

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVII—No. 27

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS
A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and His Master

THE study of objective nature is the chief characteristic of modern science. I do not mean by this that people did not study nature until modern times. Nature is not a modern discovery, however carefully it has been studied of late years. But science has become completely heliocentric, and instead of studying nature from the standpoint of human feelings and inclinations, it has learned to treat man as a part of a whole whose true constitution can only be understood when we put human feelings and prejudices on one side. It is this which is the dominant note of all modern scientific thought; a feature which has not only dismissed many speculations as fruitless and insoluble but has completely transformed our conceptions of the dual relationships of man and the universe.

These transformations have been great in all directions, but nowhere greater than in the field of religion. There was nothing inherently grotesque in our predecessors picturing the whole universe as specially designed for the benefit of man. The world was to them so little, and man so great, the immensities of space were as yet unexplored, the infinite wonders and complexities of the animal world unknown. Man bulked largest of all in the estimate of man, and there seemed nothing unreasonable in assuming that he was the object for which all nature existed. From this paradise of ignorance and egotism modern science has rudely and rapidly aroused mankind. It declares with an unfaltering voice, and supports the assertions with innumerable and undeniable proofs that nature is absolutely indifferent to the welfare of man, as man. In the structure of things man is only a fragment of a whole, a product of forces as unconscious in their operation as those which result in the formation of a crystal. His woes and joys, his hopes and fears, are nothing to nature save as they are considered as expressions of a universal world force. All his beliefs to the contrary are only the extension of his inward states to the outside world. But nature will, when carefully examined, countenance none of them. By innumerable proofs it shows that in the economy of things the life of a man is of no greater consequence than that of any other animal. To himself or his fellows the ill-doing or well-doing, the life or death of a man may be fraught with great promise or peril, but to nature at large it is but a new arrangement of complex forces. The indifference of nature to the one supreme fact established by modern science.

If we fail to trace in nature a concern for human well-being, what is that power which men have feigned behind nature, and which they have believed was actively concerned in securing human happiness, or producing human misery? I do not wish to discuss here the question of the existence of God, let that be granted for the time

being. I wish only to face, and to get others to face, the question of the indifference of God to human wishes or well-being—assuming that such a being as God exists. For I maintain that the indifference of nature once admitted, the indifference of God follows as a natural corollary. The day has gone when people could assume the existence of miracles as God's method of operation, it is admitted that if there be a God he operates only through the agency of natural law, and therefore in deciding the one question we have really settled the other.

Still, a belief is not killed, so far as the general mind is concerned, when science says it nay. Religious beliefs linger, not because there is evidence of their harmony with facts, but because they are already in possession of the mental field and so exercise a power to which they have no logical claim. Yet the maintenance of logically and scientifically worn-out doctrines and beliefs continues; the old language is still used, and people continue to talk glibly of a heavenly father ruling the world for the benefit of his earthly children.

Where are the proofs found of this heavenly guardianship? Certainly not in the animal world. No one looking at the whole scheme of nature can logically assume that there is any solicitude for animal well-being. For every animal born to live a normal period of time there are a thousand that are born destined to a premature death. Disease and starvation carry off myriads of victims. Heat and cold, pestilence and volcanic outbreaks demand their yearly tribute. Right through the animal world the picture is far more that of creatures created for the purpose of killing and to be killed, with a God enjoying the slaughter.

I know all what may be said of the gradual perfection of animal structure that is procured by the struggle for existence. This no one denies. A tiger benefits by dining off a sheep, but the injury to the sheep is none the less. The people "butchered to make a Roman holiday" in their dying gave pleasure to those who witnessed the scene, but the suffering is there none the less. Of the animal world one scientist says that one half of the animal world die in the contest of animal against animal. Among all the numerous instincts which exist in the animal world there is not one that has a clear and direct reference to species other than those concerned with its own being.

Is there any proof of the divine care to be found in the world of human life? Not a bit of it. Here, too, much that has been said with regard to animals may also be said of human nature. Science re-creates our ancestors for us at a stage that is little removed from the animal. We are shown, not by fancy but by reality, that the same struggle for existence that rages in the animal world has gone on with the different stages of human life. We are shown how progress, in its earlier stages, is affected by the cruellest passions, by superstitions and tyranny; how myriads of people have been offered up as sacrifices in the past and

are being sacrificed in the present, to the end that the survivors may dimly glimpse some of the simplest lessons of right social living. Surely we are justified—if the religious teaching be accepted—to have a right to expect a picture far different from what we actually see—and feel? If the religious outlook be accepted we have a right to demand that even though progress be slow, it should not be paid for by the sufferings and slaughter of unnumbered millions, each one of which has a clear claim to consideration, and even protection.

Even in the sphere of earnest human endeavour there is the same lesson that lies before us. Christian apologists are fond of telling us that much of that which appears as bad really ends in a measure of goodness. "In a measure of goodness?" Granted, but what are we to say to the evil that holds no promise of goodness? The full reply to this was well put by that master of language, Ruskin:—

"I do not wonder at what men suffer, but I often wonder what they lose. We may see how good rises out of pain and evil, but the dead, naked, eyeless loss—what comes out of that? The fruit struck to the earth before its ripeness; the glowing life, the goodless purpose, dissolved away in sudden death; the words half spoken, choked upon the lips with clay for ever; or, stranger than all, the whole majesty of humanity raised to its fullness, and every gift and power necessary for a given purpose, at a given moment centred in one man, and all this perfect blessing permitted to be raised, perverted, crushed, cast aside by those who need it most—the city which is not set on a hill, the candle that giveth light to none that are in the house; these are the heaviest mysteries of this strange world."

That is indeed a "mystery," but it is a mystery of man's own making. Unfortunately the handling of it fell into the hands of priesthoods who, generation after generation, found it to their interests to prolong the non-understanding of the people, and so laid the foundation of a mass of ignorances that formed the foundation of a priesthood that treated every step of understanding as a threat to their security. If "ignorance" had been recognised as identical with faith in God, and a trust in all priesthood, our understanding of the world would have been wider and better.

It should always be understood that "mystery" had its birth with the arrival of the gods, and will linger on so long as they hold a place in the human mind. A "mystery" in operation is only an unfounded theory based on irreconcilable facts, and worshipped by fools and self-seeking individuals. In the name of God even the search for truth has been treated as the greatest of crimes. To believe whatever is decreed by a priesthood is counted as the greatest of duties. Unbelief has been purchased at a far greater price than belief. Certain it is that not many followers of God have paid the price for freedom that the Atheist has. It is not difficult to become a favourite of God.

The fact is that nature is completely indifferent to human wishes or to human welfare. Man's life and death, his hopes and fears, his aspirations and degradations, are mere complexes of natural forces. The Theist affirms that Atheism robs life of its value. But this is because the quality of nature is settled first and theorised afterwards. The indifference to God does not—or should not—affect man and his possibilities. On the contrary, it is man's greatness that has grown in proportion as he placed the gods

on one side. The approach to God is with eyes closed and kneeling. The march of man is with eyes open and a determination to understand and to create.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

PAPAL TYRANNY AND INTOLERANCE

PIUS IX's "Syllabus of Errors" deplores the encroachments of contemporary States on the allegedly inalienable rights of the Church. It asserts that such authority as the church is still permitted, cannot be revoked. Also, the episcopacy possesses a natural and legal right to own property. This is a claim of primary importance, as it asserts, as Bury notes, "the principle of the Dead Hand" and protests against the practice of modern states to limit the acquisition of Ecclesiastical property—as, e.g., in Italy, France and Germany."

