if." And what is all this but an elaborate self-deception? Would people ever have prayed unless they had believed that some alteration would be brought to pass in the order of things by their prayers? And how long will people keep on praying once they realise that it is no more than a kind of spiritual dram-drinking, and without any influence whatever on external nature? This is not honest conviction that one has to fight; it is a huge, informal conspiracy of humbug.

Current Christianity makes but a small appeal to conviction. Its main appeal is to self-interest. To one class its appeal is to conserve class interests, to keep the "lower classes" in order, to act as a curb on revolutionary tendencies. To the shopkeeping class it appeals as a business investment. It offers mental mediocrity the satisfaction of a position in life, such as could not be gained in any other direction with similar qualifications. And to yet another class it promises an alleviation of miseries, which it has played no small part in creating and perpetuating. Rich and poor are thus bribed into support; and behind all is the apathy and conservatism of large masses of people to whom everything established is treated as inevitable and immovable. It may be a matter of dispute whether we run our business on Christian lines, or our Christianity on business lines, but there is no doubt that a great deal of current Christianity was well summed up by Ruskin in the sentence: "If engineers could build a tunnel to hell, Christians would invest their money in it, and would stop building churches for fear of lowering the dividends."

So much of Christianity as is kept alive owes its existence very largely to these two sets of forces—self-interest on the one side, and indifference on the other. If only we had sincere and reasoned conviction to fight, the task would be easy, and the issue soon decided. And of the two classes, the greater danger is presented by the latter. It is the indifference to all the social issues involved in the fight against superstition that makes this class so great a danger. There is really no such thing as neutrality in what the "Times" calls the "War of Thought." Assistance may be active or passive, but everyone assists one side or the other. The man who is not fighting superstition is helping it. His very inactivity is so much in its favour. The great call is for everyone to decide in one way or another. Religious beliefs cannot be set on one side as of no consequence. Either they are of great value and deserve far more support than they get, or they are a great danger, and the sooner they are swept on one side the better.

The present position of Christianity offers nothing new in the history of religion. In all probability it is a phase that has overtaken all religious systems sooner or later. Religions commence in conviction and end in convention. It is not without significance that all religions have placed the golden age in the past. For the past is the golden age of the gods, as the future is the golden age of man. Religions belong to the past, they are rooted in the past—in past habits of life, old modes of thought, outworn conceptions of the universe. This is not alone the reason why religion places its golden age in the past, it is also the reason why all over the world religious systems cling to old modes of speech, of dress, and seek by every possible means to perpetuate old customs. It is all an expression of the general law that ideas, like organisms, must have a suitable environment if they are to live. That, in spite of all that is done, religious belief steadily weakens, is proof of the utter unsuitability of religious ideas to a really civilised environment.

The decay of religion is really an expression of social evolution. Universally, religion decays as civilisation develops. This is not a phenomenon of modern times or of one religion. It is characteristic of all times, and affects

all creeds. The decay of religion is a fact, and an inevitable fact. Nothing can prevent it ultimately, although the rate of decay may be hastened or retarded. Evolution proceeds consciously or unconsciously. Only it would be well for all Freethinkers to realise that the conscious direction of social forces may do in a few years what it may otherwise take generations to accomplish.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

QUAINT CUSTOMS OF THE MOORS

THE late Professor Westermarck's anthropological researches in Moslem North Africa are of permanent importance. These were subsequently supplemented by the personal studies of Dr. Francoise Legey, who, in her medical capacity, spent thirteen years among the Moors whose manners and observances she has recorded in her "Folklore of Morocco" (Allen and Unwin). This instructive volume is graced by an appreciative preface from the pen of Marshal Lyautey and contains many illustrations, two of which are unique, as these photographs were taken on sacred occasions when no non-Moslem is permitted to be present on pain of death.

Moorish beliefs concerning the origin and destiny of the physical world: the earth, the sky, the seas and streams, the fauna and flora, are all surveyed. A short chapter describes the creation of mankind. Our first parents, it is said, fashioned from earth and these early men were giants who bore long tails, but as the years rolled by they gradually assumed the shape and proportions of modern humanity.

The legend tells us that: "In the beginning all men were white. But one day Sidi Blale . . . drew away to perform his natural functions and one of his sons followed him and mocked him. Then Sidi Blale cursed him, and exclaimed: 'May thou turn black for ever!' The young man was instantly changed into a negro."

The erring son repented and begged forgiveness, so his father bade him bathe in a purifying stream in which he laved the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet which were lightened that he ran back to display them to his parent. He then returned to plunge his body into the beneficent stream, but to his intense dismay it had disappeared, for Allah was determined to punish what Sidi Blale had pardoned. Thus was the negro race originated according to a legend which is a mere variant of a tale recorded in the Hebrew mythology.

