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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Power of the Dead

WITH most young people there is a very healthy vein of scepticism. A child with a watch wants to know what makes the wheels go round, and generally, when the impulse is not checked by parents or teachers, or parents and teachers, youth is a period of perpetual questioning. Wise educationalists regard this curiosity as good, and encourage it as much as possible. The lazy ones, or those with some sinister interest to serve think of it as a nuisance to be suppressed as completely as possible. The child is then expected to believe what it is told, and because they who do the telling are the older, forgetting that if increase of years meant growth in wisdom, the wisdom of the world would be something to be calculated in strictly mathematical terms—which it obviously is not. Even to-day I am not quite sure what would happen to a child who frequently put its teachers the question it must often think, "How do you know?" If the teacher were strictly honest he would reply in a large number of cases, "Well, I don't know, but some old men before my time told me so, and I suppose it is true." Generally the child is not encouraged to find out, only to learn, which may account for so many specimens from the point of view of the old men, are not quite so pleasing to the younger ones. The old men of the tribe are too fond of telling the rising generation what it ought to believe about everything on earth and in heaven—particularly in heaven.

A very great deal has been written about the burden of old age, but the lamentations have referred in almost every case to the fact that the old man could not get about as nimbly as he used to do, and could not grasp things as easily as he once did. But the real burden, the grievous burden of old age is the one that it places upon the shoulders of the young—and does it in such a way that the young seldom know where the weight they feel has come from. All they know is that it is there, and one great aim of education appears to be to persuade the young that in the absence of this burden life would not be worth living. In the days of chattel slavery there were always a number of slaves who could not see how society could continue if there were no slaves to do the rough work. I have myself come across many people in this country who cannot imagine how we could get along if there were no landed aristocracy to keep things as they are. In both these cases the education given had been thorough, and had been completely assimilated.

Now this rule of the Old Men of the tribe is a very ancient one. It goes back to the time when people could neither read nor write, and when man's chief superiority

over the animal world consisted in the ability for articulate speech. In such circumstances the old men became the natural vehicles for the transmission of such laws, and lore, and such customs as the tribe possessed. In this way age began to be identified with wisdom, with which it has only an accidental connection. Indeed, when Bacon said that the ancients were not the oldest but the world's children, so we might say that from a cultural point of view, it is the old men who are the children and the youth the older generation. Old men have indeed lived in vain if they do not leave their children older in a knowledge of the world than they were themselves.

But the old men were the first Educationalists. Accident delivered youth into their hands, and they have worked their hardest to see that their dictums were obeyed. There was always plenty of praise for youth, but the world's maxims have been in the direction of veneration for the aged and to leave age in charge. Youth says, "Let us try something fresh." Age moans, "It will last my time."

To-day in social, ethical and religious questions youth is asking the old men, "How do you know?" and the old men do not like it. Particularly is this the case with religion. Look how Loth Nonconformist leaders and Churchmen have been fulminating against the revolt of youth! Naturally they do not like to see young men and women finding things out for themselves. They might find out too much. Particularly in religion. For here there is nothing but the word of the old men to warrant belief in what they say. The present generation of religious teachers hold certain beliefs because the old men that went before told them. These other old men got their information from the old men that preceded them, and so we might go back through stratum after stratum of fossilised intellectual senility until we arrived at the original Old Men of the tribe who are the "onlie begetters" of those queer beliefs and monstrous customs over the decline of which our bishops and archbishops mourn when gathered in congress.

It is an old maxim that custom makes men cowards, as a teacher who must never be questioned. The old men have seen to it that this shall be one of the first and firmest of customs; and shall hold a firm place in all education, not merely the old men who are living but those who are dead. They rule us from their graves, and the better they were while alive the greater the tyranny they exercise when they are dead. Society is fairly secure against bad men—obviously bad men. They are not canonised while they are alive, they are not held up to our admiration when they have ceased to live. But the good men, the men who found creeds and create parties, the men who establish institutions and make laws, those are the men who from their graves hold the present in their grip, because they forge chains that cannot always be seen by those who wear them, and those who do find it one of the hardest tasks to convince others of their

existence. The real tyrants are the dead ones, the real burden that humanity carries is the burden created by its own illusions and its own mistakes.

What are our more or less 300 bishops trying to do but seeking some method by which they may continue to impose upon the youth of the present generation the ideas of the dead—not the physically dead, but the mentally dead? There is not a single idea for which they stand that has any direct reference to the life of today or to the thought of today. The doctrines they preach belong to the past, the phraseology in which they express them belongs to the past, the very dress they wear while they express them belongs to the dead. The utmost of their endeavours is to devise some means which, while using a language that has a closer relation to present-day existence shall perpetuate the rule of the dead. Quite appropriately they worship a dead god. A dead god and a dead creed go well together.

The everlasting enemy against which youth is unconsciously in revolt is the power of the dead hand. The existence of that power is unavoidable, and its influence inescapable. It is all a question of how to confine it within limits which will do the least harm. Society progresses, it grows from knowledge to knowledge because man alone in the animal world possesses an articulate language, and is able by writing symbols to hand on to one generation the knowledge acquired in an earlier period. But it is not an unmingled blessing. It hands on bad things as well as good ones. They come by the same channel, and most people lack discrimination to select the good from the bad, the useful from the outworn. The older the world grows, the greater becomes the dead weight of the past. That is unavoidable, but we need not consciously increase the burden by cherishing institutions the only purpose of which is to give the dead increased power. Education wisely directed will seek to minimise its influence. It would teach the youth of today, not merely the right to question, and even to try experiments, but the duty of doing so. It would listen to the Old Men of the tribe, I trust, with respect, but always with a considerable amount of suspicion.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

WILKES AND LIBERTY

WITH all his imperfections, John Wilkes was a brave and honest reformer. When the Whig Parliamentary magnates opposed the increasing influence of the Crown, so sedulously fostered by the reigning ruler George III., the Whig statesman Temple encouraged Wilkes to direct a violent attack against this aggression. So, in the 45th number of his organ, "The North Briton," Wilkes printed a very candid criticism of the King's Speech which George III. resented as a pointed personal insult. Thus, a General Warrant was issued under which 48 persons were arrested and interrogated, before Wilkes was himself detained. Under arrest, he refused to answer any questions as he claimed an M.P.'s privileges.

