

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVII.—No. 17

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and —?

MAN has been defined as a talking animal. Well, he is quite obviously an animal. He has the physical structure of one. But he has the power of speech, and that separates man from the animal world. Perhaps the best thing to say is that Man is an animal plus —? That plus is very important. Largely we may say that it separates man from the animal world. So we leave it at that. There may be other differences, but we will leave it as it is. Speech is, after all, of the greater importance. It gives Man the mastery of the world.

Man is great in consequence of what he inherits, and the power of talking and writing makes that inheritance of first-rate importance. The animal is born, goes through life and dies. Its offspring is born, and dies. Each repeats, broadly, the power and tendencies of the other. With the human there is the possibility of commencing where the parent left off. The animal makes familiar tones. The human slowly develops articulate sounds and lays the foundations of a language. The beginning of language is something that marks Man.

There was more than appears on the surface of the famous saying of Soerates, "Speak that I may know you." Speech in its very tone is some indicator of character. It is not an infallible sign, but it is a very useful one. Perhaps the development of writing is as great a feature as anything in the history of mankind. Without that we should lack what is now a very common thing, the ability to know all that has gone before.

Religion has played a great part in the history of mankind. With what result, good or bad, I am now not concerned. But first of all, what does the term religion, carry? Is it useful, or enlightening? Does it ever stand as a help to mankind? Of course there are plenty who will say it does, but what is the statement worth? To these questions religious authorities are substantially dumb. All they tell us, on analysis, is that religion has to do with God, and if I ask for a little further enlightenment I learn that God has to do with religion. That may be compact, but it is not helpful. Historically, we find that mankind does far more for God than God does for mankind.

So, as religionists can tell me nothing that is of any use we turn to others. I take that very fine book of Sir Charles Sherrington, who is a man of standing in the scientific world, "Man and His Nature." When first issued it was welcomed by all. Please note the wording of the title of the book. Surely, if God is of any importance, somewhere in the 440 pages something about God would turn up. But nothing of the kind arrived. What we do get, given quite authoritatively, is that we need not bother at all about God, we must try and understand Man. Sir Charles treats

"mind" right throughout his book as a function of the nervous system. He says:—

"Mind becomes recognisable in the more developed nervous system. . . Its chief, perhaps its sole, seat is a comparatively modern nervous structure. . . In the mental parts of the brain, still nothing but the same old structure of elements, set end to end, suggesting the one function of the transmission and collision of nerve impulses."

When one of our leading scientists can write in those terms, and also suggest—quite openly—that the structure of Man can be quite well understood without appeal to God, it is quite evident that whether God does or does not exist he is not necessary. People may fish for a God, but they are not likely to get a "bite." Professor Sherrington falls into line with the general attitude displayed by our best scientists. They have no real use for God. If anyone wishes to sing the praise of God he may do so, but it is of no use whenever one is trying to deal with life in a completely scientific manner. God is not necessary.

I remember the book when it first appeared because one of the leading religious papers explained the silence of Sherrington concerning God, in that his book did not come within the scope of the lectures. That made matters worse. If people can deal with the great things of life without having anything to do with God, it is evident that his presence is not of great importance. People have been known to die of a disease from which they never suffered. Man is very easily gulled.

Again, the word "religion." It is in constant use, but what does it mean? Marret, who is one of our leading Anthropologists, says quite clearly that the origin of religion is indecipherable—that, I take to mean, is that no sensible person can make common-sense of it. Another well-known authority, Hobhouse, says boldly that to him "Religion is pure fancy, or fancy guided by crude ideas or physical causation." Mr. J. R. Aldritch, in his "Primitive and Modern Civilisation," says that the essence of religion is a definite, compelled attitude with regard to something felt emotionally. That leaves us at the end where we were at the beginning. It means nothing, and it has left us nothing when everything has been said and done. It is only when religion is reduced to a verbal exercise without regarding the sense of what is said that religion is seen in full form.

And then I find myself with my beloved Santayana—whom I like the more because I sometimes find myself in disagreement. Now and again I find him saying, "Of this homely philosophy the tender cuticle is religious belief, the outer ring as it were, of the fortifications of prejudice, but for that reason the most jealously defended. A man of the world may seem to learn to discredit established religions on account of their variety and

absurdity, although he may, good naturedly, continue to comfort his own."

Similar opinions of our leading men might be cited over and over again. They are not strange to many of our readers, and we should be very much surprised if many of our leading men in all orders of life are not as well informed as we are. It is not a matter of unbelief in this or that country. The decay of religion is marked in every one of the civilised groups in the world. A religion that was born of contemporary knowledge and needs would not require an elaborate social machinery to keep it in being. It would keep alive in virtue of its own fitness. But in this matter the situations of the Christian side and the non-Christian side are in striking opposition. The result of Christianity is, and always has been, a dividing of people. The influence of Freethinking and ethical teaching is to create a development that will be placed upon a brotherhood and it is applied and judged by the life we are all living. The aim of Christianity is expressed in the teaching, "Keep yourself unspotted from the world." The aim of Freethought is to keep the world free from spot. These two aspects mark the difference between common-sense and fantastic preachings about another world, which if it exists must be as this is or we shall never fit it.