Nor are the clergy to be debarred from participation in temporal affairs. But, apparently on the advisability of direct priestly representation in Parliament, Romanists are divided in opinion. Restrictions imposed on the powers of the Papacy in France, Bavaria and other at least nominal Catholic communities are condemned in the Syllabus. Indeed, the Papal pronouncement in this matter is purely medieval and desiderates a clerical domination that no modern state could permit.

Moreover, the jurisdiction of Courts Christian in civil and criminal cases in which the clergy are involved should not be completely abrogated without Apostolical consent. Even when the Pope relinquishes certain rights, this surrender is in terms of a concordat occasioned by the stresses of the time.

It is also claimed that the Church possesses the exclusive right to select and direct religious studies. This denies the State's authority to supervise religious seminaries or exercise any control over the training of aspirants for the priesthood.

That the seat of Catholic authority should be confined to Rome and that the removal of the Pontificate from the Vatican to any other bishopric in any other city, even if decreed by a General Council or by the universal desire of the laity, must be forbidden. The Jew, Peter, is said to have been the first Pope, and to him Christ is supposed to have consigned the Keys of the Kingdom. Later this convenient Roman claim was confirmed by the Vatican Council.

The Syllabus, of course, insists on clerical control of the immature minds of children. It asserts that: "It is not the State that the whole management of public schools, in which the youth of a Christian State is educated, with the exception only in a qualified way of episcopal seminaries, can and ought to be assigned to the civil authority in such a way that no other authority can be recognised as having a right to interfere in the school discipline."

It is also urged that in a best appointed State, the Church cannot be excluded from all authority, administration and regulation in the instruction and training provided in schools and colleges. Furthermore: "Catholics cannot approve of a kind of education which quite ignores the Catholic faith and the authority of the Church, and which regards exclusively, or at least as its chief aim, only the knowledge of nature and the ends of secular (earthly) society."

As Bury pertinently notes, a common Catholic contention is that, before all else, the indefeasible rights of parents to select the kind of instruction their children receive, are disregarded in compulsory State teaching. Yet at the same time, it is claimed "that the Church is the universal educational institution established by God; and the parents therefore stand in their educational function under the guidance of the Church... Thus the parental right is insisted on merely to hand it over to the Church."

While sharing the advantages of State instruction, Catholics strive to secure seminaries over which the clericals exercise complete control, while imparting ultramontane instruction. The clergy are only too well aware of the truth of Alexander Pope's lines averring that the priest continues what the nurse began, and thus the child imposes on the man.

The Syllabus condemns ten errors concerning Christian marriage. Only in very exceptional instances can the Church consent to divorce. Also, the Church is justified in placing impediments to matrimony. She thus exercises her divinely given right and not a mere concession granted by the Secular Power. Moreover, the form of marriage ordained by the Council of Trent is essential to true wedlock, even when the "secular law" prescribes another form and makes validity dependent thereon."

No real marriage of Christians can ever become a mere civil contract, or matrimonial proceedings properly appertain to a secular court. As Bury intimates: "The sum of all this is the theory that marriage exclusively concerns the Church, and the State should have nothing to do with it—exactly like education. In both questions the ecclesiastical ideal and the principles of a modern State are diametrically opposed."

The Syllabus proclaims the ultramontane objective, but the less rigid Romanists realise that the medieval rules laid down in this document are no longer related to modern conditions of life.

The final paragraph of the Syllabus fully justifies intolerance, as well as its *alter ego*, persecution. We learn that: "It is still expedient in our days that the Catholic religion should be treated as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other worship whatsoever."

It was, therefore, not a good thing that in certain Catholic countries the free exercise of their worship was guaranteed by laws to persons settling in them."

For it is objected that this privilege, if granted to Rationalists and heretics, would lead "to the corruption of the morals and minds of the peoples" and the spread of the pestilence of indifferentism. These theses still testify to the ultramontane approval of intolerance. *Semper eadem*, always the same, is the Church's motto. Yet, in lands where Catholics are in a minority, is clerical policy to appear to be tolerant. But in practice, the toleration of dissenters is denounced in all Romanist States, while the modern principle of intellectual freedom is appealed to in Protestant communities only.

Ultramontane hatred and contempt for toleration is exemplified by Roh, a German Catholic cited by Bury: "'Tolerance,' he claims contemptuously, 'fair' word for superficial people, and the highest that three and a half centuries could produce! We tolerate for something that ought not to exist . . . For instance, every animal tolerates parasites, who pay for their tolerance by pricking and biting . . . Whenever the word tolerance is used, I feel a chill in my heart. It hides hate and bitterness! Away with *Toleration*! But O, divine charity remains always with us!' The inquisitors considered their work as charity."

Again, the Syllabus affirms that the Pope cannot and should not reconcile himself to, or tolerate liberalism, progress or philosophic Humanism. As this pronouncement proves, the Roman Church revels in the darkest of dark ages. Still such astounding antagonism to our most precious intellectual and moral possessions needed qualification. So Catholic apologists speak of true and false civilisation and progress, and pretend that the Church is not adverse to real civilisation. But as true civilisation is that which agrees with the principles and policy of the Vatican, the "liberal" Leo XIII, viewed modern life as a relapse into barbarism and freedom of thought and expression he stigmatised as immoral.

The Encyclical and Syllabus were joyfully received by the ultramontanes, while freethinkers and Protestants were once more

reminded that the Papacy remained in medieval darkness. To progressive Catholics it was a bitter pill and was obviously intended to be so. The liberal Bishop of Orleans strove to prove that only in extreme instances were freedom and progress unreservedly condemned.

In Belgium, nominally a Catholic State, the whole social structure reposed on the freedom of all religious cults to exercise their form of worship in their own way. So widespread was the anger and resentment that it was officially announced that the Pontiff's pronouncement neither attacked nor minimised political and religious liberty in Belgium.

Dupanloup, the Bishop of Orleans, modified the Pope's intransigence in a pamphlet for which he received a letter of approval from Rome. The ultramontanes, however, disputed Dupanloup's reading and dismissed it as an anti-Syllabus. Later, the Pope also approved Schrader's reading of the Syllabus which was diametrically opposed to that of the Bishop.

To a candid mind it seems strange that two interpretations so completely at variance could both be approved by the Vatican. But the explanation appears to be that the aims of the Syllabus are those of an ideal Catholic community, such as that so widely prevalent in the Dark and Medieval Periods, but which, unfortunately, in our degenerate days, is no longer possible.

What then, inquires Bury: "was the purpose or use of publishing and advertising the theory, which modern society was beginning to forget, and accentuating the fundamental antagonism between the Church and the modern State in such a way as to aggravate the suspiciousness with which the Church was regarded by statesmen? The explanation of this lies, I believe, in the spread of liberal ideas among bishops and clergy in France and Germany. The Syllabus was a blow aimed at liberal Catholicism: it was intended to crush the thesis that liberalism and modern constitutional liberty were good in themselves."

Thus, the Syllabus was a manifesto of the ultramontane and Jesuit parties, and it guides their obscurantist policy to this hour. The power to persecute is still the ultramontane desideratum. As Bismarck reminded the Catholic Centre Party in the Reichstag in 1884: "You say you are fighting for the freedom of the Church! What do you mean by freedom of the Church? You really mean the rule of the Church. As soon as your rule is endangered, you talk of a Diocletian persecution, slavery and oppression; ruling has been in your bones from old tradition."

T. F. PALMER.

SECOND PRESSINGS

"L'opinion publique, c'est moi."

—Baron de la Presse

"When Dr. Wand came out by the south-west door to re-enter by the main door, he was greeted with shouts of 'Traitor,' 'We protest,' 'Turn him out,' 'No popery,' by a crowd of 500 massed before the cathedral steps."

" . . . he made an appeal for unity in the church."

—From the "Daily Express," October 10, 1945, report of the enthronement of Dr. J. W. C. Wand as Bishop of London.

