

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVII.—No. 23

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Kindness of Man to God

It is not customary to talk of what God owes to man. In Christian circles it would be considered as the worst form of blasphemy. The true believer likes to take his blessing and to measure piety by the extent of personal degradation. It is true we read of some primitive people who have the habit of standing up to their gods, and when they do not behave as they are expected to they are promptly thrown into a river and then some other god is chosen of a more serviceable quality. It is even on record that in one part of Italy when one of the patron saints failed to produce good weather the effigy was marched round the city and then thrown into the sea. Another saint was chosen, and after a while the rain came. Even saints can be made to toe the line. But these cases are not numerous. The general attitude of a good Christian is on his knees, with his eyes closed, and declaring his responsibility for the Saint not doing his job. The Christian Church uses man, but it has seldom done anything by way of giving help; it emasculates manliness. So we are not surprised that the Christian never talks of God's debt to man. The expression would imply a sense of equality which is inconsistent with Christian tradition. Man is a worm, a beggar, a speck of dust in the eyes of God, etc., etc., which devout Christians love to describe themselves. The deeper the abasement the nearer the sight of God, etc. The Christian of the typically Christian ages was one who groped his way to glory, and fitted himself to associate with the angels in heaven by making himself more or less apt to mix with decent men and women on earth.

So we, an Atheist, ask the question which the theist ought properly to ask. What does God owe to man? Well, in the first place, he owes to man his existence. There may be a doubt as to whether God made man; there is none that man made God. The Gods of the world are shapen in the likeness of man, and reflect his many qualities, good and bad, with the faithfulness of a looking-glass. While man is a savage his god is a savage also. As he becomes civilised his gods also show an improvement. God is never better than the best man, but he often falls below the highest standard set by his creator. The tribal god with no concern in his helpless state writ large. The God of Saint Paul, who uses man as the potter does clay, making one vessel good and the other bad, is man living under Oriental despotism. The God of a later date, and governing accordingly to set laws, is man with a partly developed scientific conscience and who has, politically, reached the stage of conceivable constitutional government. And the God of to-day, more ready to save than to damn, more concerned with

human life here than on the other side of the grave, thinking more of practice than of mere belief, is man partly humanised, conscious of his strength and possibilities. The gods are made by man, they improve as man improves, and a decent god should at least thank man for having placed him above the state and station in which the world first designed him. God's debt to man is not less if we assume with the orthodox theology that he made man. The debt simply assumes another form. The theologians assured us that God made man for his own glory. Presumably, even the deity found perfection a bit of a bore, with no one to contemplate his work, and not having anyone to admire what he had done. It seems that God made man so that man could tell God all about himself. But whether that assumption be sound or otherwise man, having been created, had, and has, a distinct claim for consideration and fair treatment.

Most of us have got beyond the Christian stage which taught that between parents and children the rights were all on the side of the parents. The child had nothing to do with its birth, and while the relationship between the two clearly saddles the parent with certain duties, it quite as clearly gives the child certain rights. The rights are here almost solely on the side of the child, the duties on the other. Is the situation any different between God and man? Surely it is identical. Were it conceivable that all men could be consulted whether they would be created or not, it is certain that with the knowledge of what was before them they would decline the adventure. But being thrust into the world man has at least this claim against God; that he should be given the same chance as every decent parent would give his child had he the power which God is assumed to possess.

What now are the cases. Instead of the child of this heavenly parent finding itself warmed and protected, the "heavenly father" appears to have exhausted every possibility in laying pitfalls—mental, moral and physical—for his undoing. It is true that man may learn to avoid these traps, but how many suffer before this knowledge is gained? Often it is the onlooker, the one who has watched the struggle from afar, who benefits. Success is set in a background of failure, happiness in a background of misery, life is framed in death. It is not merely the failures that show how ill God discharges his debt to man; the successes, the way in which they are gained, do this not less thoroughly. It is true the race grows better, but the claim on God is by every individual. An inconsiderate egoism leads us to excuse the process because we reap benefit from it. We are an improvement, we flatter ourselves, on what has gone before. But it is this "before" that convicts God. For each one who made up that "before" had exactly the same claim for consideration as we have. The knowledge that we have would have saved them; the comforts that we have would have made their lives happier.

God excuses his lack of care for some because he shows a moderate amount of care for others. It is sometimes said that we cannot perform ill deeds without reaping the consequences. The plea does not fit the facts. Not the most extravagant bigot can argue that the suffering in the world is all disciplinary, and is all for our education. Man may be punished for a good deed as surely as though he were performing a bad one. While we write news comes of a man who has died an agonising death, after losing one arm, and the fingers of his other hand, in learning the uses of radium for healing purposes. What moral connection is there here between action and consequence? A man who gets wet through may contract tuberculosis just as surely if the cold is caught while on an errand of goodness as on a burglarious expedition. God not only punishes the good with the bad, he rewards the bad with the good. When he is offended with one of his children he knocks the whole family about. He acts like a drunken bully who gives his wife a beating because another man has offended him. That a parent owes a duty to his children, and that he may be properly punished if he fails to discharge it, is part of the legal procedure of the country in which we are living. What would happen if we applied the same rule of common-sense and justice to God and his children?

Have it one way or another. Either God discharges his obligations to man badly, or the whole thing is an illusion. You can save the character of God at the price of his existence, but you simply cannot have it both ways. Perhaps it is best to treat the whole thing as an illusion. When an old lady was told for the first time about the sufferings of Jesus, she remarked, "Ah, well, it was a long time ago, let's hope it isn't true." Let's hope that this story about a heavenly father isn't true. It is bad enough to fight nature single-handed, and to try to mould it nearer the heart's desire. But to believe that there is at the back of nature some almighty intelligence that designed the whole drama, is enough to make one mad with the horror and the brutality of it all. Perhaps it isn't true. Perhaps the whole antithesis of God and man is a fictional one, and the real antithesis is man as he is and man as he was; man savage and man partly civilised. Man may not really be improving a God, he may be only improving himself, and in the Gods that block his path he is seeing only the uncivilised humanity from which he has sprung. Man is a slave to his past in many ways, but the most disastrous of the slaveries from which he suffers is this bondage to the gods and ghosts of primitive mankind. And from this servitude deliverance can come only by recognition of the nature of the facts before him. As in so many cases ignorance is the condition of servitude, knowledge the condition of freedom. The greatest enemy that man has to conquer is himself. Once that enemy is vanquished all the rest can comfortably be taken in detail.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

HUMANISTS OF THE VICTORIAN ERA

MRS. FRANCES WENTWORTH KNICKERBOCKER'S "Free Minds, John Morley and His Friends" (Harvard University Press, 1943), furnishes an attractive picture of Victorian heretics nearly all of whom were ranged among social and religious reformers. Indeed, this survey provides an antidote to the many supercilious criticisms of a period in several respects far superior to ours.

John Morley was born in Blackburn in 1838 when the Chartist agitation was in full swing and when the Wesleyan revival—despite the dire despair its threats of eternal perdition had brought to sensitive minds—had quite inadvertently helped the cause of social reform. Our authoress considers that: "Though the direct teaching of Methodism was hostile to working-class movements, yet indirectly it was a training-ground and school for democracy. The Methodist Sunday Schools were the first to teach writing to workers' children; their class meetings and conferences became models for trade union leaders and political reformers."

Although Chartism faded away, its impulse survived in the Repeal of the Corn Laws and the passing of the first Factory Act in 1847. Moreover, in the succeeding decades far-reaching sanitary improvements and social ameliorations were secured through scientific application, and the Humanist activities of men and women like Mill, Harriet Martineau, Morley, Bradlaugh and other political and religious reformers.

Trained in strict orthodoxy, John Morley's intimate friend Leslie Stephen, like himself, became a sceptic and the same may be said of another life-long friend of Morley's, Frederic Harrison, the eminent Positivist.