In plain truth, Christianity suffers from a disadvantage that is common to all religions. In a civilised country religion is not something that man creates as he creates literature, art, politics, etc. Religion is something he inherits. The religious current in all civilised societies belongs to the past, and the work of the preacher is how to make a primitive dress look like the latest pattern. Can any modern civilised person really believe that an angel, which doesn't exist, came from a heaven, which is not there, gives us advice which is accepted only when it fits into what we already have? These ideas which the churches put before us belong to the past. They have no real connection with the present. This struggle between Man and religion has been a very lengthy one. But the fight was not accidental, it was inevitable. Ideas often resemble organisms inasmuch that if they may live heartily they must be in a suitable environment. But Christianity to exist must obstruct, with the result that as scientific knowledge advances the churches have been compelled to embrace principles that in operation threaten their own being. Every step of science to greater things the Church has had to do what it could to nullify.

In the golden days of Greece the wisdom of the wise was laid before the world of all who would learn: and ancient Rome gave us forms of laws on which much of our own law is based. The world was growing; but then came the triumph of the Cross, and for nearly a thousand years we had the Christian-made "Dark Ages." Then to the rescue came the awakening of the ancient learning and law, under the title of the New Birth. By prison, by tyranny, by all the evil forces that the Churches could muster, every effort to a new world was obstructed. To-day we are having examples of what Man may do. I repeat, what Man may do to make life worth living. We should have had enough of the gods.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The anger and rage of my enemies is my joy and delight, in spite of all their attempts to take it from me and defraud me of it. . . . To hell-fire with such flowers and fruits, for that is where they belong!—LUTHER.

"SEVEN AGAINST HEAVEN" (Studies in the History of Atheism)

(THE following series of articles represents seven studies of atheistic philosophers in various ages of world-history, from the ancient world to the end of the 19th century. There is, unfortunately, no outstanding history of atheism available in the English language: a book of such a nature would be one of the most valuable contributions to contemporary literature. The individual figures whom we have selected for treatment in this series are: the unknown author of the Book of Ecclesiastes—"Kohleth—the Preacher"; Epicurus; the Emperor Frederick Hohenstaufen; the mediaeval "Anti-Christ"—Giordano Bruno; the Abbé J. Meslier; Thomas Paine; and Ernest Renan. The long era covered successively, by the lives of these men stretches from the world of ancient Greek and Hebrew thought down to the threshold of our own age, and to the living memory of the older amongst our contemporaries.)

"The Preacher" ("Kohleth")—Author of "Ecclesiastes"

I

The oldest book available to Europeans which teaches the atheism in a precise and unambiguous manner, was written by a Jew. And if it is surprising that a member of the (self-styled) "Chosen Race" should be the first known writer to exclude the concept of "God" as an "unnecessary hypothesis," so it is even more astonishing to find this book enrolled in the "Holy Bible"; and, as such, to be for so long regarded as the *ipsissima verba* (literal words) of the Almighty himself. How came it that such a remarkable metamorphosis could take place? There was it so happens, no miracle there; only a peculiarly important literary forgery—perhaps "impersonation" would be a kinder expression; or even "a practical joke" might serve! But, certainly, whichever of these above expressions we may prefer, there can be no more remarkable transformation in all literature than the "Book of Ecclesiastes," in which an unknown sceptic we had almost written "humorist"—of the immediate pre-Christian era, posing as the wisest of the legendary Kings of the Archaic East, taught, and thinly disguised by the pious glosses of a scandalised orthodoxy, still teaches within the inspired covers of Holy Writ itself, a doctrine of pure undiluted atheism. Truly has it been said that *all* wisdom is contained within the Bible: even the wisdom of atheism!

The Book of "Ecclesiastes," which figures in the Jewish and Christian canons (in both Catholic and Protestant Bible) of the Old Testament, purports to be written by "Kohleth"—an ambiguous term usually rendered as "The Preacher," and which the Latin ("Vulgate") edition renders as "Ecclesiastes," whence the title of his book—who wrote anonymously, but gave an unmistakable hint as to his identity by adding (or, perhaps leaving it to his posthumous editor to add?) that he was "the Son of David, King in Jerusalem"; adding as a further hint as to his identity that he had applied his heart to seek wisdom beyond all who had reigned before him in Jerusalem. To a pious Jew familiar with the history of his race and with his holy books, such a signature was self-evident and needed no further attestation; "the Son of David" who made the acquisition of wisdom the primary purpose of his life, could only be the wise King, Solomon, that traditional incarnation of Wisdom, whom oriental legend was presently to endow with magic rings, servile Djinns (Spirits of the Underworld), and the whole apparatus of sorcery. The unknown atheist, who was the actual "Preacher," or perhaps again, his posthumous editor, could have adopted no bolder nor safer pseudonym for a pseudonym in an uncritical literary age than that of the royal patron of wisdom who had been traditionally the wisest of all Hebrew monarchs. The Jews would stand a lot from Solomon: even atheism!

Actually, no one knows, or, in all probability, ever will know, who the original "Preacher" was, or exactly where or when he lived. Authorities on ancient oriental linguistics appear to be unanimous in holding that the Hebrew written by the author is of a late and decadent type, such as became customary only in the very last centuries prior to the Christian Era: certainly, long posterior to the age of Solomon, or even to the Babylonian Exile (6th century B.C.), when the older parts of the Old Testament, the Historical and Prophetical Books were written, or re-written in their present form. The author, from internal allusions, evidently lived in a time of storm and stress, and domestic tyranny ("Curse not the King; no, not even in thy thought, for a bird of the air will carry the matter"—cp. Ch. 10 v. 20). Such epochs were too common, alas, in the ancient Orient to be easily identified. The era of the Maccabees, or even the later one of Herod (2nd—or 1st—century B.C.) has been suggested as a child, could apply to the last years of the Maccabees immediately prior to the Roman Conquest (63 B.C.), when this last calamity actually befell the Jewish State and hastened its doom; but this is all conjecture.