"Only Christianity can bring peace to a distracted world."

—From any priest, any parson, any bishop, anywhere.

Somebody, sometime, somewhere, is supposed to have said something about "a house divided against itself" but probably that is one of the things they have left out of the Bible, or the Prayer Book, or the New Testament, or whatever it is they do leave unpleasant things out of.

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"SEVEN AGAINST HEAVEN"

VII

"Ernest Renan"

THE 19th century has been, par excellence, the century of History and Science. That is, of *positive* knowledge of the Universe and of Mankind. For the first time in human history mankind came to *know*—not guess, as in all earlier ages—what he himself actually was, whence he came, and what sort of a Universe he really lived in. Where even the Greeks could only speculate, modern Europeans have deciphered, excavated, and explored. As a result of their labours, and of the vast acquisition of positive knowledge which has accrued therefrom, the epoch-making aphorism of the old Greek sophist, Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things": has now, also for the first time in recorded history, become an accurate measuring-rod of human achievement. The scientific and social potentialities which emerge from this new human status are absolutely incalculable and have barely even begun to be tapped.

Foremost amongst these novel perspectives which, to-day, open out before the dazzled eyes of the human race and of its progressive spirits, undoubtedly, we must place the destruction of the Supernatural of Religion, of every trace of the animistic (theological) conception of life. As long as man could not measure himself, because he did not know himself as he really was, he inevitably mistook shadow for substance, and, projecting the giant shadow of his own immaturity into the Universe, he prostrated himself before the distorted projection, and metamorphosed his own enlarged reflection into "gods" and finally into "God." We now *know* what past generations, including even the brilliant Greek sceptics, could only *guess*, that religion is an illusion of human immaturity, and consequently, that it has now become finally superfluous in the present era of man's dawning maturity. It is, to-day, only now a question of finding the appropriate *social* milieu in which the ascertained results of Science and History can effectively release mankind from his traditional inhibitions and phobias for religion finally to take its place amongst forever discarded illusions. Religion (i.e., Animism) to-day is in its final death-agony. And one cannot but suspect from their current utterances that its more intelligent representatives know this fact as well as we do!

The 19th century did not see the final end of the gods. But it dug their grave by making them scientifically and socially superfluous. And amongst all the men of the 19th century no one contributed more effectively towards this end, or understood better the fundamental drift of his age in relation to religion than did the great historian and philosopher, Ernest Renan. The circumstances and detailed knowledge of the modern age no longer permit the existence of "the universal men" of former more limited generations. Our age is, necessarily and inevitably, an age of specialists. But it was because Renan, who knew more and wrote better about the history of Judaism and of early Christianity than did anyone else in the 19th century, yet withal retained a deeper and more philosophical grasp of the essential drifts of his age in relation to the universal problem of religion, that we are justified, all things considered, in regarding him as the greatest of modern freethinkers. Frazer, and, perhaps, Gibbon, must have been still more learned, and Voltaire was a greater wit and, perhaps, an even more brilliant writer. But no one has yet equalled Renan in his unique combination of style, specialised knowledge, and philosophical insight.

The main circumstances of the life of Ernest Renan may be presumed to be so well known, if only from his own charming autobiography, that it is not necessary to enter into them in any detail. Born on February 28, 1823, in Treguier, in

Brittany, of Celtic stock, Renan was trained for the Catholic priesthood at the famous seminary of St. Sulpice, and early specialised in the study of Oriental languages, of which he soon became an acknowledged master. Under the impact of his studies of Biblical and Christian origins he gave up all intellectual assent to the dogmas of Catholicism, but retained a sentimental regard for religion which sometimes appears in his writings in a rather curious fashion. The rest of his life was devoted to a voluminous literature. Ernest Renan was, by any standards, a gigantic as well as a luminous author, and, in addition to his gigantic histories of Israel and of early Christianity—either of which would justify a lifetime spent in its composition—he wrote numerous works on literary and technical linguistic subjects, historical, literary, and philosophical essays, and philosophical disquisitions, and even political essays. One can, in fact, say that, if not a "Universal Man"—a now extinct species—Renan came as near to being such as any man of his century. His style, by universal consent, was superb; his knowledge was enormous; and his critical and analytical grasp of abstract ideas was of an unsurpassed keenness and subtlety. It remains only to glance at his most fundamental ideas.

It is, in the first place, most unfortunate that the name and fame of this very great writer should be known to the general reading public chiefly, or, indeed, often only by his "Life of Jesus," a sensational tour de force, which, indeed, did much to establish its author's popular reputation by the unprecedented furore which its appearance (1863) excited, but which is to-day in everything except sheer literary flair, a handicap to the deservedly enormous reputation of its illustrious author. As and when considered simply as a charming, if rather excessive sentimental historical essay heavily charged with "wishful thinking," the famous "Life" may be regarded as an elegant and learned contribution to the picturesque side of history. But at this time of day one can definitely say that it has little historical or scientific, and absolutely no biographical value. This last judgment is in no way affected by our individual judgment upon the admittedly difficult question as to the "historicity," or otherwise, of Jesus Christ—god or man. The fact is that even if we grant the historical existence of the person—or persons?—behind, and as a starting-point of the earliest Christian propaganda—and that subject is too vast and complex to enter into here—it is still impossible to affirm with any reasonable assurance what is fact and what is fiction in the Gospel narratives, and where, even making the hazardous assumption that it exists, the presumed kernel of truth is to be found. In no sense, not even in the rather loose sense of ancient biography, were the Four Gospels historical sources or reliable biographies. Quite the contrary! They were the reflections of uncritical churchmen, steeped in the superstitions of their age, upon an event which was already distant at the time that they assumed their present form, which, by all appearances, could hardly have been much before the middle of the 2nd century, when the Christian Church, as History has come to know it, was formed by the corporate fusion of heterogeneous and originally separate elements. The Gospels are, at best, "essays in portraiture" (as a modern historian has termed them); at worst, mere flights of wishful thinking without any basis in historical fact. In neither case do they afford any basis whatsoever for the kind of biography that Renan sought to compose. The simple truth is that no "Life of Jesus" either will or ever can be written. The basic materials for such a task simply do not exist. As a brilliant French successor (Salomon Reinach) of Renan has aptly observed, it is always impossible to use legends as sources for serious history. And it is precisely this that Renan did in his most famous, though far from his greatest work.

We have referred to this matter at some length, not out of any desire to disparage the fame of the greatest of all historians of Christian origins, but, rather, because there is nothing more injurious to the fame of a great man than the only too common

habit of bestowing praise for the wrong cause. Ernest Renan does not stand or fall by our estimate of his "best-seller," his "Life of Jesus." "Best-sellers" are rarely the best books! Renan has many and far more solid claims upon the reverence of posterity than his too audacious attempt to write a scientific biography of a god! His great "History" of Christian origins from their supposed inception in Galilee down to the death of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (180 A.D.), is a far more solid and substantial work. It is a magnificent work indeed and, even today, when it has so many rivals, probably still deserves its description as "the greatest history of ideas ever written." The transformation—one of the most extraordinary as well as momentous in all history—of an obscure sect of Jewish anti-Roman "Zionists" (in modern terminology) into the "Roman" Church, the pupil, rival, and, in time, successor of the Roman Empire, affords a superb scope for that unique mixture of literary, speculative, and historical genius, which was, par excellence, that of Ernest Renan. And the great historian has done full justice to his great theme. Whatever may be the case with Jesus, the Christian Church, at least, is a major historical fact: European civilization knows it to its cost! And the sureness of the historian's touch, the brilliance of his stylistic canvas, and the unmatched critical-analytical insight of the philosopher into the movement of ideas, makes the great history, despite inevitable corrections in scholarship, one of the greatest masterpieces of historical literature.