The elder Stephen wished his son, Leslie, to take Orders and, as the Fellowship at Cambridge to which he was appointed bound him to ordination, he became a cleric in 1859. Leslie Stephen, while still officiating as a minister of the Gospel, he was reading the writings of Hume, Buckle, Comte, Spencer and Mill. By 1862, as the absurdities of the Old Testament stories became ever more obvious—fictions he was constrained to teach as divine truth—he resigned his tutorship. In later life he could never recall any regret at the loss of his faith, and, when reproached for his plain speaking when discussing sacred themes, he retorted that his critics "never knew what it was to be throttled by a white choker." Again, as our authoress observes: "His courage by hastening the abolition of religious tests, had opened wide the gates of the universities."

Oxford experienced a pronounced change with Newman's secession to Rome and his departure from the city of spires. Mark Pattison is cited as saying that, "Theology was banished from the Common Room, and even from private conversation. Very free opinions on all subjects were rife." Frederic Harrison entered Wadham as a scholar at this stirring time when, almost immediately, the Committee of Inquiry at Oxford was appointed which led to much needed reform. Dr. Congreve exercised a stimulating influence on the brighter students and he, Harrison, Beesly and Bridges, all became shining apostles of Auguste Comte's Positivist Religion of Humanity.

The Reform measures of 1854-56 removed religious tests for admission to the University, swept aside antiquated restrictions and drafted a constitution and, "in the first election under the new statutes opening the scholarships of Lincoln College to free competition, John Morley won his scholarship."

Still, despite reform, Oxford largely remained Arnold's land of lost causes and forsaken beliefs and impossible loyalties. Also religious intolerance inspired the conduct of Morley's conventional father who was infuriated when he realised that his son, having abandoned the creed of his childhood, refused to enter the Church as a minister. We learn that "it was while he was living in the rooms that had been John Wesley's that his own youthful Methodism was dropping away. . . He had to leave Oxford at the end of his third year with only a Pass degree and to struggle for a living, cut off from his family, in real poverty and loneliness."

It seems strange that, for a score of years, a non-University philosopher, John Stuart Mill, should have been the dominant intellectual influence both at Oxford and Cambridge. Certainly Mill's experiential philosophy did not escape criticism, but his "Political Economy" and "Logic" were set studies for candidates for the philosophical Examinations.

The disciples of Auguste Comte, the founder of Positivism, were never a numerous body in England. Yet they exercised a powerful influence in the realm of thought. All the leading Positivists were men of distinction. As Mrs. Knickerbocker notes: "The first English discoverer of Comte was John Stuart Mill, and his generosity in encouraging an unknown thinker was as characteristic as his candour in criticising Comte's later work. George Henry Lewes, in his 'Biographical Dictionary of Philosophy,' did valiant service in making Positivism known in England; Harriet Martineau transcribed and condensed the 'Positive Philosophy' with a devotion truly heroic: 'Many a passage did I write with the tears falling into my lap.' And George Eliot found in Positivism both the satisfaction of her scientific interest aroused by Spencer and Lewes and the answer to her deep religious cravings. If her Savonarola and Daniel Deronda talk too often like Positivist preachers, she has wrought into the struggles of her heroines, of Maggie and Romola and Deronda, her own religion of human sympathy."

Morley's intimates, Cotter Morison, the author of "The Service of Man," George Eliot and Lewes, made him familiar with the London Comtists and was almost persuaded to join their communion. But, what he deemed their sectarian tendencies and the adverse criticisms of Huxley, Spencer and Mill held him aloof. While Morley granted that Comte's "analysis of social evolution is one of the great achievements of the human intellect," he nevertheless rejected his projected systemisation of family and civic relationship as unreasonable and retrograde. Also the exaltation of Humanity into a Supreme Being found little favour in Morley's estimation.

Morley's integrity of character endeared him to his contemporaries. Admittedly, he was intimidated by convention on more than one occasion. Yet, it was "to Morley that Leslie Stephen turned, as Meredith had done in a time of sorrow. It was Morley whom Herbert Spencer asked to say the last words over his ashes: 'You stand out above others as one from whom words would come most fitly.' To Gladstone Morley was always 'about the best I have,' although they differed on the deepest of issues."

As already intimated, Morley's refusal to take Orders enraged his pious father and he was driven to try in turn tutorship, school teaching and law for a living. Ultimately, he drifted into journalism which warded off starvation until he contributed to the "Saturday" in its palmy days, and subsequently became the successful editor of the "Fortnightly Review," and the author of many notable volumes.

Previously, Morley had edited the "Morning Star" until it expired. While writing for the "Saturday Review" his and his colleague, Leslie Stephen's opinions were too advanced for the "Saturday's" Church and State views. Thus, they were excluded from participation in political and religious discussions. Still it was in the "Saturday" that Morley made his anonymous onslaught on Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads," an attack that the great poet generously pardoned.

At the age of 28, Morley became editor of the "Fortnightly" which, hitherto, despite its high standard, had been a financial failure. A brilliant band of writers gathered round the new editor and the "Fortnightly" became the leading monthly magazine of the day. As Mrs. Knickerbocker avers: "Fearlessness and independence were the mark of the 'Fortnightly.' Some of the most original thinking of the time appeared in its pages. There was, for instance, Walter Bagehot's 'English Constitution' which opened the first number and was followed by 'Physics and Politics'; his delightful essay on Crabb Robinson was called by Sir George Trevelyan the best magazine article he had ever read."

At a time when trade unions were highly unpopular, Morley and his friends gave them open support. Frederic Harrison trained his professional career by espousing their cause, while Professor Beesly nearly lost his University post. Articles appearing in the "Fortnightly Review" were denounced as seditious, although they only pleaded for fair treatment of the

poor and oppressed. Still, Mill's review of Thornton's "Labour and Its Claims" in 1869, in which he rejected the official wage fund theory, materially "helped to break down the bars of economic 'law' against the efforts of organised labour."

John Morley was no more satisfied than Joseph Chamberlain with the Education Act of 1870, which, he declared, had "handed the elementary education of England to the Anglican Church." Morley demanded secular instruction only in State-supported schools, while he stressed the crying need for a system of enlightenment which would remove the unspeakable ignorance, apathy and superstition of the masses.

Long stigmatised as blasphemous and degrading, organic evolution is now an accepted truth by all who count in cultured circles. The recent Archbishop's Commission on Doctrine itself contended that "no objection to the theory of evolution can be drawn from Genesis." Yet not only Darwin's "Origin of Species," but even the "Essays and Reviews" penned by learned clerics, not to mention Colenso's legitimate conclusions, occasioned an outbreak of theological fury in the sixties of last century. The writers of "Essays and Reviews" were denounced as the Seven against Christ, and their prosecution demanded. Even when two Reviewers were acquitted by the Privy Council and Lord Chancellor Westbury's judgment was summarised as follows:—

"He dismissed Hell with costs,
And took away from the Orthodox members of the Church
of England
Their last hope of everlasting damnation,"

the uproar continued.

As Mrs. Knickerbocker reminds us: "Eleven thousand clergymen, headed by Pusey, signed a declaration of belief in eternal punishment. 'Only the secular arm,' says Dean Inge, 'stopped a whole series of ecclesiastical prosecutions which would have made the ministry of the Church of England impossible except for fools, liars and bigots.'"

So Morley and his supporters, seeing this menace to freedom of thought and expression, took up the cudgels on behalf of scholarship and science. Huxley, Tyndall, Clifford, Herschel, Stephen and Spencer all entered the fray. To them, and to the more popular Freethought Movement, we remain deeply indebted for much of the mental emancipation from theological error we possess to-day.