Chief Justice Pratt, later the first Lord Camden, tried the case and decided that "Wilkes' privileges should have protected him from arrest and that General Warrants were illegal." The Crown prosecution so far failed; the London public was amused when the printers and booksellers who had been arrested under the General Warrant entered actions against the authorities and, in the words of Messrs. G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate in their interesting and instructive history, "The Common

People, 1746-1938" (Methuen, p. 670, 1938), "had the experience, rare to the common people, of being awarded appreciable sums of money as compensation."

Another attack was then more judiciously arranged by the Government, and Wilkes was enticed into a duel with a loyalist M.P. In this encounter he was seriously wounded; the Lower Chamber passed a resolution censuring Number 45, while in the Upper House, observes Wingfield Stratford: "Lord Sandwich, the arch lecher of his day, compared with whom Wilkes was a Galahad, now had the impudence to rake up some smutty production of his old bottle-mate's private press in order to get him laid by the heels for obscene and impious libel."

Wounded and downcast, Wilkes retired to Paris. He was expelled from Parliament and then, as he had not surrendered for trial, he was made an outlaw by the Courts. Now, his most ardent supporters thought his career had closed.

In 1768, however, Wilkes returned to England only to discover that many of his former friends had been bought by the Government and that the hindrances to an honest man's appearance in Parliament were greater than ever. Yet, ignoring his outlawry, he presented himself as candidate for London without success, but he then contested Middlesex where he was elected. "The people of London," testify Cole and Postgate, "whose appreciation of his courage had now been intensified by a fear of the King's growing ambition, received him with such tumultuous favour that he was able to play with the authorities. He spent a week's ostentatious holiday at Bath before he surrendered to justice. Even then Lord Mansfield declined to try him."

When the trial took place, Mansfield annulled the outlawry to which Wilkes had been condemned, but despite the clamour of the crowd that surrounded the Court he sentenced Wilkes to fine and imprisonment for seditious libel and blasphemy. The London populace was infuriated and appearances were ominous until several alleged rioters were shot down and order restored.

Wilkes published a vivid description of this repressive measure known as the Massacre in St. George's Fields, where a demonstrative gathering was fired upon by the military and six people were killed and many wounded. For this offence he was again expelled.

Re-elected for the third time for Middlesex, Wilkes was once more expelled. These curious proceedings antedated by more than a century the unconstitutional conduct of the House of Commons in refusing the right of Charles Bradlaugh to take the seat to which he was several times re-elected. Yet, it seems scarcely likely that had he been elected by a metropolitan constituency the then member for Northampton would have been deprived of his seat so long.

In any case in Wilkes' day we are reminded that "the capital was in an uproar. The contest had become more than a sporting entertainment. Not only had lives been lost, but a House of Commons which had been bought by the King had raised a great question of principle by overriding the choice of a democratic constituency on purely political grounds. Well-to-do persons who might have hesitated in other circumstances to support Wilkes against the King came to his aid with considerable sums of money."

Still, Wilkes' main adherents were London toilers and traders who mingled their personal grievances with their love of liberty. Nor was this attitude restricted to urban dwellers, for the mercantile marine rendered idle the Port of London, while the coalheavers who besieged Parliament were only persuaded to vacate Palace Yard by the exhortations of the popular magistrate, Sir John Fielding.

A fourth contest now occurred in Middlesex and Luttrell was the Court candidate. But all State pressure proved unavailing for Wilkes headed the poll with a handsome majority. Thus his foes, losing all patience, not only expelled Wilkes, but Luttrell was allowed to sit as member for Middlesex. No wonder London was astounded at the audacity of a Parliamentary

majority. Cole and Postage note Franklin's conclusion that "it Wilkes had had a good character and George III. a bad, the King would have been turned off his throne." But this judgment of Franklin's was based on his experiences of the Capital and Home Counties where the Wilkesites were predominant, whereas, as our historians observe, this feeling did not embrace the country generally. Yet, the Capital was the seat of Government, and it is inferred that a rebellious London could have easily withstood all the then available armed forces of the Crown.

To achieve victory it was essential to the reformers to revive public meetings in which their views could be expressed. A campaign was planned and conducted although political gatherings had fallen into abeyance, save at elections. Also, electors were advised to urge their representatives to protest against administrative abuse of authority. But Whig magnates, if willing to aid Wilkes against the King, strongly resented the presumption of mere electors who issued instructions to grave and dignified senators. This resentment appears to have lingered until the Wilkesite movement had collapsed, but when we consider the tiny percentage then possessing the vote, the number of electors' signatures to petitions, which totalled 60,000, is, indeed, remarkable.

In addition to the agitation for the reversal of the Middlesex decision an advanced Radical programme was gradually evolved. A Reform Bill, far more extensive in scope than that subsequently passed in 1832, was projected. And, while the Reformers remained unable to bend the Commons to public requirements, the City continued favourable to reform. It appears that: "When Wilkes was released in 1770 he commenced a campaign which rapidly extirpated any traces of royal influence in the capital. His nominees became Lord Mayors, he himself a sheriff. He stopped the press-gang operating in London, and when the Commons attempted to arrest printers for printing reports of their debates, arrested their messenger for assaulting a freeman—an action which ultimately resulted in a further highly valuable extension of the freedom of the Press, after the House had again humiliated itself by sending two London M.P.'s to the Tower in a vain attempt to prevent any further reporting."