Sex plays a conspicuous part in the lives of the Moors and among the superstitions concerning it. Fertility is universally acclaimed. "A sterile woman," observes our author "is despised. It is said that she fails in every religion and is neither a Musulman, a Jewess, nor a Christian. It is thought that God forgives all the sins of a woman who brings a child into the world. It is an insult to say that a woman is barren, besides being a bad omen."

Childless wives will never admit that they are unfruitful. Any derangement in the menses assures them that they are pregnant with a dormant child, and measures are adopted to enliven it. When the husband is thought responsible for sterility he eats the testicles of a sheep, while wives swallow the testicles of a cock. Native Jewesses "eat the foreskin of the newly circumcised infant in order to become fertile and have boys. Many other curious customs of this character are intended to ward off the evil eye and to minimise the machinations of malevolent spirits against infant life.

Abortion is strongly condemned by public opinion, yet some women employ magical means to release themselves from the pangs of conception. Still, in common belief, those "women who bring it about are tormented after death in their graves"

all the children who were deprived of life by them. It is believed that they will be changed into bitches on the Day of Judgment, and will be sent to howl in hell."

The most amazing expedients are employed where conception is undesirable. For instance, figs when dried, having no reproductive powers, act as a preventive charm. And in a land where polygamy prevails there is naturally much jealousy and evil spells are frequently cast on wives too fondly favoured by their lord and master, by their less cherished rivals. So, "wormwood from a dead poplar stealthily added to the food of a rival condemns her to the sterility of the dead tree."

The Moslems dread a miscarriage as a misfortune, and the most painstaking measures are adopted to avoid its occurrence. All the saints in the Moorish Calendar confer protection against miscarriages. The saint most popular in this connection is Moulay Djelani who exercises authority over evil spirits and nullifies their devilries. For it is supposed that miscarriages are caused by a female spirit termed the pursuer who slays the infant while still in the womb. On the other hand, the Jews desert the dwelling where a miscarriage has happened, for the trouble is attributed to the wicked genii of their home.

Pregnancy and childbirth are deemed a natural purification. A mother of ten sons enters paradise immediately after death. Moreover, "a woman who dies in childbirth or immediately after pregnancy is supposed to undergo no punishment after death but to go straight to Paradise."

A child born with a caul is received with rejoicing for this is considered a promise of coming prosperity both to itself and family. Cauts are preserved as heirlooms, save when the mother sells a small part of these membranes to wealthy Moors who treasure these fragments with great care. We gather that "a man who has been unjustly accused pays any price to get hold of one, for nothing can give him greater protection against his enemies."

In correcting children who soil their beds, the Moorish procedure is curious. A leaking saucepan or perforated basket is placed over their heads; various broken utensils are attached to the delinquents and they are driven to a grating over a drain. Then they are compelled to repeat aloud an oath that they will not pollute their beds. "After this they are led about the town followed by a procession of children playing a rambourine and shouting, 'O Water-pot give us five sows or we will shout till we reach the city gates.' They generally feel so ashamed that they never offend again."

Children are trained to show the greatest respect for their parents and their natural liberties are strictly restrained. But, on the eve of the great Moslem fast of Ramadan this rule is disregarded. Then the children make game of their elders and it is stated that "it is the custom that they should jeer and laugh at the smokers and takers of snuff, who are going to suffer for a whole month by not being able to indulge their chief enjoyment during the long hours of the day." A procession of juniors is formed and as they pass along they satirically sing:—

"Who has no pipe?
Who has no matches?"

Even ruder remarks are permitted, but not only are those ridiculed expected to suffer in silence, but to hand money to their tormentors and thus get rid of them.

With the Moors circumcision is usually performed when a boy reaches seven or eight. In rural districts, the mother, attended by her female friends, carries her naked boy to a sacred spring and washes him in the water. But in the towns this ceremony is conducted within doors in a large bowl of water.

After the rural procession has returned from the spring, the child is handed over to the barber who performs the operation. This completed, the prepuce is usually taken by the operator who salts it and keeps it with the foreskins of all the children on whom he has operated. He is supposed to sacrifice a sheep for every hundred, so that the child should 'keep well.'

It is also intimated that Moorish Jewesses frequently eat the prepuce of a circumcised infant, while Moslem grandmothers devour it to intensify their affection for their grandchildren.

The Moorish Jews perform the ceremony when the child is seven days old. The infant is first taken to the synagogue to partake of its holiness and then consigned to the barber surgeon. The blood that drips from the wound is caught in a dish over which earth has been spread. On the third day, the blood-stained soil is buried in the garden while the soiled linen used in the operation is sewn within the child's pillow to preserve him from malignant spirits.

Love and Matrimony, Disease and Death, Food, Building and Handicrafts, Divination and Fortune Telling are all reviewed in this most informative volume. In a letter, Marshal Lyautey asks its authoress how she ever found time to amass all the many materials contained in her book. "There too," he wrote, "your work is of supreme interest. Popular literature, both Arab and Berber, of this country teems with charming and often beautiful inventions, and it is of precious value to preserve them in their freshness."