T. F. PALMER.

MORALS AND MOTIVES

THERE has been much revived discussion of morals and the question raised as to whether morality can become a science. On the one hand we have a call for a new morality; a new moral incentive; and on the other, a return to age-old precepts; a natural morality and a revival of supernatural sanctions. All of which implies the failure of morality, for unless the old is dead there is no need for a new, nor for its resuscitation. And where are we to find this morality; in the meditations and ravings of mystics and theologians; in the obscurantism of sophists and politicians; or in lynch-law or Nuremberg trial; in the behaviour of human beings? That such questions should be raised is a poor look-out; a case of save us from our friends; the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

It has often been urged in these columns that religion and morals are two separate issues, and that morality arises in the social need; but what we have is different interpretations of social relationships. To assert principles in general agreement ignores points in dispute. Religion has been termed morality tinged with emotion; "true morality" like "true religion" and "law and order" always happen to coincide with the sentiments of the individual. Points in common should show the connection between them. The idea that religion and morals are separate issues seems to arise in the old metaphysical trick of trying to

separate in theory what cannot be separate in fact. Morality is tinged with metaphysics and that it has also been tainted with religion indicates that it carries the dead hand of the past. This is consistent with the fact that the word morals is derived from the Latin for custom. As a theoretical consideration of human behaviour, morality has the general characteristic of tradition. What tradition is with ideas, so is custom with behaviour. Whatever is sanctioned by custom is moral in any time or place. Religion is handed down by tradition and morality handed down by custom, is religion's last ditch; a justification of "law and order" of the status quo.

A scientific method of examination involves a wide survey, and, to be dynamic, the concept of evolution. Using the comparative method in history, Buckle argued that, whereas there had been a continuous process of intellectual development, there had been none in morals. Whereas there had been an increasing accumulation of knowledge, of inventions and discoveries, new methods of inquiry, and the development of the sciences; we were still echoing classic ethics and the Christian beatitudes. We can now go further than Buckle, and, using the anthropological sciences, show that morality is a diminishing quantity. At one end of the scale we see the rigidity of the taboo, which affected the life of the savage from cradle to grave; and at the other, we have arrived at the position shown in the couplet:—

"Regulations and rules are for rogues and fools,
The wicked don't heed them and wise men don't need them."

we can also trace the development. The taboo, termed negative magic by Frazer, became the "thou shalt not." We see the germ of the concept of law, and of personification in the law-giver, and of projection in the Divine Father. With the growth of powerful theocracies came faith and works, with custom enshrined in "The Law." With polytheistic nature worship and the expansion of Empire, the pantheistic Universal Law includes both natural law and moral law on the analogy of political law. Later came the idea of scientific law, which discards anthropomorphism. The imputation of motive is unscientific.

The history of theological and metaphysical controversy follows the acquisition of knowledge and shows the intellectual confusion of law with cause, cause with reason, and reason with motive. Each step in the process arises in the need for restatement, and forms part of our intellectual inheritance. The various stages of the development are reflected in our personal attitude to social life. The negative magic stage is seen in the "it isn't done" and the "they say." We have the negative restraint of the "thou shalt not" as well as the positive coercion of the "believe or be damned." In search of righteousness and wisdom, we are lost in a maze of eclectic and rhetorical verbiage. Projection is seen in both theological personification and metaphysical humanistic analogue. The "must" shades into the "ought" and the "should." We are lost in mystical confusion; sublimely transcendental; a casuist's paradise. The tragic austerity of duty and discipline is as hypnotic as the pleasant illusion of comedy make-believe. In repetition, the power of word magic expresses the identification with the Final Cause; in association in the Machiavellian means to ends; vicarious satisfaction in the Glory of God, and the glorification of the State. The age of reason has not dispelled the illusion. The categorical imperative is the moral "thing in itself."

In practical psychology, the development of mysticism, through mesmerism, eventuated in the study of hypnotism and psychological abnormality. The development of mystical methods of auto-suggestion and rationalisation is largely historical, and mob-psychology is also evident. Like religion, morality has sanctioned the blood feud and holy war; persecution and torture, honour among thieves and my country right or wrong. Morality is as fickle as fortune. It has justified the poverty of the many and the luxury of the few. It has reconciled the chains of slavery with the ideal of freedom; the imbecilities of the cenobite and the power of the imperial juggernaut; mystical acquiescence and

the fury of fanaticism. The psychological bankruptcy of the old introspective metaphysical ethics led to the madness of the Superman. The desperation of the doctrine of live dangerously has its latest expression in the Existentialist idea that human life begins on the far side of despair. Sublimation may be delirious and violent. The desire for freedom arises in the fact of coercion; it is thinking in terms of feeling. Like the projection of personification, it involves a personal approach to social problems.

Whereas the accumulation of knowledge is a social fact involving the interplay of ideas, the feelings are personal, the individual starts from scratch and sentiments are handed on only as conditioned behaviour, and the influences of childhood persist in adult life. Inhibition and repression lead to complexes and fixations, and the so-called unconscious; and we need a scientific appreciation of the psychological consequences of custom. Morality is pre-scientific sociology, just as religion is primitive psychology.

H. H. PREECE.

JEALOUSY—LOVE—OR REASON?

"FOR I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God"—"God is love"—and "Perfect love casteth out fear." All quotations from the Bible, on which the Christian religion is based. Was anything more contradictory or illogical than the fact of a jealous God who was, at the same time, a God of Love. If a child in the kindergarten came out with such absurdities, it would be met with a pitying smile—a schoolboy would be classed as a dunce, and an adult dubbed—a fool. But—because it is in the Bible—the vade mecum of the descendants of the primitive medicine men—it becomes a truth of such staggering profundity, that the "crafty" ones have reaped untold wealth in exploiting it. Truth, we are told, is a many sided jewel. Is it possible to explain the apparently inexplicableness of these quotations as to arrive at a logical semblance of the truth? Some say that—some say that. All correct, no doubt, as far as they go, but judging by the present unhappy state of the world—none giving a simple logical explanation that satisfies the ordinary person on the ground floor—who may use his own mind for reason, and not leave it to someone else to do for him.

Having no imposing academic qualifications, one can approach the subject from an "experience" point of view. Apparently the Bible is divided into three parts—the period dealing with the creation and up to the time of the supposed covenant with Abraham—the period from that covenant until the arrival of Christ—and the period of the Christ and his apostles. The Old Testament is of no value without the covenant. Is it possible to reconstruct the facts that gave rise to that act? Abraham, we are informed, journeyed to Egypt. He was—to put it mildly—afraid of the reception he would get if he arrived there with a beautiful wife. Human nature being then, as it was later proved in David's time, and, as the reports of the divorce courts prove, is the same to-day. So Abraham arranged with his wife that she should pass as his sister. The Egyptians, being but human—did as was expected—and treated her—as his sister. Somehow or other, the secret leaked out, and the Egyptians' morality was shocked. For some reason—either as a sort of recompense—to keep his mouth shut—or as the price paid to Sarah—they initiated Abraham into the priesthood. The priests of Egypt had advanced beyond the stage of believing in idols. Although they encouraged the practice of polytheism—solely as a means of governing the people through their own credulity—they knew that there was a something at the back of everything which they called the "President of the Universe," and which was beyond their comprehension to understand. Their obligation and password, in the third degree of the initiation of priests, give an indication of which way they viewed this president. To look for a resurrection of the dead and a Judgment to come—and "I count the days of Wrath." Undoubtedly a revengeful president.

Abraham returned to his tribe imbued with the conviction of this angry unknown, who had to be appeased to ward off his anger. Whilst retaining a degree of polygamy, Abraham instituted the one deity, in preference to the Egyptian practice of polytheism. His wife must have been a strong-willed and ambitious woman to agree to his plans when they went to Egypt, and there is no doubt but that Abraham was—to use a modern expression—under her thumb—for his humanity was not proof against her spitefulness towards his mistress and child. To placate his jealous wife—out went the bondswoman and child to the wilderness—to fend as best they could. An early example of Thackeray's statement that "there are some meannesses too mean for man, but woman, lovely woman alone, can venture to commit them." So was perpetuated the Egyptian idea of a jealous god, and the bigoted morality of a woman who, whilst condoning in herself—denied the reasons to others. Which teachings had their inevitable sequences. The almost destruction of man's individuality by the attempted regimentation of all thought to the opinions of the "learned ones," culminating in the spread of fear by the "thou shalt Not"—this, that or the other, without reasonable explanation, and the subjugation of women to the state of "his wife, his ox or his ass."