As for the author, he was evidently a disillusioned observer of life, probably an aristocrat, and possibly a priest; an extreme example of the sceptical and world-wise Jewish school of thought, known to history as Sadducees; and quite possibly acquainted with, and influenced by the later sceptical Hellenistic schools of philosophy such as Stoicism, Cynicism, and Epicureanism, and, possibly, by Buddhism. More than such conjectures we cannot possibly advance. Of the unknown "Preacher" only his sermon survives: and what a sermon it is!

The recurring text of this peculiar "sermon" is "the vanity of human wishes," the universal reign of chance; the recurring spectacle of mankind tossed helplessly and aimlessly to-and-fro by the winds of chance upon the ocean of omnipotent unpredictable circumstances. "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity": this guiding thought runs like a continuous thread through the "Preacher's" eloquent and varied medley of prose, proverb, and poetry: "What profit hath man of all his labour, wherein he laboureth under the sun" (cp. ch. 1, v. 3). This theme of a permanent, ubiquitous, and overpowering futility recurs over and over again in language of incomparable power which has so penetrated the literature of the Western world that one may well say of this ancient Hebrew author what the old lady is said to have remarked upon first witnessing a performance of "Hamlet": "A fine play, indeed, but what a pity he quotes something from life; but, whether from personal misfortune or philosophical contemplation, has now resigned himself to its outer futility: "One generation goeth, and another generation cometh, and the earth abideth for ever. The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again unto its circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again. All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. There is no remembrance of the former generations, neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter generations that are to come, among those that shall come after." (cp. Ch. 1, vv. 4-11—authorised version.) And so on through pages of pessimistic eloquence runs the recurring dirge: "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." Indeed, the recurring theme of "Ecclesiastes" finds its perfect expression in one single melancholy sentence: "I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to

men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." (cp. Ch. 9, vv. 11-12.) And at the end of a peroration which scales the heights of literary eloquence, recurs again the sombre refrain: "Vanity of Vanity, saith the Preacher, all is vanity" (cp. Ch. 12, v. 8). "Sic transit gloria mundi"—"So passes the glory of this fleeting world."

A fine theme for ecclesiastical eloquence, this alleged sermon of the Son of David and the Ancestor (?) of Jesus Christ! But there is nothing ecclesiastical nor theological about our author's philosophy. This is not the world of traditional Hebrew religion, nor even of theistic metaphysics. We are transported to the utterly alien world of the Greek atheistic philosophy of the Ionian Atomists; of Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius. The "Preacher" is in the tradition of the doctrine of "eternal recurrence," familiar to Plato and the Stoics, and revived again in modern times by such Western philosophers as Blanqui, Nietzsche, and Oswald Spengler. Whilst the author's unrelieved pessimism is almost Buddhist in its intensity (perhaps consciously, for Buddhism, just about this time, was at the height of its missionary activity, and was known to, at least, one father of the Christian Church): human existence in its futile aimlessness resembles the white-crested waves which break forever upon a forever unattainable shore. A. C. Swinburne has, perhaps, best captured the spirit of the ancient Hebrew "Preacher" in his tired and lovely lines:—

"From too much love of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken
Nor any change of light;
Nor sound of waters shaken,
Nor any sound or sight.
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor day nor things diurnal
Only the sleep eternal
In an eternal night."

In this sermon of "Ecclesiastes" we confront a mindless rulerless world: essentially the self-caused world of blind chance, which is the real illusionless world of which the philosophy of atheism alone takes scientific cognisance. The few allusions to the Deity scattered about the book—whether inserted by the author with his tongue in his cheek in deference to orthodox tradition, or, as seems more likely, inserted later by scandalised editors—are obviously interpolations, sounding trivial and unreal in their alien context. Whilst the gloss which concludes the too scandalous book: "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of Man," accurately measures the intellectual gulf between "Koheleth" and his rabbinical editors!

How fortunate that the first surviving atheist "borrowed" the name and fame of Solomon! Not only did it save "Ecclesiastes" from oblivion, but it included a work of stark atheistic content in the canon of the Jewish Scriptures, with, it is true, some puerile interpolations, not to mention some well-justified misgivings on the part of the rabbis! And from the Hebrew canon the Christians took over the dubious "wisdom" of "Solomon." They, too, had their doubts about him! But there are few difficulties which a theologian cannot surmount. And the great St. Augustine himself found the satisfactory formula: "the author of 'Ecclesiastes' was inspired by God to teach us what we should avoid." Upon which, one imagines that the ashes of the first "Preacher" of atheism must have stirred faintly in protest beneath the Syrian stars!

F. A. RIDLEY,

ACID DROPS

The Archbishop of York says that it is "a sin against God to put personal gain above the claims of the community." Good! And yet again, good! But we have not yet observed that he has set aside his very handsome salary. But great deeds are done quietly.

The Archbishop adds that it is "a sin against God" not to help those who have suffered from the recent floods. It is, of course, man's social duty to do what he can to help all who have suffered from the floods. But we notice two things. One is that there are set prayers to God to send rain, and also not to send it. We have not observed that God has been asked to control the floods. Probably that is because they can't trust God to do things such as rain with discretion. So they left him out. But if it is man's duty to do his best to help others, we should like to know what God has done, and when will Christians have enough courage to kick?