T. F. PALMER.

THREE INTO ONE WON'T GO!

Three in One and One in Three—
Chase me up a "chestnut" tree!
What a wangle! What a tangle!
Who's a liar—you or me?

One in Three and Three in One—
Bishops have their bit of fun
With parlour tricks that mean just nix—
Do not ask 'em how it's done!

Three in One and One in Three—
Doesn't mean a thing to me,
Mathematics? Acrobatics?
'Tisn't Trigonometry.

One in Three and Three in One—
Dear old ladies barring none
Think it's holy roley-poley—
Not a hokus-pokus bun!

Three in One and One in Three—
What a soothing cup of tea!
Dulls the senses—pays expenses—
That's what really matters, see?

One in Three and Three in One—
Nonsense can be overdone,
Don't let ninnies in white pinnies
Fool you any longer, son.

Three in One and One in Three—
You can have it gratis—free,
Just a riddle set to diddle—
Fit for diddlers—not for me!

W. H. Wood.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; by post 5d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED, by Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

ACID DROPS

We are indebted to the "Daily Mirror" for February 7. A letter was sent to the editor which he promptly and properly published. Here it is. The name and address was given which we hold back for obvious reasons. We take it that the latter part is the editor's comment. If so, we compliment him for a straightforward comment:—

"I am Church of England and my fiancée is Roman Catholic. We are contemplating marriage, and to get the right and wrong of the match my fiancée paid a visit to her priest. I give you in the following items what he said to her—

1. This would be no marriage.
2. She would never have another night's sleep if she married me.
3. All children born would be illegitimate.

Is he correct and should he be allowed to say such?"

The other part runs thus:—

"Now this is the tenth or eleventh letter we have had lately in much the same strain. Let us Old Codgers say, bluntly, in straight terms, that marriages are made legal by the law of *this* country, not by some stupid Romish priest. Such a marriage as mentioned above would be a marriage, and the children would be legitimate. As for the bride, and her future rest, our view is that the sooner she is removed from the influence of this priest, the better it will be for her, and her husband to be. Perhaps we might draw the attention of the R.C. Archbishop to this letter."

We need only add to this that it is a disgrace that this kind of terrorism should be practised by a Church, the head of which with his tongue in his cheek advertises himself as a Democrat. The whole thing is a disgrace to decent human nature, particularly when there is no recognition of any religious marriage in this country. There is nothing but the civic marriage in England. We wonder whether anyone in the House of Commons would raise the matter. It is in a way a test for the House.

Another little work on "The Christian Religion" by H. Balmforth, is declared by the "Church Times" to be by a Christian who "has moved from Agnosticism to Faith" and therefore "can see both sides of the case." We have no recollection of Mr. Balmforth (who is now the Principal of Ely Theological College) as an active Agnostic or anything else in our movement, but of course he might have adhered to that rather nebulous non-belief without in the slightest degree knowing anything of Freethought. In any case, anybody who can go back to the Christian conglomeration of credulity and primitive beliefs is well out of even Agnosticism. One can rest assured that whatever Mr. Balmforth may have to say about Christianity, his knowledge of the Freethought case would be on a par with that of the other great infidel slayer, Canon Cockin, who used to write the script of a fatuous unbeliever himself for the B.B.C., and then give his own replies.

The Rev. W. H. Elliott in the "Sunday Graphic" has put out a heartrending appeal. He wants the paper's readers to give him their "straight" opinion for the need of a huge "spiritual" campaign all over the country. The basis of this appeal he calls "Christ's summary of religion": "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Well, we sometimes hate to tell a Christian minister the truth, but though this may be Christ's summary of religion, the two examples given are pure, unadulterated Judaism, and were commonplace of Judaism long before the supposed era of Christ. Yet, Mr. Elliott adds, "If it looks too simple, then I answer the old Gospel looks too simple—until you try to live it." The old Gospel!

But Mr. Elliott has not done. He wants to call this great spiritual campaign with its two aphorisms pinched from the Jewish Bible, "God and my Neighbour," the title of Robert Blatchford's trenchant attack on the Christian religion. It is

enough to make that doughty heretic turn in his grave. For the rest, it appears there has been a tremendous response—or at least we are told so. Only Mr. Elliott wants the keen letter writers to be keen workers. What a pity it is that these keen workers appear so little anxious to meet those other keen workers—not in such a hopeless cause as the resurrection of a religion, but workers for a world in which the gods are finally vanquished—the Freethinkers of England.

The B.B.C. boasts of the multitude (?) that listens to their religious services. That is, we are certain, largely bunkum. The B.B.C. tells us of how many listen, but it is ridiculous to assume that all who listen believe in religion. We know personally of a large number who listen and who wrote to us of the "damned nonsense" that is put on the air. The fact is that in this matter the B.B.C. is perfectly regardless of the truth where religion is concerned. Many listen because there is something going on and many swear at having the broadcasting turned into slop, sermons or religious addresses, and others shut off when the religious message commences. We challenge the B.B.C. to arrange a test—supervised by independent people to be given opportunities to test the situation.