Until the cult of Christianity appeared. The arguments for and against the immaculate conception have waged unconvincingly since it was supposed to happen, and it is only within the last hundred years that the Roman Catholic Church has decided to rise their side of the case by accepting it as a definite fact. Leaving out the biological doubts, there is no doubt but that a woman, or a man for that matter, can give birth to an Idea, without the aid of the opposite sex. Considering the undignified and often humiliating position to which the daughters of Eve had been forced—it is a wonder the idea had not arisen before. Naturally, the idea of a world so diametrically opposed to their present one, appealed in the first place—to those who suffered most, woman and those on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel. But—a woman could not lead.

The idea, in view of their inhibitions and traditions was altogether—too revolutionary. So the son of a village carpenter took over the lead, and taught the new idea—by act and example. The creed of peace—tolerance—and individualism. With one mistake. Instead of teaching the value of logic, reason and complete understanding—he allowed his disciples to become "followers," and to accept his views—without question. Which resulted in a foregone conclusion. As soon as their leader was killed—confusion of thought took place—and so to-day we have thousands of different branches of that idea of "peace on earth, goodwill towards man"—all professing to be the only true branch, and all ready to cut the other's throat if it would benefit them.

I am the Way—the Life—the Truth. The way of a free person. Following his natural reasoned desires, without detriment to others: the life, helping those more unfortunate—turning water into wine so that folk could be joyous—tolerating the failings of others—rendering to authority the duties that belong to authority; and the Truth, of which, when we know the truth of anything, we know all. Beyond that, we cannot go, so—let's finish with the humbug of a worn out superstition, and face up to the truth—that we are here for a short time only, so let us all co-operate constructively, to make that short time—for each of us—as happy as possible.

"ISHMAELITE."

VERY DIFFICULT

Nowhere is missionary work as difficult as in China. Think, for instance, of the difficulty of explaining to an ancestor-worshipping such words as, 'If any man come to Me and hate not his father, he cannot be my disciple. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father.'—Rev. E. J. HARDY, "John the Baptist at Home," 1905, p. 317.

SAINT JOHN THE DIVINE, SNAKE-SEER

A RATIONALISTIC REVELATION

Did John the Divine have a supper of pork
'Ere he wrote that last book of the Bible?
Not wisely, too well use his knife and his fork
'Ere he published that "blasphemous libel"?

If he hadn't the meal that I've mentioned to you,
I submit that he must have been boozing;
For a boozier sees "snakes," and he spotted a few
At a time when he must have been snoozing.

He spotted Old Harry, the king of them all;
He was crawling about on his belly.
Old Nick, though a "gent.," isn't upright and tall,
As depicted by Marie Corelli.

Says John—and he must have been full to the brim—
'In the spirit was I on a Sunday.'
But the spirit—to judge from his book—was in *him*
From the dawn of the previous Monday.

Yes, plainly the saint had been pulling too long
At the tankard, the bowl, or the flagon,
For he speaks of our friend, who had done him no wrong,
As the "Devil," "Old Serpent," and "Dragon."

He copies his Master, "Our Saviour," J. C.,
Who referred to his foe as a "viper,"
Cursed and swore like a trooper one day at a tree,
When he wanted its figs to be riper.

Not so bad as "Our Father" is Nick the accursed,
So we gather from Moses's journal;
He's the Father of Knowledge, schoolmaster the first,
Though consigned to the regions infernal.

Says Johnny, an angel caught hold of Old Nick,
And a thousand years' "penal" he gave him.
When a saint is "revealing," he piles it on thick
To intimidate man and enslave him.

Some beasts "full of eyes" met the muddled one's gaze—
They'd apparently got 'em inside 'em.
In those days men were jays, hadn't met with X-rays,
So the Lord only knows how he eyed 'em.

He spotted a leopard with many a spot,
Though it hadn't been made quite correctly;
Seven heads and ten horns had the animal got—
Take a warning and live circumspectly.

He spotted the Lamb "without blemish or spots,"
Christianity's founder, confound Him!
On his Father's right hand He unceasingly squats,
With His Army of eringers around Him.

Some scorpion-locusts he spotted, 'tis said,
With stings in their tails that will hurt you,
Unless you've the mark of the Lord on your head—
Though it isn't the hall mark of virtue.

Now a spade is a spade, and a fact is a fact,
Of my words I'm no chooser and picker:
"Revelation" reveals that the writer was cracked,
Had the nightmare, or wrote it in liquor!

ACID DROPS

Fr. John Heenan, Roman Catholic, says that he could never accept a religion without a mystery. We quite believe it. Mystery in religion is its only strength. For a "mystery" no explanation can be given, and any understanding is unnecessary. One must simply believe, and the more absurd the item is the more valuable the mystery. The priest is the only one who can bring man into touch with the religious mystery, and there is, again, no mystery which inspires Fr. Heenan to say that a religion without a mystery is of no use to him. We may also say that all men who live on the simplicity of others would agree that there must be a mystery, or the trick would fail.

The Archbishop of Canterbury moves along the same vein when he says that parents must encourage their children. We fancy that "encourage their children" means "compel," for we simply cannot imagine children crying to go to church. The truth of this is that the Archbishop is saying, "Compel your children to go to Church, for the safety of the Churches rests on catching people while they are young." We should like a poll taken on the matter, the voters being, say, ten years of age, with the alternatives being games, and study of animal life in some near forest.

Here is another point of the same kind. At the Convocation of Canterbury, the Rev. Hoskin wanted to know the value of Sunday morning services. He was of opinion that without them other services would be larger. These parsons are rather childish. All round them the church attendances are shrinking, and to suggest that there will be more if a service is knocked off here and there is silly. The empty churches have no connection with the time of the prayers, it is the material that people are finding very, very poor stuff. Look back at the war. The Churches had to stop their days of prayers because the more they prayed the greater the disaster seemed. Then miles and miles of food lost by terrific storms, and there were no days of prayer suggested. Churchill, when defeated at the poll, said the first thing with the Conservatives was the security of religion. And since then we have heard nothing about it. Probably his chiefs told him that he was going the way to lose the next election. So we heard no more of that. The fact of the matter is that the churches are very, very sick. It is only a question of when they will sink to oblivion.

Archbishop Downey (R.C.), does not mind people going to the pictures on Sunday—provided that they first go to Church. That seems quite sensible—for an Archbishop—and it is business. The Archbishop is really saying "I do not care whether they go to the pictures or not, provided we get a share of the plunder. You charge to go in and make a handsome profit. We are content to take what is given, and we get less and less." The clergy are realising that the present is not an age of faith. It is more than the twilight of the gods, it is a "black-out."

It is rather a pity that Sir Stafford Cripps has not sufficient sense to keep his religion to himself, and as he cannot help speaking as a mouthpiece on secular matters which he represents, that he is not careful to leave religion alone. But when he says deliberately that "all political creeds and all economic planning must be dominated by Jesus Christ," that is simply not true, and it would be an insult to Sir Stafford to say he was not aware of it. Or to put it in another way, his praise of religion is not the belief of a very, very large section of his followers. It is simply not true, that our economic plan is based on Jesus Christ. His teaching, expressed over and over again, was that his followers should take no thought for the morrow, which is certainly not what our new Government is doing. It is time that those in the Labour movement took a stand, or tried to at least, caution their leaders that elements of fair play and common decency should not be thrown aside even by a leader in politics. Politics is never a clean game but there is no necessity for men to forget that among their followers "there are others." We should like to hear the opinions of people on that head.

The King has ordered—or his "spiritual" bishops have ordered him to try his hand at—a National Day of Prayer. Of course the King is the Protector of the faith, but as the faith seems to be getting poorer and poorer, it does not look as though the "order" of the King will have much effect in getting people to church. We think if we were king we would object to being hawked about, either in person or in deputy. What the King really believes, no one knows. His religion was, officially, picked out for him. In fact, it was settled long before he was born. If we were king we should object to being ordered about in that manner. He has our sympathy.

The Glasgow Presbytery must do something to earn its salt. So it has been proposed that there should be a "Marriage Guidance Association." Of course, if young men and women are foolish enough to go to a number of clergymen to find out whether they are fit to marry this one or that one, there will be as fine a mess as anyone could wish for. People have often made blunders when getting married, but to allow outsiders to arrange a marriage for any one is to get as near damnation as one could wish. Advice as to how to run a home is good enough, but for a young man or woman to go to a "Marriage Guidance Association" is just damnable. If that does not bring marriage down to the animal level, it is making for it. After all, there should be more in marriage than can ever be developed by a bushel of semi-antediluvian parsons.