The Rev. W. H. Elliott is a brave man—at least he writes in the "Sunday Graphic" where no adequate reply is admitted. But he does say that the B.B.C. is afraid to permit open discussion of religion in the B.B.C. Broadcasts. So far we partly agree with him. But I do not think the B.B.C. is afraid to have discussions—real discussions—of religion. The B.B.C. is not afraid of discussing religion, because they have bucketfuls of preachers who are willing to discuss real religion by themselves. You see "real" has its own interpretation. It may mean "real" in preventing fair play, or "real" that demands equality in the discussion of all sorts of opinion.

To which body does Mr. Elliott belong? He says that Atheists should be permitted to debate on open terms. Does he mean it? He has a Church, will he permit, say, once per month, an open discussion between Atheists and Christians on equal terms? Or if he means what he says, we might give him a couple of columns of "The Freethinker," which is well known throughout the country, for a real open discussion. If he stands aloof from one of the opportunities offered, we shall know where the Rev. W. H. Elliott stands. He has found one Atheist whom he quotes saying "I am an Atheist . . . I only wish I had your faith." We think we could find him a better one than that.

"Stands Scotland where it did?" So far as religion is concerned, it certainly does not. We say that with much pleasure because we believe that this Journal has played a good part in bringing about its changed attitude. Here is, for example, a specimen of the influence exercised. "The Church of Scotland" felt that more churches should be built. This was not due to churches being over-crowded for churches in Scotland are like churches in England—there is always plenty of room, and a fine display of empty seats. So the authorities promptly and wisely refused their consent to more praying exhibitions. The demand in Scotland for Sunday games and "shows" is growing rapidly and, as in England, priority for houses comes before building churches. Scotland wants less religion and more healthier living. We almost pity the poor clergy. From being everything they are rapidly becoming nothing. The feeling among the clergy is deplorable. They no longer have to consider what will please God, it is now a matter of deciding by what means the "common" people can be driven to take interest in God.

The Rev. J. L. Napier, Rector of St. Clement's, Hastings, has discovered that stained glass windows are doing more harm to Christianity than anything else. The remedy would seem clear. Why not smash 'em? We can imagine some of the angels on the windows of some of the cathedrals and old churches, and we can understand the angels getting angered at their being presented with the faces given them. After all, some of the angels are women, and they naturally dislike some of the faces which are stuck on church windows; and then saying this or that picture shows some of the lady saints in heaven! We suggest that the Rev. J. Napier starts a crusade against "Ugly faces in heaven." It would attract attention, and that is what the Churches desire most now.

Our Admiral Layton is still very uncomfortable over the fact that the vast majority of the youths who enter the Navy show no interest in Christianity. Of course, he means they do not believe in Christianity. We fancy he would have his eyes opened if these youths were permitted to say what they really believe about Christianity. It is really a pity that the Admiral does not confine himself to his seafaring business, instead of harassing his youngsters with his out of date religion. We have no doubt that the Admiral believes he is helping his young people under him, but if he got the real opinions of his recruits he would be aware that he is just a nuisance. Moreover, what he is really doing is encouraging the youths under him to take their first lesson in lying. He should remember that boys of fifteen or sixteen are a little better educated than the young men of fifty years ago.

Every Easter sees our religious journals full of the "victory of Christ"—though how he happens to be victorious in an increasingly materialistic world is one of those mysteries which the Church loves to embrace. According to "Church Times" this year Christ's "victory" has "brought together Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, the quick and the dead, heaven and earth." We have tried to understand this beautiful sentence by long and arduous contemplation and even reading it backwards, but we give it up. We expect it has some meaning to the very religious, but for the plain man, uninhibited by ghostly goblins and gods, this kind of solemn pronouncement is just balderdash. Yet it is no doubt for just that very reason dear to the mind and heart of all believing Christians.

Of all the superstitions that are gathered under the great title of religion, there is, to us, none more detestable than that one of religion and death. The exploitation of grief which has been taking place during the course of this calamity to the European world is particularly nauseating. The readiness of the clergy to minister to a mind oppressed, we can understand and appreciate. It is their exploitation of human grief in the interests of a church, their manufacturing of cases of death-bed consolation and repentance, the production of evidence which the experience of all declares to be false, but which is accepted by many because of its traditional character, that fills one with a feeling akin to disgust. Of the battles of earlier days we read how professional "ghouls" followed the armies for the purpose of despoiling the dead. That species seems to have disappeared, but we have in its place an army of clergymen striving to make capital out of a War that is at once an impeachment of their God and an indictment of every Church in Christendom. Death comes to all and all meet it as their character and education fits them.

Leicester had quite a religious upheaval this last Easter. Preceded by crucifers swinging incense, more than 600 people followed a big Church of England procession, and over 1,000 congregated later in the cathedral. Strange that in front of this magnificent tribute to the Power of the Holy Spirit, our Bishops should wail so pathetically about the failure of Christianity. They can't have it both ways. If people are so religious as they are in Leicester—how can they account for the wave of crime sweeping the country? Isn't it a fact that almost all the thieves were brought up Christians and nearly all attend, reverently and piously, the religious services in prison?

We all know there is something that goes by the name of Christian Truth. It is, of course, not of the same kind or character as truth in science, philosophy or everyday life. If it were, the distinguishing adjective would be unnecessary. Ordinary truth is good enough for all, and is the same for all. If we speak of a scientific truth we mean no more than that it is a truth discovered by scientific methods. Once discovered it is a truth for all. Christian Truth has, however, a peculiar quality. It is distinctive of Christianity. No, that is going too far, for it need not be true for all the Churches. A Roman Catholic truth may be a lie to a Protestant, Presbyterian truth a lie to a Methodist, and so forth. A Christian truth stands for itself by itself. It is a truth that requires a miracle for its birth and a mixture of credulity and impudence for its continuance.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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London, W.C. 1.
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TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. gratefully acknowledges a donation of £1 1s. from Mr. W. Nelson, and 2s. from Mr. H. Lallack to the Benevolent Fund of the Society.