Nor was it alone! There is the great "History of Israel," self-sufficient to establish a magisterial historical reputation had the author written nothing else. Whilst the minor works of this encyclopaedic genius—many of them "minor works" only in the run into legion. Perhaps amidst this brilliant literary conglomeration we may hail as of surpassing pre-eminence two gems remote from the sphere of religion which, yet, always remained its major interest: his "Essay on the Poetry of the Celtic Race," in which this great Celtic writer portrays with infinite beauty and charm, the melancholy twilight of Ossian and "The Immortal Hour," the magical atmosphere of the Celtic bards. And—how different a field!—the famous essay "What is a Nation?"—that initial death-blow to all "herrenvolk" theories of racial arrogance, and which subjected the whole question of "race" to a scientific examination of razor-like keenness. To be sure, the essay would be memorable if only because its author, "a good European," predicted therein the inevitable supersession of nationalism and the proximate advent of a "United States of Europe." And then there is the famous "Prayer on the Acropolis." But why go on painting the lily?

The ultimate outlook of Ernest Renan on the Universe was essentially that of an evolutionist who always and at all times rejected that primal truth so poignantly expressed by Shakespeare, "there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Everything is finite, contingent, in constant flux, and "final causes" are mankind's final illusion. As the old Greek sage phrased it: "All things flow." A modern sceptical poet (Thomas Hardy) has poignantly written:

And as a Greek asked, I would fain ask too,
"Who knows if all this Universe be true,
Or an illusion of the gods, the Will,
To wit, some hocus-pocus to fulfil?"

This enigma, this brooding sphinx, always haunted Ernest Renan, and no one has written more feelingly or more powerfully of the enigma of mankind's existence; the why, whence, and whether. It forms the sublime conclusion of "The Prayer on the Acropolis":—

"The mighty river of oblivion bears us onward into a nameless gulf. O Abyss, thou art the one and only god! The tears of the peoples are true tears; the dreams of all the sages contain a portion of the truth. All is but symbol and dream here below. The gods, like mortals, have their day and get

them hence. It were not well that they should live for ever. The faith we once have held should never be a chain. We have done all that duty demands when we have carefully enrap it in the purple shroud wherein the dead gods sleep."

Ernest Renan died on the 2nd October, 1892, in his seventieth year. His last words were reminiscent of the ancient Hebrew "preacher" of "Ecclesiastes" (Renan translated "Ecclesiastes" into French) with whom the great Breton had a strong intellectual affinity: "The Heaven and the Earth abide."

And so, we may add, they will still abide, when the last theologian has written the obituary of the last god!

F. A. RIDLEY.

STATUS AND ORIGIN OF "PHONEY"

THE origin of the word "phoney" is still rather obscure, although it has long passed into common usage as an exceedingly useful and apt word expressively and pungently used to refer, as we all know, to any circumstance, thing, condition or position which can in any way be regarded as being false or untrue, or not "according to Cocker."

Born in that seething cauldron of laughing gas, America, as it was, we have adopted it to express and meet the definition of "sham," "fictitious" and "counterfeit." The German word "Ersatz" (Synthetic) can also be safely construed to convey the same meaning. Yet despite the fact that, like many other idioms hailing from America, it has to-day become so very commonplace and familiar on the movie screen that not one in a thousand amongst any cinema audience either queries its use or bothers one moment to think about its antecedents; there yet appear from time to time some people who have tried to ascertain how, where and when it really originated. Getting to the answers will prove extremely difficult, because, as with Topsy, it seems to have "just grown."

My authorities, here at home, in my bookcase, "Rogets Thesaurus," Fowler's "Modern English Usage," and the "New English Dictionary" fail to mention the blessed word, but it appears in the addenda for the Concise Oxford Dictionary in relation to "sham," "counterfeit," "fictitious," and it would seem to be certain that the word itself was first recorded at some period during the year 1919, though quite possibly it was in use for some time even before then.

Several interesting theories have floated about concerning the exact origin. From what I can gather a Mr. H. L. Mencken some years ago is reported to have suggested that it derives from "Forney," a maker of sham jewellery. According to that expert on English slang, Mr. Eric Partridge, there exists a much more ingenious theory which, if acceptable, goes to show that it was originally an adaptation derived from an eighteenth or early nineteenth-century English cant term, possibly introduced by some gypsy tribe. Most of you will know that "Cant" is the recognised vernacular belonging to denizens of the underworld and of tramps, beggars, nomads and gypsies.

Mr. Partridge holds that "fawney" was an old cant term for a "shoddy ring" or any similar worthless bauble, and he also cites the expression "fawney rig" as a ring-dropping confidence trick formerly practised by vagrant sleight-of-hand performers at country fairs and feasts.

It is now generally known that since the first world war and for a good thirty years before that, cant, which itself constituted largely as a semi-secret language, was not slang at all, has received a very large influx of Americanisms.

In conclusion, I can quote one, if not two, examples of the use of the word such as "phoney crip" (an ill or crippled hunchback or beggar) and "phoney man" (a peddler of shoddy or cheap imitation and usually worthless jewellery). Both these terms appear to have been in use by 1920, but more probably they were employed before then.

Ed. H. SIMPSON.

ACID DROPS

We see, with great regret, from some notes from Mr. J. A. Cummings, that the "Daily Worker" is in a serious situation owing to the steady increase of the cost of paper, wages, etc. We here have no special interest in the "Worker," but we have a strong feeling concerning those who "stand alone," whether we agree with their doctrines or not. We agree with Mr. Cummings that the "Worker" expresses a serious purpose and should "have a legitimate outlet." We Freethinkers know better than most what this struggle, year after year, means in terms of determination and devotion to a belief. There should be enough men and women to help, not entirely because they agree with the teachings of the "Worker," but because it has a real belief in something. And nowadays there is not too much of that about.

Dr. G. K. A. Bell is a parson. Actually he is the Bishop of Chichester. But being a Bishop he naturally does not draw the line at a falsity in the interests of his position. He begins by saying there has been "a real landslide from the Christian religion in all parts of England." But he then adds that this is because of the "great increase" of a landslide from Christian churches in all parts of the country." That is quite true, although it swung from the extreme on the one side to another. For he has discovered that accompanying the rejection of the churches there has gone on a decline of decent behaviour. And that is where the bishop makes a slip. Wars will have their period of bad social life wherever and whenever wars rage. The rot of Christianity began centuries ago. It has been continuing ever since. More, it will keep on. All gods die sooner or later, but no one knows the date. The Bishop should study the deaths of other gods. He will then be prepared for the death of his own.

In his recent book "The Claim of the Church of England," the Archbishop of York, as a method of saving the established Church, asks for machinery by which the Crown could assent to proposed changes without referring to Parliament. Well, that would be a very good plan by which to end the "National" Church, and it might end the hereditary monarchy. An hereditary monarchy in itself is foolish enough, but to have a State Church under the complete control of a monarchy would set Nonconformity on fire. The Archbishop says that if his plan cannot be agreed with, all that is left will be "disestablishment and disendowment."

The "Greenock Telegraph" covers about a column and a half of space in telling the world that it really does not like the "Freethinker." The writer—J. L. Dow—spends much space in telling the world that the "one and only" has lost its power. But we believe there never was a time when the "enemy" did not assure the world that the "Freethinker" was out of date, etc., etc. We think that the writer spends rather too much time in assuring people that he finds only material for a laugh in our journal. "Methinks that Mr. Dow doth laugh too much." There is a note of bitterness in his gaiety.