One of our casual readers thinks that our "very interesting" journal ought to be more respectful to the opinions of other people. We do not agree, nor do we see that we are called to pay homage to opinions with which we do not agree. There are only three real classes of opinions. They are either right, wrong or unsettled. Number one carries the support of all who agree. Number three calls for suspended opinion, and we must not destroy number two. That seems to us all there is to say. The right to express an opinion is another question, and we do not think that anyone can find the "Freethinker" slack in supporting the right of all to express opinion. For the right judgment must tell.

Mrs. Ruby Ta'Bois, we are noting, is keeping the "Leyton Independent" newspaper busy. In the issue for May 17 she has a letter very much to the point and which is not likely to please her opponents. We should like to see others of our party keeping their eye on the press. Much that is good could be done.

It is good to hear recognised prominent scientists saying what they believe without apology for speaking. Here, for example, is a man of first class standing in the world of science, and who can say without apology:—

"The man who can read history and say Christianity has not produced many abominations, many horrors, many perversions of the human spirit, must have been reading with specially constructed spectacles. . . . We are urged to make our society Christian. But Europe has been Christian for a full nine hundred years after the vision of the cross when every soul in Beziers was butchered in Christ's own name. It was but one example among many. Each one of the centuries as it went by was lit by its own cruel fires and religious wars. How grand if we could wipe out these records as from a slate. . . . The acts of massacres of the Albigensian revolt. . . . All these in fact have had their share in shaping Christianity."

And even that does not exhaust the evil that followed the track of Christianity in power.

We do not know whether Church Parade is still enforced in all its severity in the Navy, but a few weeks ago there was a "voluntary" Church of England service on board H.M.S. "Superb." And how many of our deeply religious Jack Tar-turned-up? Exactly two ratings! And yet we are constantly warned that, above all, it is our brave sailors faced with the majesty of nature, the sea, in all its beauty and ruthlessness who bow in reverence to Almighty God. Voluntary Church Parades prove it.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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

Telephone No. : Holborn 2601.

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.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 1947

The Annual Conference of the National Secular Society at Newcastle-on-Tyne during the Whitsun weekend was given an excellent send off by a reception of delegates and friends at the Crown Hotel on Saturday evening. The local N.S.S. Branch, under the leadership of Mr. J. T. Brighton, had left nothing undone to ensure the enjoyment and comfort of those present. A well-conducted orchestra and talented vocalists provided the musical side of the proceedings, which were opened by an address of welcome from the Branch chairman, Mr. W. Rowe. In responding, the President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, recalled the many happy memories of his work in Newcastle as a young man and paid a tribute to those who were always ready to work for the cause. Refreshments on a generous and varied scale were provided and were served by a busy band of ladies who volunteered their services. The evening was a marked success and thoroughly enjoyable to all present.

The morning and afternoon business sessions were held in the same hotel, and here again the arrangements were excellent. The hall was filled to capacity and the following Branches were represented by delegates, in addition to the members of the N.S.S. present: Blackpool (D. Fisher), Bradford (H. L. Searle), Bolton (T. N. Brighton), Blackburn (T. M. Mosley), Chester (C. Rosetti), Chester-le-Street (E. Elliott and W. Parkinson), Epsom (W. Heaton), Edinburgh (W. Ainsley), Felling (Mrs. Parkinson and Miss Parkinson), Glasgow (Mrs. M. Whitefield), Halifax (Mrs. F. Edwards and N. P. Berry), Jarrow (W. Turner), Kingston-on-Thames (J. W. Barker), Manchester (W. Collius and C. McCall), Merseyside (G. Thompson and W. C. Parry), Newcastle-on-Tyne (J. T. Brighton and W. Rowe), Nelson (J. Clayton), North London (L. Ebury, R. Johnson and H. Bailey), North Staffs (P. V. Morris), Oxford (H. Rennison and Mrs. D. Rennison), Seaham (Mrs. J. T. Brighton), South London (Mr. Seiber), Sheffield (A. Samms and J. Rawson), Tees-side (H. Dakin), West Ham (P. Turner), West London (E. C. Saphin and F. A. Hornibrook).

There was so much time taken up by discussing other matters that some resolutions had to be remitted to the Executive for consideration. The General Secretary read the Annual Report, which was then discussed and a number of questions asked and answered. In due course the Annual Report will be printed and circulated to all members and Branches of the Society. The Annual Balance Sheet was then presented, questions were asked and answered, after which it was put to the meeting and accepted. Mr. Chapman Cohen was again elected as President, as were also the other officials, including the Executive.

A resolution from West Ham to rescind the motion abolishing Vice-Presidents drew much discussion and a number of points were raised, one being that the title of Vice-President did not add to efficiency from either the individual or to the N.S.S. The President said, as in the past it might be bestowed as a mark of esteem, and it did not mean that a new President of the N.S.S. had necessarily to come from the vice-presidents. Manchester moved an addendum that two vice-presidents be added to Rule 5. That was accepted by the West Ham delegate and the motion was put and carried; the old motion abolishing vice-presidents was rescinded and the favour of vice-president can now be given to two members of the Society.

A resolution from Manchester Branch that an organiser be appointed was discussed. The President pointed out it was not possible to settle the matter on the spot. All manner of things had to be examined and details worked out, and the matter should be remitted to the Executive where it could have immediate attention. A resolution that Branches send to the Executive a quarterly report of work done was passed with an addendum that the Executive also report to the Branches.

The next item was not a very pleasant one, it concerned the expulsion of two members of the Bradford Branch, Messrs. F. J. Corina and R. B. Mitchell. The General Secretary read a statement covering the expulsion. Briefly, the statement referred to a resolution moved by Mr. F. J. Corina at Bradford Branch meetings: That the Branch secede from the Parent Society and continue to function as an independent organisation. Mr. Mitchell was the original author of the resolution and on his own admission would have moved it but for his illness. The resolution was actually carried out in spite of the Executive's warning that it was unconstitutional and disloyal to the Society, and Mr. Corina had threatened the Executive against interfering with him. In consequence the Executive had no other choice but to expel them. Both had appealed to the conference against their expulsion and that was the matter now before the meeting.

After the statement had been read Messrs. F. J. Corina and Mitchell were called upon and stated their case. On the other side Messrs. Baldie and Day, Secretary and Chairman respectively of the Bradford Branch, gave an outline of events which took place at Branch meetings. The official time limit of the conference had been extended to 5 o'clock, which allowed two hours for dealing with the appeals. At that time, the President said, the question would be put to the vote, which resulted in a majority for the Executive's action and the expulsion of Messrs. F. J. Corina and R. B. Mitchell from the N.S.S. was confirmed.

Mr. Cohen, in a few words, brought the proceedings to a close and a short walk brought delegates and friends to the News Theatre in Pilgrim Street; the Cafe had been privately engaged and ample attention was given to the temptations on the tea tables by a large party. In the theatre itself very comfortable accommodation awaited the public, who were streaming in for the evening demonstration, and by the time Mr. Chapman Cohen rose to open the meeting there were very few vacant seats. After a few introductory remarks in his usual humorous vein the President called upon his first speaker, Mr. J. Clayton of Burnley who aroused the interest and enthusiasm of the audience; in succession Messrs. Rosetti, Ridley, Brighton, Mosley, Mrs. Whitefield and Mr. Ebury followed; all had a good hearing and a good reception and played their part in a really very successful meeting. Mr. Chapman Cohen rounded off the proceedings with one of his best efforts and sent everybody home in a happy mood.

The 1947 Annual Conference at Newcastle-on-Tyne will long be remembered by those present for the efficient arrangements and the smoothness with which they were carried out. The work involved must have been trying and long. Expressions of appreciation were heard on all sides and most hearty thanks are due to Mr. J. T. Brighton and all the local saints who helped to make the 1947 conference the most successful for many years.