But it turns out that the clergy generally are not overpleased by these religious broadcasts. The Minister of Stamp and Church, Glasgow, is reported by the "Glasgow Herald" to say that the B.B.C. services and sermons cannot take the place of the Church. He says that the "people who settle in arm chairs cannot join in the highest form of worship." And that when translated into plain English means that the B.B.C. does not bring anyone into Church. And that is the crucial test. The clergymen say there are 30 per cent. on the fringe of coming to Church. But evidently that percentage have not come so obviously, they are not getting. So the parson goes on lamenting and the B.B.C. goes on stretching the truth to breaking point. Humbug calls to humbug.

Roman Catholics have always boasted that their religion has no colour bar and that all are equal before Christ. That may be right before Jesus in heaven, but an incident has arisen that doesn't reach to heaven, it is concerned only with the ground on which a Catholic Church stands in London. An African native was turned out of the Church with the explanation that the Church was a white man's. When told of the matter the "Universe" replies: "We must hold our judgment, and suggest that the coloured man was turned out as a concession to racial prejudice." That may be so, but that is saying nothing and suggests that no harm was done. In a Catholic Church the prejudice must have come from Catholics, and that is what the "Universe" has to face.

It is very difficult indeed to get clergymen to act straightforwardly when their religious beliefs are in question. For example, the Rev. J. Byrnell says that out of a population of some 20,000, only ten per cent. are communicants, and he has decided not to let those who are not communicants be married or otherwise use the parish Church, particularly for baptising infants. He says he is aware legal action may be taken against him but with all the courage of a martyr he is willing to take the risks.

But the matter is more than that. First, there is no such thing in England as a religious marriage nor has any clergyman as such the authority to marry anyone. He has to be registered by a secular authority and for secular purposes. He can, of course, refuse to carry out his duties, but in that case an action could be brought against him for not discharging his duties. The proper attitude for the priest would be to throw up his job. As it is, he is taking money for doing something he now refuses to do, and to bully people to come to Church whether they wish to or not. There is such a thing as honesty even in connection with a church—or there should be.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No. Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: Bradford Branch N.S.S., 10s.; A. Hanson, 3s.; Miss E. Oates, 3s.

Our sincere thanks to all readers who sent copies of the issue for September 2. We are able not only to fulfil all standing orders for complete volumes but also have a few over. Early application for these would be advisable.

For "The Freethinker."—R. Cronin (Manchester), £1.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, 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 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, by the first post on Monday, or they will not be inserted.

SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. Cohen's journeys afar for lecturing are not so frequent as they used to be, but on March 3 next, he will be lecturing on "Will Christianity Survive?" at the Cosmo Cinema, Rose Street, Glasgow. The chair will be taken at 6-30 p.m. Admission is free, but there are a number of donation tickets to be had at 75, George Street, and at Collett's Bookshop, 15, Dundas Street.

The Church situation appears to grow worse and worse. They appear to have tried conferences over and over again but without closing the religious leak. Now Canon Tardrew writing from Lincolnshire, says that the fault is that clergymen spend their time attending committees. He says that he knows a case in one district where the clergy held meeting after meeting discussing how the Christian slump could be stopped. But the congregations got smaller. He also knew a parson who never attended committees but just leaned over his garden gate and spoke in an easy manner to passers-by. And his congregation got larger. That seems to point to the fact that if the Church is to be filled it must drop religion.

From the "Bath and Wells Chronicle" it appears that some of the town councillors at Twerton have been hitting out against Christianity-soaked schools. Recently at a meeting Councillor Mrs. R. Coates said she was prejudiced against Church schools. Councillor E. Cox declared that council schools were superior to Church schools, and added the very obvious truth that "Church schools were recruiting stations for the Churches." Finally, several mothers said that "children have a better chance in life in council schools." We take those comments to be refutable. In the end a vote of ten to three in favour of council schools was carried. That, we think, is indisputable.

Gateshead has a fight on for Sunday cinemas. Tyneside Freethinkers have got to work and Mr. J. T. Brighton will address a meeting in support of Sunday opening arranged for the Scala Cinema, Gateshead, to-day at 7 p.m. Admission is free and no collection. We understand the meeting has been well advertised and if the potential patrons of Sunday cinema shows in Gateshead will support this evening's meeting there should be more than a crowded house.

The curiosities of human nature are numerous and, in a way, they are all instructive. So there is nothing strange in finding the Rev. W. Elliott, who writes regularly in the "Sunday Graphic," begging for people who are in trouble to write him. That is not at all a bad plan—for Mr. Elliott. Obviously the ones who will write are those who already believe in Mr. Elliott. Quite as certain it is that those who do not get relief will not be named. But suppose a batch of letters came asking why God should not have prevented the grief that the people are writing about. The art of advertising has many forms.