We see that the schoolmasters of the L.C.C. have ordered only 30 per cent. of the canes used in the schools 20 years ago. That is good news in a time when the world war has lowered the level of life. It is also an answer to those of the Church body who are trying to shift the responsibility for the social set-back as due to the decline of belief in the Churches. They play that game as hard as they can, but it pleases only fools and rogues. Essentially the world is not worse than it was. Brutality and robbery after a war is common, but the recovery is certain. Lose or win, we all have to pay our part of the costs. We pay heavily for war—and also for our representatives of God.

But the children and the cane. That is something of first importance. We have always held, in the press and on the platform, that generally speaking a teacher who cannot control a class without a cane should get back to street sweeping or some suitable occupation—say making bullets for the next war. So we are pleased to see an interesting article by Mr. Leslie Brewer strongly opposing the use of the cane in schools. He also gives

us an interesting list of schools in other countries which object to whipping. Here are the names, but I believe there are more. They are all State schools. Poland, Norway, Belgium, Italy, Yugoslavia, France, Czechoslovakia, China, the Netherlands, Brazil, Japan, and now Germany. There are other places, but it should be a lesson to us. It seems that in Wales thousands of boys and girls still have a daily caning.

The Vicar of Holy Trinity, Penge, has discovered that people turn to God only when in tight corners. Well that seems to us what one would expect. Theoretically man can do nothing for God, and again theoretically, God can do much for man. Besides, our Vicar forgets that if God stands as the parent of human beings it is he who should do what he can for his family. According to English law parents are legally compelled to see that children are properly treated, under penalty of being punished. The Vicar seems to have got the wrong end of the stick. It is God that is open to an indictment, not man. He is just a parent who is not looking after his children properly.

God's character, we are told, is vindicated not by a series of interferences with natural order, but by the order itself, less by the process than by the end. Thus, destruction and disease are facts, but a more perfect form of life emerges from the carnage. Hatred and love exist, but the latter is the more powerful factor. All this, and more may be granted, but it does not meet the real issue. If God's goodness is shown by their removal of obstacles to development, what is shown by their existence? Is it carelessness or cruelty? A tiger benefits by dining off a sheep, and the cosmic process is justified—to the tiger. And in the evolutionary process it is wildly untrue to argue that perfection is gained through suffering—at least, so far as the individual is concerned; and pleasure and pain are never other than individual. Some suffer and others profit. Consider the generations of men that have lived cherishing degrading superstitions, practising brutal customs, butchering and being butchered, before their descendants began to glimpse a more humane mode of life. How can we excuse the cruelty of such a process because someone benefits at the end? Surely, if there is a God, we are entitled to demand that progress shall not be bought at so frightful a price. The Atheist does not deny the process, he does impeach its morality.

We have praised Paine so much that it is with extra pleasure we gladly cite this from one who hides under the mask of "Ignotus." He says:—

"Think of the lies that have been built up on the dead bodies of renowned unbelievers. Think of the slanders on dying men—how Voltaire passed away in a torment of remorse; how Paine died drunk and blaspheming; how Roman recanted; how Huxley repented in his last hours of all that he had said and done in his life of thought and research. I think of Thomas Paine . . . I wonder what foul deeds this miscreant committed? It happens that I have his biography before me, and I find that he was a humanitarian, a hero on the battlefield, a valiant reformer, a high-minded philosopher, a self-denying practitioner of the Golden Rule, one who loved his neighbour, and devoted his strength to, and risked his life for, his fellow men . . . Paine was the author of the sublime appeal to the American nation to abolish slavery, and he fought heroically that the black man's fetters should be struck off . . . But he wrote the "Age of Reason," and "Tom" Paine, the righteous man, has ever since been marked out for unsparing condemnation by other righteous men who forgot the Christian precepts of mercy, toleration and forgiveness."

Soon we hope to say more of what this great writer and worker did, not merely for a country, but for the world.

Our Houses of Parliament are filled with very, very brave men; we have their own words to prove it. But one would think that at a time when it is important to be economical in every direction that the Government would show its courage by arranging for a million pounds to rebuild some of the Churches damaged during the war. But one wonders whether it is courage or fear at the opposition of the Churches.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

BENEVOLENT FUND N.S.S.—The General Secretary, N.S.S., gratefully acknowledges the following donations to the Benevolent Fund of the Society: A. Hanson £1, Robert Walker 4s.

Mr. W. CLUNAS (Johnstone).—You must not expect to see in "The Freethinker" articles with which you can *always* agree. We often publish articles with which we do not agree, as long as they are interesting and well-written. It would be a sad and barren world if we only published opinions with which everyone agreed.

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

We had intended to deal with the B.B.C. and "What I Believe" series. On second thoughts we resolved to wait until the series are complete. We shall then be able to see how far the B.B.C. has developed fair play and honesty. Professors Russell and Haldane did splendidly, and showed what they could do in absolute freedom. But merely to state differences is not enough. And it is almost impossible to make the general public appreciate Atheism unless something is said about religion. No man can show his power as a boxer if he never comes within arms length of his opponent. So far it looks as though the B.B.C. is playing some tricks. We hope we are wrong. That we shall see later. But we know the B.B.C. when religion is concerned.

The aftermath of war as seen by the poet, Shelley—and common sense:—

"War is a kind of superstition, the parade of arms and badges corrupts the imagination of men. How far more appropriate would be the symbol of an inconsolable grief, muffled drums, and melancholy music and arms reversed, the livery of sorrow. War waged from whatever motive extinguishes the sentiment of reason and justice in the mind. The motive is forgotten or only adverted to in a mechanical and habitual manner. A sentiment of confidence of brute force and in a contempt of death is considered as the higher virtue, when in truth they are merely the means and the instruments capable of being perverted to destroy the cause they were assumed to promote."

It would not be correct to say that there has been of late a revival of Thomas Paine and his work. For there was never a time when in spite of all the villainy manifested by Christians and politicians that Paine was not on the air. He was lied about in a way that has never been surpassed. But he fought for the liberty of the French, he struggled hard for the betterment of the English, and he played an important part in the creation of the "United States of America." Such a man could not be buried. But Christian malignity and his championship of the poor never forgave him. In this country, at least, it was the Freethinkers and the most ardent social reformers who never forgot this great reformer. Even the creation of a European re-planning, for which Churchill has credit, belongs to Thomas Paine.

Messrs. J. T. Brighton and J. Clayton are busily engaged on their usual summer lecture circuit in Lancashire, Durham and Northumberland. Both report successful meetings, with opposition and sometimes noise, and the movement has gained many friends as a result of the work for which the Executive of the N.S.S. is responsible.

The leaflet on "Sunday Cinemas" issued by the N.S.S. appears to be doing good work in the general campaign for Sunday opening. Supplies for free distribution will be sent to any district where a poll is pending and readers can help by sending information, with offers of help in distributing, to the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London W.C. 1.

The "Age of Reason" and "The Bible Handbook" are in the hands of the printers and should be ready soon. The actual date will be published in these pages.

We have just received "The Free Mind" No. 2 (Watts and Co.). The Editorial suggests that the journal is essential for the encouragement of the formation of University Rationalist Societies. Dr. Kenneth Urwin maintains that "in the last resort, the interests of rationalism and university ideals are the same—the free exercise of reason."

Other contributors include Basil Bradlaugh Bonner and Philip Allan.

The "Free Mind" is a quarterly, subscription 1s. 8d.

We are asked to say that Mr. Norman Charlton is now living at 72, Collva Street, Burnley. Those interested will please note.

THE BIBLE AND DICKENS

THE Bible is the secret of England's greatness. This is the only secret on record that defies discovery; but we know the assertion is true, because we saw it in a Christian paper. It is equally certain that all great men are Christians—or, at least, they had Christian mothers. Personally, we do not know of any English genius in the whole realm of art and science who does not belong to a Christian country. In face of this stupendous fact let every Atheist hang his head, and no longer deny that Moses described his own burial. Let him admit it like a man, and renew his spiritual Fire Insurance.