THE SEPIK

I

Here the water was many-coloured, green, white and yellow, and we presumed that it came from great rivers, for it was sweeter than that of the ocean; floating in the water were many trees, leaves and branches, on which at times were birds or crabs.—W. C. SCHOUTEN: "Journal on Description du merveilleux Voyage dans les années, 1615, 1616 et 1617."

SCHOUTEN did not see the mouth of the Sepik, New Guinea's largest river. He saw its dirty doorstep. His name remains immortalised as that of a group of islands near where Latitude 3 South cuts across Longitude 144 East, which is pretty near the equator, the waistband of the world. The Germans called the Sepik the *Kaiserin Augusta*, after the wife of the ill-fated Wilhelm; the Australians renamed it the Sepik, nobody knows why, for that is its name only in pidgin-English. Just as green were the Germans who name it *Ngu*, which is the word for water in one of the Sepik tongues.

In 1926, I was in charge of the Government station at Wewak, a few houses of rough-hewn logs, roofed with sago palm (or nipa when one could get it), walled with sago stems, floored with *limbon*, the whole tied together with cane, and so connected that if one entered the front door the clock shook in the kitchen. Wewak was a peninsula which jutted into the Bismarck Sea, a mass of rotting coral, on which some coconut palms struggled for life.

Wewak had risen in the world by the year 1942, and had become the capital of the Sepik District; but the Japanese came with a large army and occupied it. In 1944, the Americans landed at Aitape, to the westward; the Japanese marched from Wewak and gave battle, but were worsted; the Australians pressed from the west; and the Japanese, to escape encirclement and starvation, retired to the highlands to the south, where they made gardens and prepared to fight into a ripe old age. In 1945, the atomic bombs burst over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Japanese came from the jungle and surrendered. Wewak became Australian again. I, an Australian, felt pleased, although I detested the land.

From my station at Wewak in 1925 and 1926, I explored the interior, from Mount Turu, where the lightning strikes close enough, so it seems, to light one's cigarette, to the total nudists, about forty miles to the west.

We trudged upward, perspiring and muddy. One morning a naked savage who carried a wooden sword on his shoulder, barred our path and looked at us. He was startled, and so were we. We had never before seen a naked swordsman; and he had never before seen a white man. The police raised their rifles and looked about them. The interpreter yabbered a friendly greeting and the swordsman came towards us. Then we all laughed.

Up and up the swordsman led us and there below us was the Sepik Valley, the *massif* which forms the backbone of New Guinea forming its southern wall. Ambunti was over there, on a spur through which the river had cut its path in its mad rush to throw the tropic rainwater into the ocean. Miles and miles of grassy plain, sword grass which reflected the sun and made travelling in daytime a torture. The Sepik was the great gatherer, thousands of streams flowing into it. There was always a whirlwind somewhere in the valley, dust and leaves rising in mile-high tubes which rocked and bent madly.

The natives in general were not unfriendly. They ignored us and disappeared into the *knuti* (sword-grass) until we had moved on. Here and there old people grinned and yabbered at us, because they were too old to run. At one place a woman hid her baby in the grass and ran.

And they had such lovely churches—sorry, ghost-houses, symphonies in wood and sago leaves or grass. And such cute signboards over the front doors.

The police tittered and I rubbed my eyes. The indigenes were sex-worshippers. In wooden bas-relief were male and female figures copulating in an impossible position. Sometimes there were five or six ghost-houses in a village, probably each belonging to a totemic group.

We marched on to the total nudists and were not amused when we saw some. *Nacktkultur* suits only perfect bodies. Clothing mercifully hides our physical imperfections. Then down to the coast again at Matapau where men were seeking petroleum.

The name of Professor Thurnwald, of Hamburg, will ever be associated with the Sepik. In 1914, he was exploring its upper reaches. When war with Germany began he pressed upward to its source, and the names of Tirpitz and Hindenburg were given by him to some mountains. He solved the riddle of the phallic symbols on the ghost-houses. A bride bore a ghost-child to an old man in the ghost-house, the only time that a woman entered. That done she was allowed to live with her husband.

The Christian missionaries on the coast were trying to suppress the indigenous religion, one Catholic priest going so far as to burn down the ghost-houses in his parish. Perhaps it is dead now. They appealed to me to suppress it; but I could not find anything unlawful about it, although it was a most obnoxious religion. But it was as nothing when compared with head-hunting.

I received orders to proceed to Ambunti, then the capital of the Sepik District.

The mouth of the Sepik is easily found. In 1926, I set out from Wewak in a small schooner. The cool wind blew from the land as we moved through the night, so that we would not meet the wind which rises with the sun. Once I was caught at the mouth, the Sepik racing into the ocean, the tide falling and the wind slashing the river's rolling water; the schooner at times was on end, the propellor threatening to drag it under; and enormous trees, uprooted as the river ate into its banks, acres of grass frolicking in the mad waters added to our terror.

But cunning does it. You chug along through the night until the two most easterly of the Schouten Islands and your ship are in line; then you place the islands at your stern when daylight comes and race for the mouth. Soon you will be in the Sepik's smooth river, but battling against a current which at times is nearly as fast as the schooner's speed. Hug the banks, tie up at night amidst millions of mosquitoes, and Ambunti will be reached in four days.

The Sepik Valley then was a land of slit-gongs, some large logs with a low rumble, others with a sharp note like a blacksmith at his anvil. It is maddening. The natives have coals and all night they yabber from village to village, keeping the nerves taut. When a ship entered the Sepik the first villages sight it hammered every slit-gong in the village, then decamped for grass or jungle. From village to village, far into the heart of New Guinea, the alarm passed, with the speed of sound.

BERTRAM CALCUTT.

Milson's Point, New South Wales.

URSE d'ABITOT

I

"Hightest thou Urse;
Havest God's curse."

HE must have been a man of uncommonly strong character to win the malignancy of monks that they cursed him publicly in life—behind his back—and openly after his death. Not only that, but on appeal from the Worcester monks Aldred, Archbishop of York formerly Bishop of Worcester, solemnly cursed the d'Abitot and his offspring, the latter being doomed not to inherit their sire's castle.

This was nothing of the massive, gloomy and romantic narrative detailed by Scott and other novelists of tushery. Actually it was

a huge bank of earth overlooking the River Severn. Surrounding it was a wall and ditch in the shape of a figure 8. Large space was the bailey, smaller the motte, in which was a mound with a wooden structure upon it, the keep.

Urse d'Abitot's offence was that his bailey was supposed to encroach upon monastic land at Worcester Cathedral. As this touched the monks on their economic side, their property, they were vastly more resentful of such a material affront than any spiritual defect on Urse's part and cursed him, calling upon their former bishop, Aldred, now of York, to substantiate the curse.

One more than wonders if the curse was felt by Urse d'Abitot, or taken seriously by him if he was aware of it; one very much doubts.

He was cousin of William the Conqueror, made Sheriff of Worcester when that monarch deemed it necessary to safeguard the line of the Severn. Hence the castle at Worcester dominating the ford, later a ferry before a bridge was built. Also it would watch in the distance the blue ramp of the Malvern and lesser hills westward, from behind which turbulent Welsh might any day appear on foray.

Robust in person and personality must have been this first Sheriff of Worcester, like his royal cousin, who would not appoint a man to such office unless he were capable of filling it efficiently.

That he did so is testified by the long time he held it—all the remainder of his life, the absence of disturbances during that time or the quick suppression of them, and the rewards King William heaped upon him. These were land, manors in various parts of Worcestershire; two villages, Croome d'Abitot and Redmarley d'Abitot still bearing his family origin from St. Jean d'Abitot near Le Havre.

From the same source, monkish chroniclers, we gather Urse d'Abitot to have been strict, stern, a martinet. So much so that a punning Latin phrase on his name—tradatur Urso—let him be handed over to the bear, persisted long as applied to mis-dominants.