SHELLEY AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS

THERE were five people who knew Shelley more or less intimately and they have recorded their impressions of him. Many others, less fortunate, have written about him secondhand as it were: and thus may biographers be divided. Shelley is fortunate in having so many biographers although, as has been stated, no really good biography by an English author has yet appeared. Whether this statement means that no complete biography has been written, or whether the character of the poet has not been correctly delineated is not clear.

Of the contemporary biographers, Hogg in his "Life of Shelley" claimed "to know more of him, indeed, on the whole than anyone." But as Professor Edward Dowden stated in his introduction to this racy narrative: "Personal intimacy with the subject of a biography does not always ensure accuracy of statement, it does not even assure that a figure will be given us, so to speak, in the round," and was of the opinion that Hogg's offences as a biographer are grave because he "perverts the facts." Of Medwin, Professor Dowden remarked that he was guilty "of unintentional errors of real or supposed facts." Peacock's contribution to the biography of Shelley was slight, and Trelawny was acquainted with the poet for no longer than six months. Mary Shelley, the poet's widow, "was, perhaps, too near to see him quite aright." Other biographers have added light and shade in painting a portrait of Shelley, and yet, it appears that the picture is not complete. Perhaps the qualifications of a master painter were lacking.

Shelley soared far higher than the skylark he apostrophised in a beautiful poem. In his magic car as described in "Queen Mab," he journeyed into space, collided with astral bodies and was covered in star dust. Shelley was a genius. Who can assess that? A superb and lofty imagination was uniquely combined with a fine and noble intellect. Only a few choice spirits have possessed that exquisite phenomenon. Hail to thee blithe spirit, mortal thou never wert!

John Ruskin, a thinker and writer of no mean ability, said that he admired Shelley's genius but thought he was "entirely mischievous." On the other hand, F. W. Robertson in his "Life and Letters" said that "Shelleyism is very sublime; sublimer a good deal than God: for God's world is all wrong, and Shelley is all right." Any man who strongly arouses such comments must be far too complex for absolute condemnation or approval. Leslie Stephen in his "Hours in a Library" sums up the matter thus: "To illustrate Shelley would be as impossible as to paint a strain of music, unless, indeed, some of Turner's cloud scenery may be taken as representative of his incidental description." It may not be out of place, however, to speculate on the probable cause of the inspiration of much of the poet's work.

At the age of nineteen Shelley was well acquainted with the doctrine of Universal Benevolence as described in the remarkable work "Political Justice." This treatise was written by William Godwin and became the text book of Philosophic Anarchism. The author became known as the "Amiable Anarchist" and later on Shelley's father-in-law. When Shelley discovered that Godwin was still living he was overwhelmed with "inconceiv-

able emotion." He regarded Godwin with reverence and admiration and referred to him "as a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him." H. N. Brailsford in his "Shelley, Godwin and their Circle" is of the opinion that "to Shelley 'Political Justice' was the veritable milk of Paradise" and adds that "Godwin explains Shelley and it is equally true that Shelley is the indispensable commentary to Godwin." In other words Godwin supplied the theme and Shelley wrote the variations. We assume that what Mr. Brailsford means when he says that Godwin "explains" Shelley is that the poet derived his inspiration from the doctrines of the former as set forth in "Political Justice" such as perfectibility, non-resistance (to evil), anarchism, universal benevolence, the power of reason, and the superiority of persuasion over force. But this circumstance cannot explain Shelley's genius.

Hogg, a man of the world, had little or nothing in common with the doctrines and abstract principles which fired the imagination of Shelley. He had a great admiration for the poet's genius but considered him at once sublime and ridiculous. The "divine poet" was also his "poor friend." If Hogg drew any inferences from Godwin's doctrines and Shelley's inspiration they are glossed over in this manner: "People are used to talk positively of Shelley's principles, and solemnly to assure the world, which does not care a straw about the matter, that they do not participate nor concur in them. I knew Shelley more intimately than any man but I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. . . love of liberty . . . and toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions. . . He certainly was at all times prone to discuss, to attack or defend the curious speculations which abound in the writings of William Godwin, and of divers French authors of that age, but he never seriously, and in good earnest, adopted their startling and unhealthy paradoxes." Of the poet's "irreligious opinions" Hogg disposes of the matter by asking "Did anybody ever know a poet—and Shelley was a truly great poet—who was an irreligious man?"

If "Queen Mab" was an outline of the poet's thought, subsequent work shows the sketch filled in. The "theme" is identical, but the "variations" more beautifully expressed. That is why we think Ruskin described him as "entirely mischievous" and why the same writer preferred Scott to Shelley.

Given the facts, the essentials of a good biographer are a knowledge of psychology, and sincerity of purpose. What follows should be worth reading.