Wilkes also lessened the sufferings of prisoners and more humane treatment was accorded the cattle in Smithfield, while the size of the penny loaf was increased for the benefit of the poor.

In 1774 Wilkes was again returned to Parliament and he and twelve supporters—the Apostles—took their seats. But the House was too far sunk in corruption to pay any heed to Wilkes' Reform Bill. Indeed, the King's party was so securely entrenched that it defied the City with impunity.

Meanwhile the Reformers themselves lost their unity and this weakened their cause. Then came the American War of Independence which led to further dissensions and heartburnings. Royal influence invaded the City and in 1778 a royalist was elected Mayor.

Still, Wilkes retained sufficient influence to defeat a proposal to enlist a London regiment for the American War. Moreover, the King's ascendancy was seriously shaken by the news of a series of British reverses overseas. Several prominent politicians who had supported the King now joined the Whigs. So pronounced grew the change that: "Early in 1780 the House of Commons actually carried a famous resolution 'that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished.'"

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, there occurred the Gordon or No-Popery riots with their devastating sequel, when London was for a time at the mercy of an ignorant and fanatically-infuriated mob. These shameful manifestations seriously alarmed all law-abiding citizens and nearly all Wilkes' well-to-do supporters deserted him. He himself helped to suppress the rioters, but his whole movement was completely shattered, and Wilkes disappeared from public life.

T. F. PALMER.

SERVICE

I.

THE priest of Saint Clement's came to the door of his church and stood. He had to narrow his eyes to prevent them blinking and watering, the light of that Spring day being so strong as to be painful after the dim gloom inside the building.

It being Good Friday the clergyman had just concluded the three hours' service. The number of people present was small, mostly elderly women. The priest's sorrow at this disappeared in the intensity of his concentration upon devotions. Almost in his hands and feet and side he could feel an ache, sympathetic to the sacred wounds.

Now he was dazzled by the blue and gold of sky and sunshine. A little dizzy, too, for he was fasting till evening. Had there been a vision in the sky he would have taken it as what should be; would not have been surprised to find darkness over all the land.

Instead a light fresh breeze blew. There was sunshine and azure sky. From the latter fell a lark's receding twitter. Nearer were sounds of children at play, motorcars, voices and other secular noises.

Slowly the vicar of Saint Clement's walked along the pathway, a conspicuous contrast to his surroundings in black cassock and biretta, even the cross of black ebony on his chest, while his face was white and set.

From all sides came attacks upon his mood of exaltation. The world was not treating this greatest of days as a holy day but as a holiday. On a piece of waste ground some boys were kicking a football about. Others of more formal taste played cricket, as a group of bigger girls did rounders. Smaller children ran wildly to and fro in their diverse games and erratic sport. All shouted and yelled, with frequent laughter or quick passing disputes.

II.

To cross the main road the parson had to wait, so much was the traffic, before getting to the other side. Buses were loaded. Grouped or paired were dozens of young cyclists, many boys and girls venturing into shorts. Followed by a spasm of self-accusation for worldly weakness the cleric was shocked to find himself noticing how muscular and white and sinewy were the youths' legs; how pink and plump and shapely the maidens.

Older people were sauntering, enjoying gossip and the sun's warmth, while small children ran with dogs or chased each other.

Sadly the priest walked on, fighting against the cheering influences assailing him, resentful that nature and humanity should be so lively and joyous.

Facing the sun, he blinked his eyes at its brilliance. In his nostrils he could smell the tang of freshly turned earth, for he was passing allotments where the holders were planting potatoes.

Said one, "Looks funny to see a bloke wearing petticoats." The other man spat and grunted, "And wears 'em longer than women do now."

Both laughed and went on working.

In a plot by the rails a man sang out heartily, "Good day, Reverend. Lovely weather."

Jarred in his sensibilities, the priest merely nodded. The worker in the next allotment, a smiling slip of a fellow, added, as he stared at the vicar's pale abstracted countenance, "You ought to come out here and work like us. It'd do you good."

Quickening his pace the clergyman walked on. Deep down in his mind some contrary idea whispered: The man's right. Also it would do more good than you've done in church.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

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.

ACID DROPS

An ex-chaplain of the Forces gives us the reason for empty, or nearly empty, churches. He says the man finds himself surrounded by women and children, or the singing is pitched too high, or the prayer-book services are mutilated, etc. We suppose we might sum it up by saying that people are in increasing numbers getting tired of religion.

The Bishop of London is making an appeal for £750,000 to help the Church; and in order to get what he wants he is trying a period of "continuous prayer." We notice that the Bishop does not give a date at which the prayers will stop, and what he will do if the money is not forthcoming. Not for the first time we suggest that, as praying for money does not appear to move God—at least, to the extent wanted—why not issue a notice to him that if certain things do not materialise praying will be stopped, and if no answer comes at the end of a given time the churches will be closed, and even domestic praying will be abolished. It is time man made a stand.

Meanwhile the bishop and other Christian leaders are insisting on the need for many new churches where repairs are not possible. But in the present state of things that is surely double-barrelled impudence. There are millions of people living in crowded buildings of some kind or other, and who should have priority over all churches and chapels. The new shelters that have been run up are mere makeshift structures, and they must be replaced by proper dwellings without any delay. Religions can wait, the Churches must wait, God may wait. It is the growing children, the adults who are doing an honest day's work, the old men and women who long for their closing years to be free of want and to have a decent home in which to end their spell of life that should have a strict priority. Gods can wait.