GENERAL FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary N.S.S. acknowledges the following donations to the General Fund of the Society: Mr. H. Lallack, 2s.; F. F., 5s.

R. CARRINGTON.—To have read "The Freethinker" for sixty-one years is, we think, likely to be a record. That you still find it interesting is a compliment to those responsible; and to have started reading it at twelve years of age is, unconsciously, a compliment to yourself. But we think our reading of serious books goes farther back than yours. We were always a non-believer of religion, but our contact with "The Freethinker" must have been much later than yours. We wish you the best of health.

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

The fantastic idea that Christianity in England could be resuscitated by making a row, has taken place in London. Trumpets were blown, and all kinds of desperate efforts made to revive the Christian religion. Very daring, the N.S.S. was challenged to send three of its members to take part in a discussion with three members of the Church. That was agreed, and Mr. Archibald Robertson, Mr. Rosetti, and Chapman Cohen were sent. That is all that space and time permits us to say at the moment. Except that we were heartily satisfied with the results. More will be said next week.

One of our readers wishes to know whether we believe that the B.B.C. will agree to the broadcasting of a fair statement of Atheism. Our reply is: Not the slightest. What may come will be a very respectful approach to Christianity which will lead to a statement of non-Christianity, while Christianity is being praised for its goodness, etc. and the selected Freethinker gives away the game by his timid handling of the Christian religion. Already we have seen how those whom we know are not godites, carefully avoiding anything that would seriously displease Christian leaders and, worse still, we have to reckon with the sober truth our greatest obstacle in the way of a plain and truthful criticism of religion are those who are known to be Freethinkers but who are afraid of ruining their status with the B.B.C. It is a sad, but a solid, truth that our greatest enemies are often those who should be publicly standing in the vanguard of non-believers.

We have been told, we do not know how far it is true, that an exchange of opinions and desires has already been made. If that be true, we suggest that the first things that should be

attacked are the morning prayers and the evening ditto. Nothing in the programmes of the B.B.C. sinks lower than the morning and evening prayers or exhortations. They mark a depth of primitive superstition that is almost unbelievable. We have often been asked who is it who provides these morning and evening prayers. We can only say that if genuine they touch a very, very low level of intellect. And if that does not fit the situation, then it is an exhibition of mentality that makes one ashamed of seeing such men in a public situation.

We almost had a shock when we happened to get hold of a pamphlet by a Christian preacher bearing the title: "The Duty of Candour in Religious Teaching." That sounded very well indeed, but on glancing over it we found that it really meant that Ministers of religion must keep to the old story, told in a slightly new way, but with marked determination to keep substantially to the old, old game. Still we liked the title, and we suggest to the writer of the pamphlet that he would arouse more attention and would do much better work if he gave his preaching something like the following:—

My dear brothers in Christ. It is impossible to go on forever telling the old stories concerning the Bible. Thanks to the activities of Freethinkers the laity has almost as much knowledge of the Bible as we have, and they are not backward in saying what they know. So if we go on telling the ancient stories about the Bible we shall surely be found out. Gentlemen, I advise you all to practise a little Candour—not too much, but just enough to allay the growing inquisitiveness of the congregations. It is right to be candid with your people—up to a certain point—because the common people now know as much about the Bible as we do.

We note that Mrs. Ruby Ta'Bois still keeps her pen active in the interests of Freethought, mainly through the press. What she has to say is always interesting, well expressed and to the point. We should like to see her activity and quality imitated by others. It is all good work.

The Hosts of the Lord continue to fare badly at the polls on the question of Sunday Cinemas. In previous issues of "The Freethinker" we gave some of the results, here are more from recent announcements:—

	For Sunday		Majority
	opening	Against	for
Colchester	4,078	1,818	2,260
St. Albans	4,042	1,744	2,298
Wellington	1,343	633	710
Salisbury	6,902	1,725	5,177
Bath	8,093	3,560	4,533
Bradford	31,258	21,514	9,744
Kettering	4,608	2,340	2,268
Bedford	5,532	2,645	2,887
Wolverton	2,471	1,761	713
Cheltenham	6,893	3,963	2,930
Gloucester	6,070	2,606	3,464
Rotherham	7,159	3,213	3,946
Harrogate	6,655	4,022	2,633

Mr. F. A. Ridley will lecture for the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. today at 38, John Bright Street on "Atheism and Society." We can assure the speaker of a warm-hearted welcome from the local saints, and all those present are sure of an authoritative address. The lecture begins at 3 30 p.m.

The Rev. H. C. Heywood says, in the April number of the Southwell (church) Magazine that the singing of "Roll Out the Barrel" was not sung by his people as a hymn to Bacchus. He says it was simply an adolescent "play noise." That may be true, as also that some—having heard the praise of the "barrel" may not go any further. But we feel quite certain that if the barrel was a real barrel, and the contents good beer, most of the people would have liked it all the better. Moreover, Southwell Church would have been better filled than it has been for many, many years. We have roadside churches that promise to look after cars while people enter the church and take part in the service. But no service, no guarding of cars.