Some time ago a writer in this journal referred to the Holy Bible as a work of humour. At first we thought he had been "too much in the sun." Then we doubted the condition of his soul. There seemed something so heterodox in the idea. But we have thought about it, and prayed about it, and sworn about it, and the upshot of it all is—we agree with him.

The *fin de siècle* Miss Miggs may denounce the discovery as "pagin," and the discoverer as concentrated "whitening and sepulchres." But if the Bible is not a humorous production, whence did men like Dickens derive their inspiration? It is true

that Mark Twain only perceived one joke in the Bible, but it is to be feared that Mark did not search the scriptures in a proper spirit. The process may be an unconscious one, but if humorists do not obtain their ideas from Holy Writ, they must get them from some other source, which is absurd on the face of it. To use an expressive Gallicism, the thing is not "God possible." If the Bible does not contain humour, it is not the only fountain of genius—a blasphemous conclusion at best.

Arrived at this point, we felt that we were immortal. We experienced the honest, touching pride of the physician who has laboriously discovered a new disease. We had unearthed a new theological difficulty!

We immediately put the principle in operation, taking Charles Dickens as our subject. We set to work, and traced some of his happiest passages to their only possible foundation. Our success, "for which the Lord be praised!" (as dear old Pepys used to say when he ascertained the state of his accounts), is best exemplified in the following parallelisms:—

THE BIBLE

My kingdom is not of this world (John xviii. 36).

I, even I, am he that comforteth you (Isa. li. 12).

The kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt. x. 7).

Be not righteous over much (Eccles. vii. 16).

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up (John iii. 14).

I am meek and lowly in heart (Matt. xi. 29).

Be not faithless, but believing (John xx. 27).

Her ways are ways of pleasantness (Prov. iii. 17).

How long will ye vex my soul and break me in pieces with words? (Job xix. 2).

I will pour out mine indignation upon thee, I will blow against thee in the fire of my wrath (Ez. xxi. 31).

All we like sheep have gone astray (Isa. liii. 6).

Seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink (Luke xii. 29).

Mine eyes are upon all their ways (Jer. xvi. 17).

But the red-vested genius of Gad's Hill went further. In the course of our researches we were startled to find that many of his remarks are really oblique commentaries on Scripture. In short, Charles Dickens—humorist, realist, sentimentalist, weaver

DICKENS

MRS. GAMP: Don't ask me to take none ("Martin Chuzzlewit," 19).

CODLIN: Codlin's the friend, not Short ("Old Curiosity Shop," 19).

MICAWBER: I have now an immediate prospect of something turning up ("David Copperfield," 27).

If you make a brag of your honesty to me, I'll knock your brains out (D.C., 13).

CHOLLOP: We must be cracked-up, sir... We are a model to the airth, and we must be jist cracked-up, I tell you (M.C., 33).

URIAH HEEP: I'm a very 'umble person (D.C., 16).

CODLIN: Take my advice; don't ask me why, but take it (O.C.S., 19).

MANTALINI: She... coils her fascinations round me like a pure and angelic rattlesnake ("Nicholas Nickleby," 34).

MR. VENUS: Don't sauce me, in the wicious pride of your youth ("Our Mutual Friend," i. 7).

QUILP: You and I will have such a settling presently; there's such a scratching and bruising in store for you, my dear young friend (O.C.S., 11).

MISS MOWCHER: What a refreshing set of humbugs we are to be sure, ain't we, my sweet child? (D.C., 22).

SQUEERS: Subdue your appetites, my dears, and you've conquered human nature (N.N., 5).

JENNY WREN: I know their tricks and their manners (O.M.F., ii. 1).

of plot, analyst of nature, mover of tears—was a Bible commentator! This important fact has been hitherto overlooked, because he did not announce his intention. He commented *sub rosa*. Real art is art concealed. That is why the sterling merits of our English painters are so hard to find.

The following remarkable instances will show with what wonderful adroitness Dickens was able to seize upon the inner meaning of a text. In the elucidation of dubious passages our commentator has no equal:—

THE BIBLE

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son (John iii. 16).

The very hairs of your head are all numbered (Matt. x. 30).

Save me, and I shall be saved (Jer. xvii. 14).

Worthy is the lamb that was slain (Rev. v. 12).

The Lord shall smite thee in the knees and in the legs with a sore botch that cannot be healed (Deut. xxviii. 35).

About the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea (Mark vi. 48).

Swear not at all (Matt. v. 34).

He that believeth on me believeth not on me (John xii. 44).

Keep that which is committed to thy trust (1 Tim. vi. 20).

Having eyes, see ye not? (Mark viii. 18).

Of course such instances might be almost indefinitely extended. We might even enlarge the scope of the present article. The writings of Dickens fairly bristle with veiled allusions—if we may be pardoned a *mélange* of metaphor—to matters controversial. He must surely have been thinking of Methodist prayer-meetings when he wrote in "Great Expectations" (chap. xxvii.): "I put it to yourself, sir, whether it were calculated to keep a man up to his work with a good hart, to be continually cutting in between him and the Ghost with 'Amen!'" And in Betsy Prig he evidently typified the blatant unbeliever of our day, who, in spite of constant allusions to the Deity by fervent Christians, has the "Bragian" boldness to declare: "I don't believe there's no such a person!"

DICKENS.

ROB THE GRINDER: What a thing it is to be perfectly pitched into with affection like this here! ("Dombey and Son," 52).

MANTALINI: What's the dem'd total? (N.N., 21).

SAM WELLER: That's what I call a self-evident proposition, as the dogs'-meat man said when the housemaid told him he warn't a gentleman ("Pickwick," 22).

SAM WELLER: It's the seasonin' as does it! (P., 19).

JERRY CRUNCHER: It's hard in the law to spile a man, I think. It's hard enough to kill him, but it's very hard to spile him ("Tale of Two Cities," ii. 2).

JERRY CRUNCHER: I leave you to judge what a damp way of earning a living mine is! (T.T.C., ii. 2).

ROGUE RIDERHOOD: That's knowing the obligations of a Alfred David, ain't it? (O.M.F., i. 12).

MRS. GUMMIDGE: Everything goes contrary with me (D.C., 3).

CAPTAIN CUTTLE: A parting gift, my lad. Put it back half-an-hour every morning, and about another quarter towards the afternoon, and it's a watch that'll do you credit (D. and S., i. 19).

SAM WELLER: Yes, I have a pair of eyes, and that's just it. If they was a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power, p'r'aps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door; but, being only eyes, you see, my wision's limited (P., 34).

THE ORIGINALITY OF BUNYAN

READERS of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" will have observed that the characters therein exhibited are personified abstractions of mental and moral qualities provided with appropriate names, and subjected to a variety of experiences, sometimes highly tragical. But Dr. Thomas Warton in his "History of English Poetry" says that about the beginning of 1506 Stephen Hawes, a native of Suffolk, and sometime lord of the chamber to King Henry VII, finished a lengthy poem entitled "The Passtyme of Pleasure or the Historie of Graunde Amoure and La Bal Pucel," which was issued in 1514 by Wynkyn de Worde.