S. GORDON HOGG.

INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC CULTURE ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE WEST

(Continued from page 66)

ART always follows in the wake of trade. Music and popular songs spread through Arabic channels; a proof of it may be found in Lute from Alud; Guitar from Guitara; Ribble from Rabab; Fanfare from Anfari; and Troubadour from Taraba; Alfarabi, under the name of "Al-pharabius" was widely known for his works on music. With songs, the Chansons-De-Gest found their way into the South of France and Europe. The song of Roland, the Cid and many fables and tales of mediæval Europe, are direct copies of Arabic prototypes. The result of the infiltration of Arabic literary themes was a vast intellectual movement which outgrew the narrow ecclesiastical limits of that period. Boccaccio, for his Decameron, found his inspiration in oriental tales, Dante, in his "Divine Comedy," borrows his legend of Saint Patrick, and his description of purgatory from Arabic ideas. Germany and England with their scholars Olarius or William Bedwell, and Edmond Castell—one of the first Cambridge

professors of Arabic. In the 18th century, the translation into English by Chaplow of that masterpiece, "The Maqamat" by Hariri brought fresh ideas to European literature. In France many books were written in imitation of Arabic themes, such as Montesquieu's "Lettres Persanes" and Victor Hugo's "Les Orientales." Even Voltaire, whose prolific mind is beyond question, succumbed to the influence of Islamic literature. The rôle that Islamic universities and centres of learning have played is not yet fully known. Long before Bologna, Montpellier or Oxford Islamic universities flourished in Damascus, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Salerno. The University of Baghdad, founded by Nizam-al-Mulk, friend of Omar Khayyam, was famous. European universities were modelled on Islamic institutions, especially the university of Mustan Serijah in Baghdad (1234). At that university students paid no fees and received an allowance of one gold dinar per month each. According to Ibn Tufayl free meals were provided, baths and even free paper and pens. A hospital with daily medical inspections was attached to the university for the benefit of the students, and all that happened in the 13th century, long before the name of Beveridge had been heard! In the field of arts the debt of Europe to Islam can hardly be assessed. The Sicilian and Spanish weavers were responsible for the spread of rich fabrics with Arabic inscriptions all over Europe. This patterning influenced not only architecture but also painting and all the ancillary arts. The German emperors were robed with Arabic inscription, many Christian cathedrals had their alfars covered with Islamic fabrics and churches possessed priceless Eastern carpets. It is curious to note that a painting by Giotto represents Christ, draped in clothes with borders of Arabic inscriptions. The art of pottery in Europe owes almost everything to Islam. Italian drug-jars of 15th century were the product of Muslim artists. Hispano-moresque pottery was made for Cardinals and Popes, and rich families of Spain, Italy and France. As Cardinal Ximenez once remarked "They lack our faith, but we lack their works." The present-day ceramics of south-western Europe are a legacy of the coloured Agulejos. The wonderful Spanish timber or coffered ceilings, inspired by Arabic patterning are by far the best examples of such work, much better than the Palestine Chapel at Palermo or the ceilings at Fontainebleau or Dijon. These works usually were carried out in Spain by Muslim craftsmen called "mudejars" who were constantly employed in Spain in the construction of churches. This spirit of tolerance proving that art is a unifying factor in this world was reciprocated by the Muslims who employed Christian craftsmen in the construction of mosques. It is interesting to note that the Alcazar at Seville was built for Pedro the Cruel by "mudejar" workmen.

If Muslims did not invent the pointed arch they certainly made an intelligent use of it and taught its construction to Christian builders. The intersecting arches and rib-vaulting construction, preceded the similar Gothic system by two centuries. The countries which first saw Islamic architecture flourish offered worthy examples like Machatta, Sarvistan, Fizuz-a-bad, Cesiphon and in the great entrance openings of mosques there is no servile copyism of the prototype. Egypt and Syria were rich in Hellenistic traditions. In the former country the Copal transmitted many building traditions. Armenian and Greek masons were employed in Egypt and even as far west as Spain and sometimes in France, as may be seen in the 9th century Church of Germigny des pres. Yet the Muslim architecture imparted a character and individuality of its own. The pointed arch as well as the waved or keel-shaped arch, passed into Gothic while the lobed or cusped arch (very likely borrowed from India) was eagerly adopted by the mediæval western architect. It is known that Indian craftsmen worked in Egypt as early as the 3rd century B.C. India herself borrowed from Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece, since the times of Asoka, and later became a lender.