PIETY IN PRISON

THE Government Statistician of New South Wales has made available statistics showing the religions of persons in N.S.W. prisons on June 30, 1946, as follows:—

Religion	Males	Females	Total
Church of England	614	38	652
Roman Catholic	527	33	560
Methodist	67	1	68
Presbyterian	82	10	92
Congregational	5	—	5
Baptist	8	1	9
Lutheran	2	—	2
Other Christians	42	3	45
Hebrew	6	—	6
Other Non-Christians	7	—	7
No religion	238	—	238
Totals	1,598	86	1,684

Australia's census of 1933 recorded that 21.38 per cent. of the population of N.S.W. claimed to be "Roman Catholic" or "Catholic," and the Holy Mother Church has claimed all these as her children. At the same census 43.97 per cent. stated that they belonged to the Church of England. An Australian census is proposed for the present year, and until then it will not be possible to ascertain the exact proportions of religiouses in N.S.W. at present.

The figures quoted above may safely be taken as the index to the rates of delinquency amongst the religious sects in all fields, from serious crime down to minor offences and child delinquency. It will be seen that a high rate of delinquency is a burden on the taxpayer if it is noted that in the year ended June 30, 1946, 6,436 males and 896 females were committed to N.S.W. prisons.

According to the latest figures available, 70 per cent. of Catholic children are educated in schools conducted by the Holy Mother Church. The other Christian sects send all but a handful of their children to the State schools. Here, as everywhere else, Catholics denounce the State schools as "ungodly institutions," despite the provision that priest and parson have full access to them for that horror called "religious instruction." This instruction—really destruction—is given by Catholic priests who have a standardised form of nonsense, and, for the most part, by Protestant lay preachers, many of whom mishandle their aspirates and ride wild when describing the joys of death. They must grate on the nervous systems of the teachers of secular subjects.

It will be seen from the table quoted that Catholic prisoners formed 33 per cent. of the prison population, and those of the Anglican faith 38 per cent., about one-half the Catholic proportion. But most of the Anglican children attend the State schools and are very lightly influenced by the Church of England socrerers.

A mysterious army in N.S.W. prisons is composed of men who do not claim to belong to any religious sect. At the 1933 census only a comparative few claimed to be of no religion. I cannot obtain any information about these men. The figures may be indicative of the rise of Atheism in N.S.W., or it may be that many people simply do not acknowledge any religion or are spiritualists, etc.

Much is now known about the connection between supernaturalism and delinquency, due chiefly to statistics compiled in the United States. It may be safely stated that delinquency is highest amongst people who are the most exposed to intensive religious training. For many years N.S.W. has recorded the religions of prisoners, and Catholics have always had the highest rate of delinquency, the Catholic one-fifth producing one-third of the delinquents.

The probable cause of the high rate amongst Catholics is the Holy Mother Church's teaching that this earth is vile, only paradise being worthwhile. That is a philosophy which could be tolerated in a world composed only of Catholics; but unbelievers who have to pay taxes feel that the State might send D.D.T. to the Christian Churches with instructions on using it without damaging useful organisms while cleansing themselves. If D.D.T. fails, the priests and parsons should be given T.N.T. with similar instructions.

How strange life is! When I was a boy I felt that the dear vicar and the parish priest were absolute essentials in a well-conducted society. I now see them as menaces to mankind.

BERTRAM CALCUTT.

Milson's Point, N.S.W.

THE LAUGHING HUMANIST

"Rabelais laughing in his easy chair."—POPE.

"I class Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes."—COLERIDGE.

THE popular idea of Rabelais coincides with Pope's famous line. He is pictured as one who laughs and mocks at all things—a hog for appetite, a monkey for tricks. He has been described as a great moral teacher, a grossly obscene writer, a reckless buffoon, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Freethinker. To paint him as a moral teacher alone is to ignore the innate drollery of his character. To set him up as a mere mountebank is to forget the stern reality which underlies his writings. Other unconscious ironists would turn the first of French humorists into a triumphal ecclesiastical historian. To treat Rabelais as destitute of all serious purpose in art or life is even a greater error. Whatever Rabelais may have been, he was not a trifler. He had seen ecclesiastical life from the inside, and he hated priests with every drop of his blood. He studied Greek when it was a hated and forbidden language. He was an enthusiastic disciple of the new learning in an age when scholars carried their lives in their hands. His noble zeal for intellectual freedom, untrammelled by priestcraft, entitles him to rank with Erasmus and Von Hutten as an apostle of humanism.

François Rabelais was of middle-class parentage. He was born in 1483, near the lovely little city of Chinon, on the *Vienne*, where Henry II cursed his sons, and died. He always regarded *Touraine*, its cities, rivers, and vineyards, with affectionate admiration. The fact of his father having been an innkeeper was used as a weapon against him in literary controversy. His father, unfortunately, wished to make him a priest. Accordingly, little François was sent, at nine years of age, to the Benedictine monks of *Scully*, so young that the white shirt was put over the child's frock. Later, Rabelais was removed to the Franciscan Monastery of *Fontenoy le Comte*. The Franciscan vows seem to have included ignorance as well as celibacy and poverty. He remained there for fifteen years, taking priest's orders in 1511, at the age of twenty-eight. It is to this long period spent among the ignorant, bigoted, narrow sons of the great lying Catholic Church that we owe his undying hatred of priestcraft. It breaks out in every page of his writings—now passionately, now sorrowfully, with a cry of rage, a sob of pain, or a laugh of scorn. He hated the "monk birds" more bitterly than even Erasmus, for his nature was stronger.