Archbishop Downey is a lifelong celibate. He is that because to the Catholic Church—indeed to all Christian Churches—woman is the source of all evil. It is true it was Adam that fell and so damned the whole human race, but it was Eve who did the primal mischief. The Catholic Church and our own English Church will not permit women to mount the pulpit, and the socially unclean celibate is given the first place. The record of the Christian Churches with regard to the treatment of women is the darkest among civilised peoples. So we can understand Archbishop Downey. He finds it most "distressing" to see women advocating all sorts of things, he denounces easier divorce, birth control, legalised abortion, etc. Unfortunately for Downey and his kind, women and men are learning to treat each other as comrades. That is the lesson both needed. Naturally the half-human persons who parade the earth do not agree with it.

The latest conversion story is that of Mrs. Toynebee, the daughter of Prof. Gilbert Murray. She appears to have always had a hankering for the Church, in spite of her father's unbelief—though it should be added his family was Catholic. She went to Mass at 15, and later was quite certain that "our Lord" was at the "Blessed Sacrament" when she was there, and of course she never doubted the "fact." And that is how she was "converted." All one can say is that Mrs. Toynebee was always a Catholic, and her "conversion" story is just as much nonsense as are all the others. How many convinced Atheists has the hocus-poens of the Church converted—not just people who say they are Atheists, and who are quite unable to formulate one Atheistic argument, but men and women who know what they are talking about. None at all.

The Protestant Press Bureau asks in one of its circulars, "Is Romanism Paganism?" Of course it is, but then so is Protestantism and every branch of the Christian religion. No, that is not quite correct, for Pagans did not mind other people having whatever god they chose. One might have got into trouble if he used bad language to another people's God, but there the matter ended. But the Christian came along and yelled at the local gods as devils, and then threatened damnation to man. Indeed, we should not be surprised if those who were sent to hell begged the carriers not to make a mistake and take them to the Christian heaven. Hell may be a rather warm residence,

but "think of the company!" Taking the records, we are open to prove that Satan did more to breed men than did the Christian deity.

Think of a God who sent out the order: "If anyone says, let us go and serve other Gods. . . Thou shalt surely kill him. Think of it! In a world where gods were as common as trees one of them has the impudence to order that a man shall be killed if he becomes friendly with the other god. And mark that a very large section of Christians, after having placed before them some deity as good as one can expect to be, orders their well-wisher to be surely killed?

The war should have at least taught us one thing about the State. That is, that there is no "State" while war lasts. There is only a man at the top who issues orders.

We think that if Mr. Churchill wishes to maintain his opinion in the world someone ought to advise him to stick to wars and political rows. We say this in all good feeling because he is reported in the "Tablet," a very high Roman Catholic paper, as saying that there "is at least one profound and beneficent net-work of which all should take account. The Church of Rome has ranged itself with those who defend the right and dignity of the individual and the cause of personal dignity throughout the world." It is a pity that Hitler was not at his elbow, then the German leader might have won Churchill's praise, because his idea of freedom is exactly the idea of the Church of Rome. A good Catholic may not marry whom he pleases, he must, not read books he would like to read, he must not question what the Pope says, and so on and so forth. What on earth did Mr. Churchill mean, or was he just —?

It is good to know that while our Government and masses of ordinary folk are spending time on frivolities such as food supplies, world peace, housing, etc., there are some paying attention to really serious matters. There are, for example, discussions going on in Scotland as to whether John Knox did or did not hold supper parties, and whether Calvin played bowls on the Sabbath. It is good that we have men who will not permit the serious things of life to be neglected.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is troubled very much on the subject of woman's eligibility for the "elder-ship." The "Glasgow Daily Record" points out "though women are now members of practically all professions once barred to them . . . the Church of Scotland denies them an official place in the Church on any terms of equality with men." Well the Church of Scotland has behind it the whole of the tradition of the Church—English and Scotch. Jesus appointed no women to carry his gospel. The Christian Church everywhere denied the equality of the sexes, and here in England it was only when women could take a useful part in war that the powers permitted women to have the franchise. The teaching of history and Christianity is clear—woman must have no equality with man.

The position of women in the Christian Church is quite plain, and those who have access to that monumental historical "Dictionary" of Peter Bayle (1736) will find accounts of articles and discussions on the question of whether woman was a human being or not. The discussion was a very religious one, and the general opinion was:—

"That nature which ever aims at perfection would always have produced man, and when a woman is born it is, as it were, by mistake and an error of nature. . . . Thus a woman is an animal produced by accident."

That seems to justify the Scottish "elders" who, religiously, fight to keep woman out of the pulpit.

And to good Scots there is the emphatic declaration of John Knox that—

"To promote a woman to bear rule . . . is repugnant to nature and contemptible to God. From all women, be she married or unmarried is all authority taken . . . because in the nature of woman lurketh such vices as in good government is intolerable."

That should settle the matter for all Christian Scots.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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SUGAR PLUMS

To-day (June 9), the N.S.S. Annual Conference will be held at the Mechanics' Institute, Town Hall Square, Bradford. It will open at 10 a.m. promptly and admission will be by card of membership. The public meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the same building.

Torquay is one of the most recent places to decide that cinemas may be open on Sundays. And this in spite of the clergy bringing their full forces into the fray. One clergyman, the Rev. Burgess, went down on his knees in the street and asked God not to permit Sunday cinemas. Of course, it may be that God was misinformed on the matter, and took Sunday cinemas to stand for some new forms of religious worship. The vote was 10,512 for, and 4,482 against. God was badly beaten.