I do not propose to enter into a lengthy explanation of Indian symbolism in architecture, whether the horseshoe arch suggests the lotus leaf, or the pointed arch the lotus petal and the trefoil arch a compound aureole is immaterial. The Islamic artist made use of this motif and passed it on to the builders of Gothic cathedrals. The dome itself whether depressed as in the Byzantine cupola, or ovoid as in the Syro-Persian, raised or bulbous or even cone-shaped became an integral part of the five principal styles in Islamic architecture. In Sicily, French and Arab artists mingled freely under the patronage of Frederick II. and Islamic influence spread to Rome, Lombardy and is apparent in Apulian art as may be observed in the cathedrals of Trani, Bari, and Betonto. Genoa naturally was subjected to Islamic influences and so were buildings of the Carolingian period—Santo Tosca at Tosello and San Donato at Zara. Venice itself, rich with spoils from the sack of Constantinople in 1204, and artistic objects brought by merchants from the East, gave rise to a special art of its own, which I call by the French word "Arabisant." This art influenced mediæval and renaissance Germany and also Southern and Central France

PROFESSOR HECTOR O. CORFIATO, S.A.D.G.
(Professor of Architectural Design in the University of London)

From "The Islamic Review"

(To be concluded)

CONFIRMATION

THE Headmaster of a large boys' school in the City, a school with which I have some connection, is becoming obnoxiously insistent that all Church of England boys should be confirmed in a service at Saint Paul's Cathedral. During the summer term he sent round the form rooms asking for names of boys who were prepared to undergo the ordeal for the honour (?) of the school. (My phraseology.) In the hall recently he said that when compared with the total number of Protestants the number of boys who did attend was negligible. This I know to be true. But he has made a second statement in which he says he is going to write to all parents informing them of his reasons for asking for the boys in the first place. This is nothing short of advertising for the Church of England.

Since when has the Headmaster of a Public School been in a position to use his official status and the name of his school to fill a few empty pews in the Empire's Parish Church? I suggest that his type of religious propaganda should be kept for those insane people who attend a Sunday school. As it is, he is insulting the intelligence of his pupils. Might a mere Atheist point out the people are confirmed for the benefit of the Church, not for the doubtful honour of a Public School. When I heard what the gentleman said I thought, "Thank God I'm an Atheist!" And the letter on confirmation will be returned unopened.

FRANCIS I. GOULD.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE TOMB OF JESUS.

Sir.—Re par: on p. 52 of "The Freethinker."
So Alman has found the grave of Jesus. Wonders never cease! As long ago as July 5, 1922, the information was given in "The American Moslem Sunrise" that Jesus escaped to India, died at 120, and his tomb is to be found in Srinagar, Kashmir. Two tombs? But perhaps one is Jesus's and the other Christ's.—
Yours, etc.,
CHAS. M. HOLLINGHAM.

OBITUARY

SUSAN JANE EBURY.

We have to announce the death of Susan Jane Ebury, a valiant worker in the cause of social and intellectual freedom, which took place on February 9 after a long period of ill-health. Most of the 76 years of her life were devoted to causes which called for courage and determination of spirit. She gave long and faithful service to the Socialist, Co-operative, Suffragette, and Labour movements, serving on the North St. Pancras Council. Her staunch Freethought principles were always to the fore; she was a member of the North London Branch, N.S.S., and was proud of her son's work on the Freethought platform and on the Executive at headquarters of the Society.

The cremation took place at Golders Green Crematorium on February 13, where before a large assembly of relatives and friends a Secular Service was read by the General Secretary, N.S.S., and appropriate organ music played by a relative. To the surviving members of the family we offer sincere sympathy in their loss.

R. H. R.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held February 14, 1946

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair, also present: Messrs. Clifton, Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Thompson, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Morris, Page, Barker, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Glasgow, Chester, Bradford, Birmingham, Bristol, West London Branches and the Parent Society.

Report on the inquiries made on the Chapman (India) estate was presented, discussed and accepted. The Annual Conference this year will be held in Bradford in response to the invitation from the local N.S.S. branch. Mr. Thompson reported on the activity of the Bristol Branch and its encouraging work. Lecture reports from Blackpool, Bethnal Green, Belfast, Birmingham, Glasgow, and Newcastle were before the meeting.

The meeting recorded a vote of sympathy with Mr. L. Ebury, a member of the Executive, on the death of his mother.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, March 14, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—
Sunday 12 noon, Mr. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m., H. L. BEALES, M.A.: "Our Educational System." Conway Discussion Circle, Tuesday, 7 p.m., CHAPMAN COHEN: "The Fallacy and Dangers of 'Race.'"

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—
Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Why the World is Going Atheistic." Various Speakers; open discussion. Tea at 5 p.m.
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—
Sunday, 6-30 p.m., F. C. WOOD, B.Sc.: "The Commercial Aspect of Organised Religion."

Leicester Secular Society (75, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m., Dr. C. A. SMITH: "That Liberty is Preferable to Security."

YOUNG man intending to emigrate, wishes to contact Colonial reader.—Box No. 44, c/o "The Freethinker," 41, Grays Inn Road, W.C.1.