II

One imagines Urse d'Abitot stocky of figure and broad-shouldered, with bull neck and reddish hair, his grey eyes restless and keen in their gaze, apt to stare uncompromisingly at offenders and opponents, while the resolute jaw held firm lips which opened to speak direct and blunt. He must have been a familiar form about the town which was growing on the riverbank, or riding back from manor to manor and village to village on his feudal cousin's business, hard and efficient, somewhat a terror, almost a legend of fear to uncouth easy Saxons, disloyal Normans, and monks vainly seeking refuge in cowl or cloister from his insistence and authority, his aggressive secularism of materialism and appetite for power.

Urse d'Abitot was symptomatic of the centuries in many ways before his time. He lived when the great line of political churchmen culminating in Thomas Wolsey was beginning; Dunstan, Oswald, Aldred, Lanfranc, Anselm and

The first Sheriff of Worcester would not have much dealing with such great figures, but within the bounds of the country he seems to have kept monks and priests in their places. Hence their heartfelt cry:—

“Hightest thou Urse;
Havest God's curse.”

As long as William the Conqueror lived the Church was disciplined, not allowed to transgress on kingly prerogative or interfere unduly in secular and state affairs.

Successive monarchs were not all so strong and self-reliant. The growing dissonance of Church and State, the contest of canon and civil law swept to and fro, reaching a climax in the quarrel between King Henry the Second and Thomas Becket.

Henry's apocryphal, “Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?” epitomised the whole matter.

No doubt the murder in the cathedral was dreadful; all murder is horrible; but King Henry might have excused himself that it was state murder, political execution rising far above private or personal dispute. It involved a world-wide principle.

For England it was finally settled by King Henry the Eighth, a monarch whose character and practices had much in common with William the Conqueror and his sturdily astute cousin Urse d'Abitot.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

A FREETHINKING PRIEST

AN eighty-four-year-old priest died in Rennes, Brittany, on February 5, 1943, in a humble house situated in the Rue Waldeck Rousseau. He had devoted his long lifetime to an austere labour and he left behind his considerable work. A long procession accompanied him on his last journey to the Town Cemetery. There were no “black hats” or “white surplices.” No Requiem, de Profundis, or Miserere. According to his last will, the Secular funeral was organised by the French Freethinkers' Movement in Rennes which he had joined eight years before his death, and of which he was an active member.

Last March, under the auspices of the local group of Freethinkers, a great demonstration in his honour took place. Not only did the National Federation of Freethinkers take part, but the World Union of Freethinkers was represented, and all associations with secular tendencies were invited. The demonstration involved a double inauguration; a granite stele shaped like a menhir, with a bronze effigy, was erected on his grave and a plaque was affixed by the Municipality of Rennes, in the Rue Joseph Turmel. Several speakers eulogised the great man who had devoted his whole life in the search for truth.

A short summary of his life is indispensable. Joseph Turmel was born in Rennes on December 13, 1859. His parents were poor, he shared their hard life and mystical faith. He impressed the vicar of his parish by his intelligence and piety, who undertook his education. Joseph Turmel first studied in an ecclesiastical college, and entered the Great Seminary in his 17th year. Sub-deacon at 21, he was sent for further training to the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Angers. Ordained as priest two years later, he returned to the Great Seminary as Professor of Dogma. The meticulous and passionate inquiries to which he devoted his time rapidly induced him to state that he had been the pawn of a great illusion. Since his 26th year, on March 18, he ceased his theological labours, but in order not to hurt his parents and benefactors he decided to remain in his position and to apply himself the best he could, both for himself and others, to bring light upon the dogmas of the Church.

Six years later, however, he was dismissed from the Great Seminary after being reported by one of his pupils that his teachings were heretical; he was treated as suspect, and found himself relegated to inferior positions such as Professor of Latin in a school for backward pupils, a Chaplaincy in an Almshouse, and then for a Carmelite Convent. He nevertheless pursued his solitary inquiries and researches with an ardour inflamed by his daily frustrations.

During the Spring of 1897—through one of his compatriots of Stanislav College—he met the Abbé Alfred Loisy, who had just started his “Revue of Religious History and Literature.” He contributed many articles on “Angelology,” “Original Sin,” etc., which attracted considerable notice, and as a consequence offers for co-operation came to him from many sources. He was induced to write for the French “Clergy Revue” and “The Annals of Christian Philosophy,” a Roman Catholic publication. Some of his works, particularly those that were less unorthodox, were published under his own name, others were written under pseudonyms like “Louis Coulangue,” etc.

Under his own name he also published from 1905-8 several apparently inoffensive works including "St. Jerome," "History of Positive Theology," "History of the Papacy Dogma," etc.

Such precautions are understandable when one realizes the persistent attacks to which Joseph Turmel was subjected by certain theologians who had detected his heresy, and who persisted in persecuting him despite his various non de plumes. The criticism finally led, on November 6, to a decree of the Holy Office, which nominally excommunicated him as a heretic to be shunned.

This verdict, however, resulted in bringing him to the notice of the great public which previously had no knowledge of him. As early as the following year he published, under his own name, the first volume of his great work, "The History of Dogma," of which the sixth volume, published in 1936, contained the results of his last researches.

After this he broke with the Church and associated intimately with Agnostics and Rationalists. He started to write, without any attempt of concealment or caution, books of a less technical nature, written specifically for the public, including such works as "How I Left the Dogmas," "How Rome Dismissed Me," etc. These books express the very pith of his thoughts and opinions, and have been widely published in France by the Freethinkers' Publishing Company, and should find a place in every Freethinker's and Rationalist's library.

PROF. PROSPER ALFARIC.

(Vice-President, French Rationalist Union).
Translated by G. Laparra from "La Raison."

THE APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS

ANYONE who wishes to make a serious study of the origins of Christianity must devote some attention to the remains of what are called the Apocryphal Gospels. Many of these were indeed quoted with as much respect by the early Fathers as those now termed Canonical. Although they have been much decried, and have for long been as far as possible kept out of sight by the orthodox, they are of considerable importance to those who wish to disentangle the complication of influences which contributed to the evolution of Christianity.

It is the commonplace of orthodox advocates to speak of the vast difference between the Apocryphal Gospels and those which are endorsed by the Church. I readily allow that in doctrinal teaching the four gospels ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are superior to the other Gospels now remaining. But it is absurd to call this difference "immeasurable," as a writer in the "Edinburgh Review" does. Those speak with contempt of the "grotesque miracles" of the Apocryphal Gospels, who believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, carried by the devil to the top of the temple, walked on the water, cured the blind with spittle and clay, cast devils into swine, cursed a fig tree and so withered it, and turned water into wine. Why not also believe Jesus turned clay sparrows into live ones, and that the idols in Egypt fell prostrate in his presence? This is just as likely as that the veil of the temple was rent, the sun darkened, and that the dead rose from their graves at the crucifixion. There are no stories more puerile than those of the angel stirring up the healing waters of the pool of Bethesda, and the tribute money found in the mouth of the fish.

In all these Gospels the object is the same, to exalt the hero as a superhuman agent with miraculous displays. The great difference is that the Canonical and so-called inspired Gospels are read through the glamour of reverence, while the Apocryphal Gospels, which are of the same root and atmosphere, like the sacred books of other faiths, are read in the light of common sense.

If there is a greater wealth of imagination in the Apocryphal Gospels it is easily explained. The canonical ones, in the words of Dean Alford, "were not published to the world in general, but were reserved and precious possessions of the believing societies" ("Prolegomena to the New Testament," page 15). They represented the doctrines of the Church, while the other Gospels represented the beliefs of the people, curious as to the details of the life of their hero. In selecting the books of the Canon, the Church was neither guided by critical scholarship nor by a distaste for the miraculous and legendary, but by a sense of what was edifying as well as possessing traditional sanction, and of what best comported with its own doctrine. This would sufficiently account for the boasted superiority of those declared to be inspired. The Apocryphal Gospels show the Christianity of the crowd. They attest how deeply it was rooted in superstition, and how rapidly it sunk into vulgarity.

The Rev. J. J. Taylor says ("Theological Review," April 1867, p. 178): "They so constantly fly in the face of the clearest statement and still more obvious tendency of the Canonical Gospels, that it is sometimes difficult to believe that the apocryphal writers could have been acquainted with them, or at least could have held them in such reverence, as to feel themselves under any control in the indulgence of their wildest fancies."