In glaring letters the "Catholic Times" announces, with approval, that "the Church summons the laity to their aid." And this while they possess crowds of saints who nowadays can make the sun dance out of its orbit, present alive Jesus as a child and also as a grown man. There seems something wrong when the Catholic clergy have to call ordinary people to their aid.

Current religions do not spring out of current knowledge, nor were they fashioned to meet current needs. They were all born of speculations long since exploded, of ideas that are no longer held even by the most religious among us. The flat earth, the solid heaven, the god-sent disease, the natural forces that were the very notions of deity, all these beliefs are now rejected, we have only the superstructure that was built upon these rejected premises. It is this simple fact that makes all religions essentially and unalterably retrogressive. They are all so many attempts to rule the present by the past. Science studies the past that we may improve upon it; religion that we may perpetuate its control. There is no finality with science, and there is no progress with religion. Every new discovery gives science a new strength; every new discovery spells for religion a fresh source of weakness.

A leading article in a religious newspaper commences with "An Atheist is one who has forgotten God." Now that is very bad. First, an Atheist knows too much to forget, he knows all about God, he understands him. The Atheist is never surprised by a man not bothering about god, he is only surprised that people should be continually spending their time in praising him or worrying about him. We are not surprised when God is angry when men cease to worship him, for praise is more than mere pleasure to the gods; it is the food on which the gods live, and in the end it means death from starvation.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

(Prompted by a recent translation by Monsignor Ronald Knox)

"OF making many books there is no end." This sapient reflection of a biblical writer (of "Koheleth"—"The Preacher"—In "Ecclesiastes") is also true of the Bible itself. For of fresh translations of the sacred volume there seems absolutely no end! The "inspired" author of that excellent Rationalist pamphlet, "Ecclesiastes," whose eloquent and persuasive epicurean philosophy has found its incongruous way into the canon of Holy Scripture—God alone knows how!—has undoubtedly proved a true prophet with regard to his own work, and to the vast, and vastly unequal corpus of surviving Hebrew literature which has come to be regarded as the Word of God.

Our attention has been drawn to this subject by a recent review (in the Sunday "Observer") of a new translation of the New Testament issued under the auspices of the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Great Britain, by the well-known publicist and Roman ecclesiastic, Monsignor Ronald Knox. The author of this new translation from the Vulgate is a scholar and a recognised academic wit, whose bon mots have long circulated in Oxford common-rooms, and who writes with equal facility on atoms and evangelists. (Ronald Knox recently wrote a book entitled "God and the Atom"—an ambitious subject!) His new translation is avowedly intended to give English Catholics a more accurate and up-to-date translation of the inspired word of God than the venerable but, by all standards, decidedly inaccurate Douai version, at present still the standard version in British Catholic circles.

A laudable aim! Indeed, an aim which rationalists must heartily commend. For, after all, if one must have a Word of God, one may as well have it as accurate as possible: under such circumstances, it is surely of importance to have the exact words of omnipotence rather than of any muddled human translator. (It is true that one might think that it would be a comparatively small matter for the Almighty to have endowed his translators as well as his actual mouthpieces with a similar inerrancy? But, as innumerable preachers and commentators have reminded us, one must not seek to comprehend the "mysterious ways" of the Incomprehensible).

Accordingly, "The Freethinker," no less than the more orthodox "Observer," cannot but applaud the intention both of the Roman hierarchy and of the gifted translator in seeking to enlighten their co-religionists not only as to what God meant, but as to what he actually said. For we must not, in this connection, allow ourselves to forget that, with regard to the nature of the Canon of Scripture, "extremes meet." Along with the most "fundamentalist" Protestant sects of the American and Middle West (of "Monkeyville"—Tennessee fame), the Church of Rome still regards the biblical canon as verbally inspired in every part and word. In the words of Cardinal Newman, as "letters from our heavenly country." Even though the 16th century Council of Trent, the canonical pronouncement of which is still final and valid upon this question, very wisely declined to say exactly in what inspiration consisted, and—or to what precise lengths, it extended. But the Roman Church is still in essence, "fundamentalist," indeed even more so than the evangelical scriptural die-hards; in that it includes in the sacred canon the disputed apocryphal writings which even the biblical scholarship of the Reformation had sorted out from the authentic canon and rejected as dubious and spurious.

In view of the conservative nature of the authoritarian institution under the auspices of which his translation is conducted, Mgr. Knox's re-translation of the sacrosanct text of the New Testament must, of necessity, be limited to manner as against matter. He is free within limits—provided, of course, that he puts no "heresy" into the mouths of the sacred penman—that is, he must not make them say anything which the "competent authority" in this case, the popes and councils speaking infallibly

—ex-cathedra, to use the technical phraseology of Roman canon law—have condemned. But, as far as language is concerned, his aim is, apparently, to be modern and lucid; and in this laudible aim his Anglican reviewer in the "Observer" holds him to have met with no small measure of success. Which, after all, is to be expected of a publicist endowed with the very considerable literary and intellectual abilities which Mgr. Knox has revealed in several departments of literature.

It is, however, when we turn from the "lower" to the "higher" criticism that the mediaeval obscurantism of the most powerful of the Christian Churches comes into full view. In matters appertaining to the "lower criticism" that is to the precise phraseology of scripture and the exact shades of meaning to be deduced therefrom—Rome can and does give her translators some degree of liberty. But when it comes to the far more important "higher criticism"—that is, the dates, authorship, and historical and cultural background of the various and ill assorted collection of miscellaneous works which an uncritical age bound together in a single cover as the "Christian (in distinction from the Jewish) bible, the "New Testament," then we—and Mgr. Knox—come up against a "Chinese Wall" of mediaeval obscurantism built by the dead hand of a pre-scientific past.