THE CHURCH IN ACTION

AN old story nearly forgotten. This happened in 1911. There was in Montreal a Freemasonry Lodge of the Grand Orient de France, under the name "L'Emancipation." Some reason that I do not understand, made the members choose for their meetings a building on St. James West in which was located "Le Devoir," Roman Catholic daily paper, true tool of the priests. Of course the black frocks finally discovered who was their neighbour, and some very decent of their friends rented another part of the building, bored holes in the ceiling, installed a dictator, and listened to all that went on. To be sure that no theft would be committed, the secretary of the Lodge took home the papers, and . . . after alighting from the street car, in a very quiet section, was pounced upon, beaten, and left unconscious on the ground. When coming to he discovered that papers and his money, some 80 dollars had been stolen. Police and detectives called were unable to discover any trace of the thief. About a year after, a man named Lemieux boasted of the fact that he had done that beautiful deed. Arrested, he asked for a trial by jury, and in court admitted all the facts, even boastfully.

The jury retired, and returned later with a verdict: "Not guilty."

The judge, His Honour Mr. Lavergne, was so disgusted with the verdict, that instead of thanking them as is usual, he simply said when he discharged them: "Allez recevoir vos trente deniers," in English that would be "Go and collect your thirty shekels."

While a lawyer, Judge Lavergne was a partner of the late Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

Some ten years ago, a French-Canadian notary public told me on several occasions, that "he had lost all belief in what he had been taught about religion, and would like to stop completely going to church, but that if he missed once at mass, the priest would at once notice his absence; that if he was absent three Sundays, the fact would be reported in 'Le Bulletin Paroissial' without his name but so clearly that everyone would know who and he would immediately lose part of his clientele; and if he dared be absent for six weeks, he might as well close his office as all his clients would have been advised of going to another of his confreres." Freedom from fear, freedom of worship, freedom from want . . . Hum!

Recently a young boy by the name of Benson was found murdered, after having been assaulted indecently. There is quite a rumour in the public that the guilty is a black frock, but a man who has been interned in the insane asylum before, has been charged and sentenced for that crime. But a good number of people do still believe that he was made the scapegoat for a black frock.

I should have added about "L'Emancipation" that the list of members was made in great deal of professors, of the Catholic Université de Montreal, of doctors, lawyers, notaries, etc., that had studied there.

One of the members after a first failure at it, succeeded in suiciding, and due to the power of money, and against all rules on the matter was interred after a Catholic funeral with all honours.

Only a few of the original members are living now.

D. E.

SPEAKING FOR MYSELF, by Lady (Robert) Simon. Price, post free, 2s. 8d.

SPORT — ATHEISTS v. CHRISTIANS

BEING a god-fearing Christian, and brought up in the faith, but like all good Christians I like to see a good clean game of football, that being so I travelled to "Parkhead" to see two good Christian teams, Celtic v Rangers, play 90 minutes, and when the final whistle blew, the result was of the good Christian sort—hundreds of split heads, razor-slashing, hospitals full, and as many arrests. Thinking this was only a sham, I next went over to Windsor Park (Belfast) to watch Linfield v. Belfast Celtic, and true to the god-fearing Christian style, the result had a marvellous effect on us Christians—30 killed outright, four armoured cars ambushed, military called out, ten Black Tans missing—these Christian team supporters upheld their god-fearing theory. But when I saw it advertised about the Moscow Dynamos going to play at Stamford Bridge, a queer feeling came over me. "What was the Church doing to allow this to come to pass." I know what I was taught about these Atheists from Russia, through the Press, pulpit, priests, and B.B.C. programmes, of the atrocities they had done since the Russian Revolution: shot priests, ate babies, burned churches, carried bombs and roamed about with knives in their mouths, and even had grown horns, and all the Satanic processes. Anyway, I plucked up courage and with my god-fearing chum (Sunday school teacher) decided to see the worst of it through with these Atheist Bolsheviks, but not before we were fully armed against these Atheistic monsters from Russia. We saw the priest who blessed us, and we carried the Rosary, Bible, Crucifix, Holy Water, and even if it came to the worst we had the Relic of Saint Timbuctoo. Being well prepared we now approached Stamford Bridge, my friend was now weeping at the thought of seeing these Atheistic monsters trotting out on to the playing pitch with a few new-born babies in their mouths, partly devoured while perhaps the captain of these Atheists from Russia might be burning down our "Houses of God." Well, a few minutes before the game started we noticed these Atheistic monsters carrying "red and white wreaths" with them as they came out of the pavilion, so my friend and myself took fright and left the ground as we decided we couldn't stay and watch the Chelsea team burned at the stake or even eaten without salt. But perhaps the Truth Society, or Church magazines will have the final casualties.

"SAINT BOREMESTIFF"

JUST PUBLISHED

How the Churches Betray Their Christ

An Examination of British Christianity

By C. G. L. DU CANN

Price 9d

Postage 1d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD, by G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; post 4d.

MISTAKES OF MOSES, by Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

THOMAS PAINE, by Chapman Cohen. A Pioneer of Two Worlds. An Essay on Paine's Literary, Political and Religious Activities. Price 1s. 4d., post free.