Respecting the above poem, Anthony à Wood, the celebrated antiquary, dolefully observes: "Such is the fate of poetry that this book which in the time of Henry VII and VIII was taken into the hands of all ingenious men is now thought but worthy of a ballad-monger's stall." My reason for thus associating Hawes' poem with Bunyan's work is that, although the two writings differ in theme, they agree in treatment. Both are allegorical, and all the marks above noticed as occurring in the case of Bunyan occur also in that of Hawes. As Bunyan issued his P.P. in 1678, and Wood's observation appears in one or the other of two works which he published in 1684 and 1691-2 respectively, it is clear from his testimony that at the time in question a man of Bunyan's humble class would find no difficulty in getting access to Hawes' poem. Moreover, Bunyan in his Treatise on the Parable of Dives and Lazarus says: "When I was in the world . . . thought I then . . . Alack what is Scripture? Give me a ballad, a news-book, or George on Horseback, or Bevis of Southampton. Give me some book that teaches curious Arts, that tells old Fables."*

I am not aware that any suggestion of Bunyan's having imitated Hawes has ever been made, and I do not affirm that he did imitate him. My purpose is only to indicate certain facts, and to leave their appreciation at the reader's discernment. It is my duty also to add that there are many things in the work of Hawes that to Bunyan when he wrote his "Pilgrim" would, if he knew of them, have appeared either morally bad, or theologically false; but, supposing that the poem of Hawes suggested to Bunyan the plan of his *magnum opus*, he could without difficulty have fitted it for his purpose by the simple method of suppressing what he regarded as offensive details. The use of this means enabled the Christians in the early days of their political ascendancy to convert heathen Temples into Churches.

Warton gives an elaborate resumé of Hawes' poem, and my quotations from it. Here is a brief outline of his account.

A beautiful lady named Fame directs Grandamour to the Tower of Doctrine, where he will meet with the Seven Sciences, and have his first sight of La Belle Pucelle. This edifice, situated on "a craggy rock," is a splendid castle, described with Oriental magnificence. The marshal is Reason, the sewer Observance, the cook Temperance, the high steward Liberality, and so forth. Grandamour explains to Doctrine the purpose of his visit. She introduces him to her daughters, the Seven Sciences. In the apartment of Music, the last of these ladies, he finds La Belle Pucelle, with whom he is "instantly captivated," and to whom he tells his name and declares his passion. After dancing with her he retires "deeply in love." On the morn he joins her in a delicious garden, and urges his suit, which at first she seems to reject, but finally accepts with the proviso that he will have to overcome numerous monsters, and face many dangers before she is his possession. He then sets out upon his adventures. Lack of space excludes many details, but it would be sinful to conceal that he cut off Falsehood, Imagination and Perjury, the three heads of "a most formidable giant." After this achievement a lady named Perseverance brings him a shield from his

beloved, and takes him to pass the night with Comfort, her cousin, at a moated grange by a wood. Next morning he sallies forth, and slays a seven-headed giant "after a bloody battle." Five ladies with significant names who had been incarcerated for a year by the slaughtered giant accompany the victor upon his way. After traversing "a dreary wilderness full of wild beasts" they espy afar off in a glorious land the palace of La Pucelle, but "a tempestuous ocean" divides them from it. In this is an island where dwells a frightful monster; two ladies sent by Patience arrive in a ship named Perfectness and conduct the hero to the island, where the monster is dispatched by a method no less singular than efficacious. The happy lovers speedily meet again, and next morning their wedding is celebrated "according to the Catholic ritual by Lex Ecclesia." This event, says Dr. Warton, ought to have concluded the poem. But the author evidently thought otherwise, for he gave a continuation which is very far from being a success. Bunyan's second part is censured by some critics, but it is vastly superior to the one that Hawes made.

As regards the signification of Hawes' poem it would seem that the hero, Grandamour, symbolises the perfect gentleman, and that the heroine, La Belle Pucelle, is the ideal of conduct which such a person would cherish and pursue throughout his life. To gain knowledge, to discipline the mental faculties, to subdue ignoble passion, to deliver the feeble from their oppressors, in short to resist evil and to do good, this appears to have been what that ancient bard conceived as the whole duty of man, and sought to exemplify through the conduct of his adventurous knight. How mean in comparison is the character which Bunyan attributes to Christian, the foremost person in his work. This wretched man has no other aim in life than to save his despicable soul from imaginary torments in a future world. For this he abandons his wife and children; and for this alone he endures afflictions and faces perils. Such a belief engendering such practices is, as Carlyle describes Methodism,† "but a new phase of *Egoism* stretched out into the Infinite." Whether virtues are ultimate values or merely relative existences concerns man but little. It is enough for him that the best of his kind respond to them as they do to the song of the lark and the grace of the fawn, although these things so beautiful to the human ear and the human eye may be totally devoid of charm for beings different from humanity in their constitution.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

* See "A Chronological Critique on Bunyan's Writings and Genius" by the Rev. Robert Philip, prefixed to a Selection of Bunyan's Works, published by T. Nelson, Paternoster Row, London, 1845, p. xii. Warton names "Sir Bevis of Southampton" along with two other "metrical romances," and regards it as "highly probable" that they were "modernised" in the reign of Henry VIII "from more ancient and simpler narratives."

† Past and Present, B, 2, C. 15.

WIDOW-STRANGLERS' HEAVEN

THE island of New Britain sits in the Pacific Ocean, shaped like a wartime sausage that has burst its bounds in the frying.

Draw a horizontal line for latitude 6 South, and that's the approximate northern limit of the widow-strangers' country; then draw a vertical line for longitude 150 East, and that's the centre, with the government station of Gasmata a few miles to the right.

Officers shuddered when told that they had been assigned to Gasmata. The average annual rainfall was 250 inches—20 feet 10 inches of water, most dropped during the south-east monsoon, from April to September, when the sun is peeping at England and southern winds are trying to reach it and the earth is giving them a diagonal course.

I reached Gasmata in July, 1928. The Pacific rolled in, the wind cutting the tops off the billows as they crashed against

Gasmata, a coralline island close to the great island of New Britain. Night and day for weeks Gasmata shook as the Pacific hurled itself against the cliffs, as if trying to remove the island from its path. Night and day for a week it rained, and one only knew night from day by the increased darkness at night and a lessening of the wind.

The district was troubled in the west. The coastal tribes were being raided by the inland widow-stranglers near Moewe Harbour. I was warned to be very careful as the inlanders had blow-guns. (Later I saw the blow-guns. They were used for catching small birds by most unsportsmanlike methods. The blow-gun was something like a chimney-sweep's pole, lengths of bamboo joined as required. The bird is singing in a tree; the hunter stealthily places the dart in the gun and adds the required lengths of bamboo, edging towards the bird; then, whoosh! goes the hunter's breath and the bird falls with the dart stuck in its body.)

Inland they were singing "We love the old religion." As men died their widows were strangled, often after a chase by pious fools. Shocking murder it was in some cases, especially if the widow was young and wanted to live.

I was not cordially received, most darted into the jungle as my party approached. Here and there I made contact and warned the people that I desired a religious reformation. I added that the white man regarded widow-strangling as murder, and murder was a hanging job. (Later the Government gave me a nice new gallows at Gasmata, a masterpiece of the carpenter's art.)

I was nearly three years in charge at Gasmata, during which the old religion lost much of its force. But when I left, some hot-gospeller must have revived the old religion, for some widow-stranglers were captured and hanged.

In 1930 Professor Felix Speiser, of Basle, came to Gasmata. The local natives bind their children's heads, causing elongation of the skull, an exophthalmic goitre expression about the eyes and many cases of epilepsy. Despite that, they are very intelligent. They were abandoning circumcision because the white man did not universally practise it; but they strenuously resisted the efforts of the Christian missions to establish themselves in their area. That made them excellent field material for the anthropologist, Professor Speiser, who measured the heads of my Sepik River headhunter prisoners, his speciality, but was foiled by the distorted skulls of the local inhabitants.