The critical science of the 20th century, to which, beyond the confines of Rome, even most non-Catholic orthodoxy has made some necessary concessions, is still rigorously forced by the Vatican to prostrate itself before the pre-critical guess-work of the 4th century: what was good enough for St. Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, is good enough for the historians and scholars of the 20th century, and, indeed, of all succeeding centuries until the end of time! It would, accordingly, be an obvious presumption, entailing the most serious personal and professional consequences, for Mgr. Knox to go beyond the ipsissima verba of St. Thomas Aquinas. Nor, to do him justice, has he done so. His various reviewers are unanimous in demonstrating his docile submission to the authoritative decisions of the competent authorities of his own church on the nature, dates and authorship of the canon of the New Testament.

So extreme, indeed, is Mgr. Knox's dependence upon the ante-diluvian biblical scholarship of the Fathers of the Church and their mediaeval and modern commentators, that even the "Observer's" reviewer, Canon Anthony Deane, an Anglican cleric of, we should say, moderately liberal views, is stirred to protest against our translators' uncritically whole-hearted acceptance of the rigorous scientific black-out imposed by Rome on virtually all and any literary and historical criticism of the sacred canon. Not that the reviewer himself could be described as by any means a critic of the ultra-left school. Apparently, he even accepts the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. But, at least, living in a less exacting ecclesiastical climate than that of his author, he knows, and can reprove Mgr. Knox for not knowing, the more elementary and generally accepted results of the "higher criticism" of the New Testament.

For example, that St. Paul, whatever else he did, or did not write, could not, and never claimed to have written the "Epistle to the Hebrews"; that St. Peter did not write the "Second Epistle of Peter" (why not add the "First Epistle" as well, which is not at all in the style of a Galilean fisherman?); and that, whoever may have written the Fourth Gospel, the most Hellenistic book in the New Testament, could not by that very fact have also written the Apocalypse, the most Hebraic and least Hellenistic work in the same collection. Even an early Christian ecclesiastic, Dionysus of Alexandria, had had at least the minimum critical acumen to discern that the glaring stylistic differences and complete cultural lack of affinity between these two supposed works "of John" made their common authorship a stark impossibility. But the Vatican and Mgr. Knox—the latter, we hope, under compulsion—both agree to ignore these

most elementary results of modern scientific research and criticism.

So far—and it is not, after all, so very far—the reviewer of the "Observer." But Canon Deane is still a Christian clergyman, even if of a rather less rigorous Church than is Ronald Knox, and as such, one could not expect him to delve too deeply into fundamental issues of New Testament criticism. In particular, as one might expect, neither the Roman translator nor his Anglican reviewer so much as hints at the two supreme issues, the solution of which is essential to any realistic study of the New Testament: what, if any, is the criterion by means of which one can distinguish between the obviously mythical elements in the stories about Christ and any genuinely historical residue which may be supposed to be present (or, put simply, the historicity of the alleged Founder of Christianity). And, of scarcely inferior importance to any scientific account of the origins of Christianity: were the Epistles of Paul or, at least, the more important "dogmatic" ones—in particular the "Epistle to the Romans"—the work of Paul himself; or were they not, rather, as Albert Kalthoff suggested long ago, tracts on the developing dogmatic theology of the Catholic Church which, when they were written in the second century, was already emerging out of the Jewish Messianic movement that was primitive Christianity, into the fully-fledged Catholic Church of later ages? Was Paul their author or was he merely the already venerable name which supplied a protective covering, so to speak, to a much later ecclesiastical growth?

At any rate, whatever solution of these problems may be arrived at by scientific historians, it can hardly be disputed, even in the light of our present knowledge, that the "New Testament" came out of the developing Church and not vice versa; and here, for once, Mgr. Knox would probably agree with us against the Protestant bibliolators, though hardly with our resulting conclusions!

It would, however, be scarcely reasonable to expect even a liberal clergyman to ask such searching questions as the above. For in proceeding so far, he might, indeed, remain a liberal, but would probably cease to remain a clergyman! Indeed, the inescapable dilemma of the liberal Christian when confronted by the results of even the most moderate New Testament criticism, is well illustrated by Canon Deane in his aforementioned review. For he starts with the true if somewhat obvious remark that modern scholarship has entirely altered the character of the New Testament by putting it in an entirely new historical setting. He then goes on to assert that its character as a "sacred book" is in no way affected by the results of modern criticism and then, further on, in sublime disregard of what he had previously written, he reproaches the obscurantist Knox and his Church for not admitting the universally accepted opinion of scholars that the "Second Epistle of St. Peter" is a second century forgery. Or, in other words, it makes no difference whatsoever to its "sacred character" if an epistle of an apostle is proved to be a deliberate forgery, the success of which forgery alone securing its entry into the canon as an inspired work!

The truth is that the old view of the New Testament, still defended with out-of-date logic by the Church of Rome, and by Mgr. Knox, has completely broken down in face of modern criticism. But, to do it justice, however primitive, is at least an honest and consistent point of view, having regard to the pre-scientific age in which it arose. But, really, what can one say about the endless equivocations of those who accept in principle, at least, the results of modern criticism and yet profess, and often make an excellent living by professing, which depend for their validity on a pre-critical view which scientific study of the New Testament has made forever impossible. This attitude of so-called Liberal Christianity is certainly more intelligent than the mediaeval obscurantism which Mgr. Knox and his co-religionists still blindly defend. But it is much less consistent and objectively, at least, much less honest.

OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS—SHAKESPEARE

I LIKED Mr. Du Cann's article, but must express my surprise that at this time of day he still accepts the Stratford actor, multi-dealer, and litigant for small debts as the author of the greatest works in our language. I am sure if it was a theological and not a literary god that was in question, Freethinkers would not be found so remarkably amongst the orthodox.