At the age of forty he came into the world a free man—free, that is, to follow his studies—burning with a pathetic enthusiasm for the new learning. He threw aside the hated monastic garb and became secretary to the Bishop of *Maillezais*. About 1530 he went to the University of *Montpellier*, with the intention of getting a medical degree. Remark that at this time, when Rabelais is following the lectures, he is already within sight of his fiftieth year. Two years later he went to *Lyons*, where he

held an appointment as physician to the hospital. His friend, Etienne Dolet, was already established as a printer in the place; Rabelais's connection with the first reformers of France is certain; the extent difficult to determine. Rabelais had no desire for the martyr's crown. He never contemplated following Calvin into exile, or Berquin to the stake. His sympathies were antagonistic to all dogmas. He held Luther and Calvin in almost as much abhorrence as the priests. The society of Des Perriers, Dolet, and the Lyonnais Freethinkers was more congenial to his habits of thought. Moreover, he had excellent reasons for knowing the power of the great lying Church and the pious malignity of her hired assassins.

Heretics were then handed over to the secular arm to be burnt for the good of their souls and the greater glory of God, and François Rabelais did not intend, if he could help it, to be butchered to make a Roman holiday. When he was denounced as a heretic, he challenged his enemies to produce a heretical proposition from his writings. They were unequal to the task; but, none the less, the heresy was there. Rabelais's caution was necessary if he wished to live. Three at least of his contemporaries suffered for heresy. Dolet was burnt, Des Perriers was driven to suicide, Marot was a half-starved wanderer in Piedmont. Rabelais may be excused for not wishing to be "saved by fire." His sense of humour always prevented him from becoming a fanatic.

It has been said that Rabelais despised women. He did not write till an age when the passion of youth had consumed itself to ashes. Passion was killed in Rabelais by that hateful system of monkery which has filled Christendom with unspeakable horrors. Poor Rabelais! A whole half of humanity absent from his mind. Love, the central fire of the universe, the source of all human joys and sympathies, the bond of society, appears, in the accursed monastic system in which he was trained, as corruption and depravity. The damnable discipline surrounded Rabelais from the time he wore a child's frock till he was a man of forty, and the best side of his nature was strangled. He never loved, never even thought of loving. He had no more respect for women than a eunuch in an eastern seraglio. Nay more, there had even been crushed out of him that love for his mother which characterises every Frenchman worthy of the name. Alone among French writers he has no filial piety. As the old galley-slave may be known by the dragging foot, on which was once the letter so when the unlovely years have eaten away manhood, imprisoned with its blind instincts and objectless passions, the monk is known by his sexless mind. Thrice, poor Rabelais! The monkish devils spoiled his life. The robe he wore was to him like a bodily deformity, corrupting his mind, narrowing his views. Originally, his nature must have been lofty and beautiful—witness those exquisite chapters in which he describes the monks of Thelema, whose motto was "Liberty." His death was unexpected. We may picture the rage of the Christians when their old enemy, now almost within their pious clutches, slipped quietly out of their eager hands. The great lying Catholic Church never forgets, and priests never forgive. It was well for the old man that his life was not prolonged. Rabelais went further than contempt for the trappings of Christianity. He rejected it altogether. There cannot be the slightest doubt that Rabelais was a Freethinker. He hoped to cure the evil of religion by spreading knowledge, by bringing priestcraft into contempt, by widening the boundaries of thought. He knew as much as any man of his time. He was acquainted with the book of the world, and not merely with the world of books. He studied science and practised medicine. He knew practically everything there was to be known. His life was spent in the pursuit of knowledge. Liberty was Rabelais's sovereign specific for the ills of his time. He found his contemporaries tied and bound with chains of their own manufacture. His purpose was to break their fetters and set them free.

M. S.

THE PICKLED PARSON

The Rev. John Garnage, A.M., rector of Sedgfield, Co. Durham, died during the second week of December, 1747, just about a week before the tithes became due; and local gossip said that his widow in full possession of all her wits resorted to the bold strategy of laying the body in a bath of salt, and keeping or preserving it in a private room until after the 20th of that month, on which the tithe-farmers came to settle their dues. It appears that her scheme succeeded, because she duly received the emoluments of the living for that year, which would otherwise have gone into the hands of the Bishop of Durham, as patron. After she had gotten the money she released the fact of her husband's decease.

This audacious piece of trickery however does not appear to have at all pleased the ghost of her dear departed, who was, no doubt, an honourable as well as a most righteous man, and accordingly the old parsonage became in time to be regarded as a haunted house. "The Pickled Parson," as he was irreverently called, infested the entire neighbourhood for the best part of half a century, "making night extremely hideous for all concerned." By some mischance, on the morning of a day in the year 1792, a fire broke out in one of the bedrooms of this old rectory house, and before it could be extinguished, the greater portion of the building was destroyed. From that day and hour the apparition was no more seen.

E. H. S.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, April 29, 7 p.m.: "The Idea of God," Mrs. A. BLANCO WHITE, O.B.E.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Japan in Defeat," PROFESSOR KEETON.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Barrowford Women's Guild.—Wednesday, April 30, 7-30 p.m.: A lecture, Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: "Atheism and Society," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (London); tea 5 p.m.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Lecture Hall, 7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Religion in the Soviet Union," Mr. E. V. TEMPEST.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market.—Sunday, April 27, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Enfield.—Saturday, April 26, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, April 27, 6-30 p.m.: "What Do Secularists Believe," Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Worsthorne.—Friday, April 25, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

THE FAULTS AND FAILINGS OF JESUS CHRIST. By C. G. L. Du Cann. (Second Edition.) Price 4d.; postage 1d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. First, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d.

HE NOTHING OF RELIGION KNOWS WHO ONLY KNOWS HIS OWN

Some of the older Faiths very briefly examined

VI

BABYLON

WHOLE libraries of learned tomes have been published on this obscure and fascinating subject. The present writer can only apologise to that marvellous city for this necessarily futile essay.