The comparative simplicity and artlessness of their legends is some evidence of their antiquity. If Jesus appears less as a moral teacher and more of a wonder-worker, in this respect they are more nearly like Mark, which is usually allowed to be the earliest Gospel. The second Gospel of our four, there is indeed reason to believe, may be founded on "The Preaching of Peter," which Clemens Alexandrinus declared was the authentic production of that apostle.

It is evident from the particulars which Justin Martyr gives of the birth of Jesus in a cave, his being visited by men from Arabia, and of the fire kindled in the Jordan at his baptism, that he used one or several of these Gospels under the name of "Memorials of the Apostles" in the middle of the second century. Yet he never mentions by name either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

Luke states at the outset of his Gospel that already "many things which are most surely believed among us." Here, then, we have several lines of evidence, all tending to show that Apocryphal Gospels were forerunners of the present one, and probably afforded narratives aiding in their construction.

The oldest Gospels, the real competitors with the Canonical ones, such as the Preaching of Peter, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospels of Peter, of Bartholomew, of Philip, of Judas, of Matthias and of the Twelve, the Gospel of Basilides, the Gnostic, etc., have all perished or been destroyed. All that we know of them is derived from a few fragments and some scattered notices of the Fathers. In the case of the Gospel of the Hebrews we have far better evidence of antiquity and genuineness than for either of the four. All the early Fathers state that Matthew composed a Gospel for the Hebrews in his own tongue. Yet our Gospels are all in Greek, while this was in Aramaic. Numerous fragments of the Gospel of the Hebrews remain, which attest its antiquity. It was used by the earliest Christian sects, the Nazarenes and Ebionites. Paul, the earliest writer of the New Testament (1 Cor. xv, 7), refers to a legend found in it and not in our Gospels, viz., that Jesus appeared first to James. The learned Jeremiah Jones in his work on the Canon gives the opinion that it was referred to in Gal. ii, 7. It was quoted by Ignatius in his Epistle to the Smyrneans. Papias relates a story found in it and not in the four. Clement of Alexandria cites it with the phrase "it is written." Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Theodoret quote it, often as "Scripture." Yet it was rejected. Its opening sentence suggests a reason: "There was a certain man named Jesus." It contained no intimation that this man was born differently from others. It speaks of the Holy Ghost as his mother, treating

accordance with Jewish usage, the Spirit as feminine. There is sufficient evidence that the genuineness of a book did not secure it a place in the Canon, nor its spuriousness exclude it. The Epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter and Jude, were admitted, though the best scholars from the earliest times have held they were no more the production of those whose names they bear than the Gospels ascribed to Thomas and James, or, I may add, those assigned to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

J. M. WHEELER.

CORRESPONDENCE

SUPERNATURAL RELIGION.

SIR,—I was interested by the reference, in H. Cutner's able article, "New Testament Scholarship," in your May 4 issue, to the iconoclastic 'Supernatural Religion' (which burst like a thunderbolt on the complacent believers in miracles" about seventy years ago; and by his allusion to the fact that "believers did their utmost to discredit the learned author, though, needless to say, without any effect whatever."

The attacks on Walter R. Cassels' famous book have long seemed to me amongst the most unsavoury specimens of ecclesiastical obscurantism. They generally take the form of saying that Bishop Lightfoot exposed it." Dr. George Salmon, the Dublin Protestant theologian of a generation or more ago, sneeringly said so in his book on the New Testament. Later, Bishop Charles Gore asserted likewise in his "Belief" trilogy.

The assertion is continually remade. The latest writer to whom I have seen it is Mr. Arnold Lunn, the eager and self-confident convertologist of Catholicism, who in his book, "The Third Day" (a defence of the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus), records the "S.R." with which, years ago, he read Lightfoot's "Essays" and even proved that the author of "S.R." had hardly a schoolboy knowledge of Greek (a jibe of which the absurdity ought to have been obvious to Lunn if he had even seen a copy of "S.R." which is full of Greek).

What are the facts about Lightfoot and "S.R."? The Bishop was not yet one, though published in the "Contemporary Review" some essays dealing with "S.R." He did not cover the whole ground, but dealt minutely with trifles or matters of secondary importance. He found a few slips in "S.R." and is very severe on some of its footnotes. In the "Fortnightly Review" Cassels replied in detail, vindicating the notes, replying to Lightfoot's general arguments, and convicting the critic of himself making slips. In 1889, just before his death, the (now) Bishop was persuaded (apparently somewhat reluctantly) to re-publish the Essays as a book. He admitted, in his preface, that the author of "S.R." "sometimes had had the last word."

That author immediately published, through Longmans, a volume, "Reply to Dr. Lightfoot's Essays!" He vindicated his book completely. Later, in 1902, he issued a one-volume edition, which reaffirmed his conclusions as correct.

But this our theological obscurantists conceal. We never hear of them. Yet we are constantly told "Lightfoot exposed Cassels." This incessant repetition of an untruth seems to me, as stated above, a flagrant example of ecclesiastical obscurantism.— J. W. POYNTER.

SUNDAY CINEMAS.

SIR,—In Norwich the black-coated, stiff-collared preservers of respectability have been agitating for the closing of Sunday cinemas. It is good to report that their efforts were overruled by a general thousands of votes. We have also heard a great deal recently, in that most boring five minutes of "Lift up your voice" on the wireless, about the love of God in sending his Son to redeem the world.

I suggest it would be better if, instead of meddling with other people's business, and talking sententiously about what the majority of thinking people now laugh at, some Reverend gentleman, conversant with the doings of the Almighty, would clearly explain why there was any necessity for God to oblige in the matter of sending his Son. God, we are told, is all good, omni-

potent, and the cause of all things. Then how did that evil for the redemption of which the Son was sent, get into the world? How could evil possibly come out of the all good? Admitting, however, without prejudice, the absurdity of evil coming out of the wholly good, why then the sacrifice of God to God for something which God had allowed? If these questions were answered there would be a chance of Churches and Chapels not becoming the museum places they soon will become if Christian apologetics remain on their present bankrupt level.

When the pleaders for Truth (represented by Christianity) are not evading issues they are apt to become blatantly misrepresentative. As an example: In an issue of "John Bull" recently, there was an article by the Rev. W. E. Purcell on "How Pagan are we?" Mr. Purcell wrote "Paganism is indifference to any belief at all rather than a state of false belief." The statement is incorrect. I have not had an opportunity of consulting the Oxford Dictionary, but my own, a very good one, gives the primary meaning of "Pagan" as "heathen, an idolator, or worshipper of idols of false Gods." Wordsworth writes "I'd rather be a Pagan, suckled on a creed outworn," etc., and we have all heard of Pagan creeds. Mr. Purcell further stated that scepticism is a product of modern man's reaction to the profound disappointments arising from the obvious failure of the view that Science can do everything, and that "there is nothing left for God to do." Scepticism is not the result of such a reaction. On the contrary, scepticism arises because (inter alia) of seeing the many things that God could do but doesn't and didn't. For example, if God be all loving and all powerful, why (in addition to the initial difficulties before cited) the recent deaths of over a million sheep and cattle from frost, and the ruin of hundreds of homes through flood?

Let the Church cut the cackle and get down to the 'osses (if it can).—Yours, etc., B. COOKE.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

"All the societies of the Far East are founded, like that of Japan, upon ancestor-worship. This ancient religion, in various forms, represents their normal experience, and it offers everywhere to the introduction of Christianity, as now intolerantly preached, obstacles of the most serious kind. Attacks upon it must seem, to those whose lives are directed by it, the greatest of outrages and the most unpardonable of crimes."—LAFRANCESCO HEARN, "Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation," 1905, p. 517.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon, Mr. L. EBURY; (Highbury Corner) Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. L. EBURY.

West London Branch (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD. Thursday, 7 p.m.; Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, F. PAGE, JAMES HART, C. E. WOOD.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Can the Human Race Survive?" Prof. G. W. KEETON, M.A., L.D.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., Mr. J. BARKER.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m., a lecture.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

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