A fledgling curate will sometimes urge as a Christian evidence that Jesus must have been the greatest impostor on record if his claims to have been the Son of God are not accepted. Well, assuming the historicity of the New Testament record, which, of course, such an one would not doubt, he is justified. Where, however, can be found the claims of Shakespeare of Stratford to be the great literary god who wrote the plays? I fancy he would have regarded those who have ascribed them to him as galls like unto Malvolio.

It must be remembered that his name does not appear on title-pages as he himself signed it. It is sometimes "Shakespeare" sometimes "Shake-speare." This surely was a nom de plume?

However, my object is not to enter into the old authorship controversy, but to indicate that Edward De Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford, believed by Mr. H. Cutner and myself to be the real "Shakespeare," answers the account given by Mr. Du Cann of his religious feelings. He also fits in well with the figure revealed in Birch's fine book, which, alas, was one of my losses through enemy action.

De Vere, at the age of twelve on the death of his father, became a ward of Lord Burghley. The latter was a Protestant, with Puritan leanings. No doubt for a time De Vere followed in his train—there is Protestant propaganda in "King John." As he grew older he departed from these ideas, and the following is a passage from the late Capt. B. M. Ward's biography:—

"Liberty was what he wanted, and liberty was only possible by making a complete break with the whole Cecil clan. It was a ruthless action and in many ways a tragic one. It broke his wife's heart, and for a time at any rate estranged his truest friends. . . . But for the moment he was free. With all the zest of his impetuous nature he threw himself into the new life that seemed to open so gloriously before him. To make the break with Cecil House more complete, he chose for his companions wild spirits like Lord Surrey, Charles Arundel, Francis Southwell and Walter Rayleigh. He turned Catholic and then Atheist, though this did not appear openly."

Nothing is known of the religious leanings of the Stratford man. He is a mere shadow against the intense human personality of De Vere.

W. KENT.

ON MARTIN LUTHER AGAIN

(Concluded from p. 216)

It seems to me, therefore, that the accounts of Luther given by those two opponents, Mr. Wiener and Mr. Rupp, in their respective books, do not exactly rule each other out. It may be unfair to attribute everything bad to Luther, and to quote him as saying things which cannot be verified. But there cannot surely be the slightest doubt that Luther's was not a great Reformation—if it was a Reformation at all.

"The outcome of the Reformation," concludes Professor Pearson, "was to hand over reason, bound and chained, to an emotional faith; all learning was to flow from a 'natural light.'" Only the Bible was to be studied—an infallible Bible instead of an infallible Church. "The universities," cried Luther, "deserve to be pulverised; nothing savouring more of hell or devil has come upon earth since the beginning of history. . . ."

If all this is not a foretaste of Hitler, then language has no meaning. Perhaps I ought to add lastly that my own sympathies on the question lie much more with Mr. Wiener than with the Rev. Gordon Rupp.

H. CUTNER.

National Secular Society
BRADFORD MECHANICS' INSTITUTE
TOWN HALL SQUARE, BRADFORD

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FREETHOUGHT DEMONSTRATION
WHIT-SUNDAY, JUNE 9th, 1946

Chairman: Mr. CHAPMAN COHEN
(President of the National Secular Society,
Editor of "The Freethinker")

SPEAKERS:
J. T. BRIGHTON F. A. HORNIBROOK J. CLAYTON
L. EBURY F. J. CORINA J. V. SHORTT
R. H. ROSETTI G. THOMPSON C. MCCALL

Doors open at 6.30 p.m. Commence 7 p.m.
ADMISSION FREE Reserved Seats 1/- each

OBITUARY

MRS. F. E. CREECH

We regret to record the death of Mrs. Florence Elizabeth Creech, of Manchester, at the age of 76.

Although she was not a member of the N.S.S. she was in sympathy with our objects and was a regular reader of "The Freethinker."

The end came suddenly although she had been ailing for some time.

She is survived by two sons (one of whom is a member of the Parent Society) to whom we offer our sympathy.

A Secular service was conducted by the writer at the Crematorium on May 23.
W. COLLINS.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held May 28, 1946

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs Hornibrook, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Silvester, Horowitz, Morris, Page, Barker, Mrs. Grant and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Halifax, Sheffield, Newcastle, Felling, Chester-le-Street, Birmingham, Branches and to the Parent Society. Correspondence and future lecture arrangements were dealt with and instructions given.

The Executive's Annual Report to be read at the Annual Conference was before the meeting and finally adopted.

The Secretary reported Conference arrangements completed and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m., Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, J. HART and E. PAGE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Crawshawbooth.—Friday, June 7, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Higham.—Wednesday, June 12, 7-30 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON will lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. W. BARKER will lecture.

Council for Investigation of Vatican Influence and Censorship (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, London, S.W.1, opposite St. James' Underground Station).—Friday, June 14, at 7 p.m. Subject: "Menace of Catholic Action." Speakers: F. A. RIDLEY, REV. A. ROBERTSON.

ON MARTIN LUTHER AGAIN

III.

WHEN we call Martin Luther the "Great" Reformer, we should, I think, ask ourselves what it is he reformed?

We are always made to understand that it was the Church—that is, the Church of Rome, which had in his time sunk into a mass of iniquity and degradation. That is how he found it, and almost alone he attacked it with the veritable sword of Christ himself, the Word of God, the Blessed Bible. And the question is answered, say the Lutheran's, by simply pointing to the Protestant Church. (It could well be the Protestant Churches but let that pass.) There is the proof of his "Reformation."