Inscriptions found in Mesopotamia dating 3500 B.C. indicate that long before that time the pre-Semite Sumerians of that country had an elaborately developed pantheon, of 4,000, and intricate theological systems which must have reached back right into prehistoric barbarism. From records dating 2000 B.C. a good general idea of the Faiths of these simple minded and scientifically ignorant but otherwise highly civilised people can be put together.

As in the Dark Ages, when Christianity was at the height of its prosperity and power, so in ancient Babylon the whole people, and even powerful kings, lived in mortal fear of the supernatural and its agents, the priests, who made use of the superstitions they themselves implanted to gain and maintain their almost unlimited power. The monuments, inscriptions, etc., emphasise the great importance of propitiatory sacrifice to the gods and, of course, of rich gifts to the priests themselves. Instructions in the greatest detail are given for these magic rites, resembling very closely similar instructions laid down in the Christian Scriptures. In some instances the animal is definitely indicated as being a substitute for a human sacrifice, but for notes on this practice see under Mithraism. Carrying the images of gods in procession through the streets was a great feature, encouraged by the priests as having an obvious entertainment and propaganda value. Roman Catholics, even today, stage just such parades.

As in all very ancient Faiths, there is found a strong element of astro-theology, the sun, of course, being the obvious controller of the fortunes of men as its life-giving warmth is showered down upon or withheld from man, beast and field. The moon and hundreds of stars were worshipped as secondary gods. At times and places a secondary god not infrequently found himself or herself gradually becoming elevated to the highest place in public favour, and there are cases of a mere village god becoming, in certain favourable circumstances, a first class divinity. This procedure is also, on occasions, reversed and one comes to realise how the fortunes, nay, the very continued existence, of a god depends entirely on the fickle support of his admirers. No admirers, no god. No god, however apparently firmly established, ever has or ever can escape this relentless law.

In Babylonia the all-powerful Holy Trinity was composed of God the Father, Anu, supreme god of the heavens, the god of earth and the god of the waters. It was trouble with this latter god that resulted in the prehistoric Babylonian myth of a world flood, though, of course, devastating floods would be nothing miraculous in the Euphrates lowlands, nor, for that matter, in many other areas in the constricted then-known world. There is also the Holy Virgin Mother, one of whose many names is Mama, the Creator of man from clay, and for whom she interceded with the ever-irascible gods (cf. R.C.s). One of her sacred symbols was a cross, which has from time immemorial represented fertility, increase, in men, lands and cattle, being the sign of procreation—male crossing female. It was worshipped as a sacred symbol throughout all the Eastern world thousands of years B.C.

The virgin goddess Mama is often depicted as a Mater Dolorosa, weeping for the sorrows of man, or pleading for him with the Sun god. It was believed that all life (including the gods) originated in water—a very shrewd guess—the creative force Mumma being the spoken word or Logos of the Water god.

The Christian legend of a Six-day Creation first appears in Babylonian mythology, though the stories of creation found in

India are very much more intriguing and variegated, displaying a much more imaginative artistry.

When the Jews were defeated and carted off to Babylon, circa 600 B.C., they doubtless adopted to a large degree the mythology of their conquerors, though this would not necessarily have been insisted on. It was not till the invention of monotheism—my god is the only god and so yours must be false—that religious persecution really got going.

Ethics, social conduct, was a secondary consideration in the priestly scheme, even as in all religions, but their rules of conduct were of a high degree of culture, perhaps thousands of years before their King Hammurabi collected them together into his famous "Book of the Dead" in 2140 B.C. In Egypt similar guidebooks for departed souls were produced from time to time. Ignorant people are always talking about what they call "Christian Ethics," little knowing that there is not one single original precept, idea or miracle in the whole Christian Faith.

This "Book of the Dead" contains, inter alia, a remarkably complete code of laws covering perhaps the whole complex of contemporary life down to quite minor details. It is of interest to note that special action is laid down for curbing the rapacity of the priesthood in their exploiting of the superstitious fears of the masses. In recent years both Spain and Mexico have been the scene of anti-priest revolutions, so we can scarcely claim to have progressed much since Babylon as far as religious oppression is concerned.

Divination or forecasting of the future was universally practised and no king or general would have dreamed of initiating any important action without first consulting the oracles. Astrology was much venerated but forecasting by means of a sheep's liver seems to have been the most reliable and popular method. The calls to mind the frequency with which livers are referred to in the Christian Scriptures and an amusing tale of the miraculous powers of a fish liver is related in our Holy Book of Tobit in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament.

To what extent these astrologers and liver scratchers really believed in their own hocus pocus is, of course, impossible to find out now, especially considering the fact that in old times a sort of priest, witch-doctor or what-have-you had to live undoubtedly, a man of superior intelligence if he wanted to live to a ripe old age.

Incidentally, the ancients looked upon and spoke of the liver very much as we moderns (who should know better) do of the heart, as being the seat of the emotions, and thence, alas, as the source of their thinking. Man is more naturally inclined to think with his emotions than with his brains, a fact that has kept religions alive through the countless centuries.

Amid all this evidence of a high order of culture, intelligence and ordered living, weltering in a vast morass of religious superstitions, astonishing but quite definite indications exist of an important—sufficiently important to be monumentally recorded—Rationalist movement! And this seems to have been quite amicably tolerated by the priesthood which, it can only be presumed, did not take it seriously, any more than men nowadays at the opposite end of world civilisation, take the religious fanaticism of the R.N.

M. C. BROTHERTON, COMDR., R.N.

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