Now there can be no question whatever that the Roman Church was in a pretty low state in the sixteenth century. Corruption and bribery were eating its heart out, Popes like Alexander VI. were more than a scandal, they were a foul blot, while the Inquisition could equal then the very worst that even a Hitler could spew in the world. The Roman Catholic Church itself is not very proud of its record just before the so-called Reformation.

But it is a mistake to suppose for one instant that the Church itself has not some great men in its ranks who knew the situation as well as even Martin Luther. After all, the impact of the Renaissance had already made its mark on Europe, the rise in culture of all kinds was, if slow, absolutely certain; and though a reforming movement might have been different from that initiated by Luther, it was almost inevitable.

However we may attack the Church of Rome it cannot be denied that in some measure it formed a social link between the people, even between one nation and another. It was a common heritage, and it is now conceded as Professor Karl Pearson points out in his essay on Martin Luther, that "the battle which rose in Germany in the latter half of the fifteenth century between the Canon and the Roman Laws was not a mere contest between Church and State for supremacy, between ambitious ecclesiastic and grasping lay ruler. It involved the far more important question whether the peasant should be a free man or a serf." It was the German princes who wanted a slave state just as Hitler did in these days. It was the Church which opposed it. It was the Roman Law, made for essentially a slave state, which won the day, and it was Luther's great feat to burn with the papal bull a copy of the Canon Law—which opposed "Luther's doctrines of the divine right of princes and of the duty of implicit obedience," as Professor Pearson adds. The question as to whether a people dominated entirely by the Roman Church was or was not also a slave people can of course be argued; but Professor Pearson is emphatic that the break-up of the old beliefs which followed in the wake of Luther brought about an immorality and dissoluteness which are "almost indescribable."

What then were the great reforms which Luther is supposed to have brought about? Were the Lutheran clergy better than the old priests? Were the people happier and more contented with Lutheran doctrines as their guide than with Popish ones? Were the "Protestants" more tolerant of opposition, more advanced in literature and art? The truth compels us to answer no to every question.

The great Catholic, in fact the greatest, in Luther's day, was Erasmus, and Erasmus was first and foremost a Humanist. He was of course a theologian also, for he was a very learned man, and in the Church. Remembering that, it is quite humorous to find that Protestants now claim that he was the head of the movement to reform the Church which paved the way to the Reformation.

Of course Erasmus was keenly alive to the depraved state of his Church, and his writings testify to his opposition to many of its most notable evils such as convent life, fasting, pilgrim-

ages, and the worship of saints. And he went still further. Not believing over much in Catholic theology he recognised that what was best in the morality of Rome and Greece was almost, if not quite, the equal of Christianity.

His idea of the place of Jesus in the scheme of things differed from Luther's who wrote, "I fear that Erasmus does not sufficiently exalt Christ and the divine grace." But Luther was shrewd enough to recognise in Erasmus, "our pride and hope," though the great Humanist implored Luther to be more moderate and careful. And to show the difference between the two men even better here is J. A. Froude's estimate of them on one point: "In Luther, belief in God was the first principle of life; in Erasmus, it was an inference which might be taken away and yet leave the world a very tolerable and habitable place." Certainly on this judgment Erasmus came very near to being a Secularist, which Luther never could have been. As a matter of fact, Luther later actually did consider his rival as "a sceptic and epicurean, an enemy of all true religion." More honour to Erasmus!

The Roman Church then, with few exceptions, was deficient in scholarship, its clergy, monks and nuns were fattening on the people, and all the time it claimed, as far as possible, temporal power. But it cannot be denied that a good deal of the money which passed into the Church's hands was spent on literature and art. "The Popes built St. Peter's," says Professor Pearson, "and were the patrons of Raphael and Michael Angelo, and the character of their religion is essentially reflected in the works of these artists." And at the courts of the German cardinals were the greatest literati and artists of their day—men like Reuchlin, Ulrich von Hutten, Sabinus, Durer, Cranach and Erasmus. They had no sympathy whatever for the narrow doctrinal subtleties of Luther, but this does not mean that they were not aware of the state of their Church. They knew it only too well, and were as anxious to reform it as Luther himself.

For Professor Pearson "the plans of Erasmus were shipwrecked by the violence of the Lutheran movement," and he adds, "Mr. Beard, in his Hibbert Lectures, remarks with great truth that while the Reformation of the past has been Luther's that of the future will be Erasmus's; we venture to remind Mr. Beard that but for Luther the Reformation of Erasmus would have been the Reformation of the past as well as the future."

If Erasmus was essentially a Secularist it is not unfair to claim for him a spirit entirely opposed to that of Luther. For the great Reformer, immorality, crime, vice, are all the work of the Devil; for Erasmus and some of his friends, evil was not to be ousted by theology but by better education—"Make men wise and they will cease to commit sin." They preferred the ethical rather than the doctrinal. They had not, it is true, emancipated themselves from religion—how could they at that epoch? But they had gone a better way to do so than Luther's. Erasmus wanted to educate the Church—Luther considered that "reason was the chief instrument of the Devil, unless its application had been preceded by the mystical process of redemption, the transcendental attainment of a perfect faith." Faith above works was Luther's constant cry; Erasmus was always on the side of reason and—Humanism.

Luther was Devil drunk, he was always seeing the Prince of Darkness, and even threw an inkwell at him. I expect Erasmus had no more belief in the Infernal Deity than we have.

Luther's personal Devil was, perhaps, one of the causes of the increased violence towards "witches" in Protestant countries, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the rule of one German prince, Heinrich Julius, ten or twelve witches were often burnt in one day. And with that came the Lutheran spirit of "tolerance"—paralleled these days by the tolerance shown in Hitlerite Germany for anti-Nazism.

(Continued on p. 215)