While Professor Speiser was at Gasmata a miracle occurred. A notable died nearby, and this provided an opportunity for close observation of the funeral ceremony, complete except for the strangling of the man's widow. The natives demonstrated what would have occurred but for the presence of a white government. (I am convinced that primitive religions require months, sometimes years, of observation before religious beliefs can be understood. Unlike the Church of England, they have no Thirty-nine Articles of Faith and other printed rules and regulations.)

The corpse was propped up. Its widow (sometimes widows) held the man's boar's tusks (a war device) in her mouth, while she danced under the long loin-cloth of beaten bark. The dance finished, the woman lay between the legs of a relation while other relations strangled her with the loin-cloth. Her body was thrown into the grave with that of her husband; his pigs were killed and eaten; his coconuts cut down; his root crops taken up and eaten; then his house was burnt and his other possessions distributed amongst the mourners.

It all seemed to be too horrible to have any meaning. But it was an act of great religious importance. It was months later that I learned that the spirit had been sent to paradise.

Ari, a native constable from the widow-strangling tribe, was, I noticed when we visited native villages, a theologian. He was always examining the churches (sorry, ghost-houses) of the indigenes and describing the practices to me and to other

members of my party. I was always trying to find a god of the status of Jehovah amongst the South Sea Islanders. Ari said that it was *Nut* (Noot) who controlled the widow-strangler's universe. The English Methodists believed that *Kalou* was Jehovah in Samoa; but the German Catholics introduced *Gott* to the South Seas, maintaining, probably correctly, that Jehovah had no equal.

When Ari was helmsman one night of the small schooner with which I patrolled the south New Britain coast, and I was sitting near with an eye on the compass, he explained the significance of widow-strangling. The sea was smooth; the engine chugged rhythmically; the cool wind blew off a river; and the faint light from the binnacle shone on Ari's conical head and his organ-stop eyes.

It was simple. The dead man's spirit in paradise (the air above Cape Bali, west of Gasmata) needed all that the man had possessed in life, with the exception of his children. His widow was killed and her spirit flew to his; his house rushed out of the flames to him; his pigs and other foodstuffs passed on to him via the digestive tracts of the mourners; and his other possessions moved to him only in the symbolical sense, in that their ownership changed. *Eureka*, Ari was right!

A short time before going to Gasmata I had served on the Sepik River, where skulls filled the ghost-houses, the spoil of war. That was ghastly enough. But the thoughts at Gasmata of the many thousands of women in its history who had been strangled, the loneliness and the rain combined to make it the most depressing place on earth. In 1942 it fell to the Japanese, who hastily retreated when the Americans landed at Arawe. I feel certain that the Japanese would have given it away at any time during the south-east monsoon. I would have willingly done so, despite its mile of hibiscus hedges and its thousand coconut palms.

BERTRAM CALCUTT.

Milson's Point, New South Wales.

A CATHOLIC FAMILY

FOR six months I have lived with a Catholic family. I am a munition worker in an area where "digs" are scarce must take the accommodation he can get. This, and the fact that hunting for "digs" is about the most thankless task imaginable, explains why I lived on a very low cultural plane for this period. A keen interest in sociology prompts me to set down objectively and at some length the life habits of this Catholic family. This article gives the bare outline of the longer work.

The family consisted of Mrs. Blank, aged 46, whom I gathered had lived apart from her husband for many years; her son, Fred, aged 21, and Dolly, his 19 year-old wife. Another son, Arthur, aged 22, was in the army but managed to get home every week or two. The eldest child, Phyllis, aged 26, was married and had a year-old baby. She lived a few doors away and came in several times a day. In addition to the human members of the family, two Scotch Terriers were kept. In a sense the dogs were the most important feature of the family, around which almost all activities revolved. Two more spoilt and disgustingly reared animals I have never seen.

All members of the family doted on the Scotties. Every visible manifestation of affection was directed towards them. They were in turn petted, cajoled and wooed with loving words, from morning to night. The first thought of any member of the family on entering the house was the precious welfare of the dogs. No valuable animals at a zoo could have had more attention.

The dogs were fed well at every meal time and were plied with tit-bits ranging from chocolates to sausage rolls between meals. Often they were so gorged with food that the most tasty morsels between meals were refused. The dogs buried chocolate biscuits

toast, rusks, etc. in the upholstery of the two easy chairs of the living room. When I first saw the dogs burying food under the cushions I did not comment upon it, but my surprised look prompted Dolly to say, "They like to do it; it gives them pleasure." Similar indulgence was shown the dogs when they tore to shreds the upholstery on the arm of an armchair. But shocked as I was by these stupid indulgences, worse was to come.

It would be wrong to say that the dogs were never exercised; once or twice a week they would be taken for a short walk. In summer no doubt they got more exercise. But during the cold weather so solicitous were the family for the comfort of the dogs that more often than not they were not allowed outside the house at all. Sometimes Mrs. Blank would open the kitchen door leading to the garden and beseech one or other of the dogs to go outside to relieve itself. But if the wind blew cold or rain was falling, the dog would sit stubbornly on the mat. Mrs. Blank's usual remark was, "Poor Bonny (or Dinah), it's too cold for you to-night. Never mind." Hence the dogs relieved themselves all over the house, several times a day, usually on one of the mats in the living room. The more noticeable messes were cleaned up fairly quickly but in some instances urine and faeces were not cleaned up for several days.

The living room linoleum was never, to my knowledge, polished. And that was true of the rest of the house. Occasionally the rooms were swept out hurriedly, but only the living room was dusted properly. I had a wireless set in my room and it was dusted in six months by the Blanks. I dusted the furniture in my room myself occasionally and, much more often, made my bed. (By accident or design my bed was often in the same place when I returned from work as I had left it in the morning. I did not really mind this, for the Blanks did not, or would not, make the bed properly. Their idea of bed-making was to cover the pillows with bed covers. Any care in tucking in sheets or blankets at the bottom of the bed was, apparently, unnecessary.)

The feeding habits of the Blanks were a little crude. Plenty of food, of a sort, was always available, but apart from Sundays, when a joint of meat was well cooked and served with vegetables Mrs. Blank, cooking, in any real sense, was not practised. Mrs. Blank was a transport worker employed on six to two and nine shifts alternately. She usually cooked herself some plain hot dish on her return from work late at night. Dolly, who stayed at home and did most of the housekeeping knew nothing about cooking when she married. Her mother—also a Catholic—had never allowed her to learn, she said. After a year of married life my impression was that Dolly did not want to learn even the simplest kind of cooking. Her every dish was composed basically of potatoes, cooked, moreover, in one way or another. Dolly produced many dinners for me during six months when the meal consisted of sausages and chips. She and her husband often eat huge platefuls of chips alone, helped down with sauce or vinegar. On very rare occasions a rice pudding and custard and prunes would be produced, with some pride, as a rare event, as second course. Generally cakes or biscuits, followed by tea, completed the "dinner."

Minor points of table etiquette did not worry the Blanks. I remember once saw sugar or salt spoons in their respective containers. Tea spoons, generally wet, were used to help one get to sugar; one's fingers, dirty or clean, sufficed in lieu of a spoon. Butter or margarine was almost always left in its grease-proof paper and put on a plate. Butter dishes were a much trouble. Similarly milk jugs were rarely used and milk was served from the bottle. In this connection I was most surprised to learn that before the war cow's milk was never drunk by the Blanks. They all preferred tinned condensed milk!

J. D.

(To be continued)

CORRESPONDENCE

SYNONYMS!

SIR,—Under "Acid Drops" in "The Freethinker" of 15th June there is this statement:—"The decline of religion has been quickened by the world war." I wish to register my disagreement with this, or rather, with its implication that war is detrimental to religion. The reverse is the truth. Where there is war there is fear, and where there is fear there is religion. In fact, war and religion are practically convertible terms, "synonyms" in fact, and inseparable allies. At the outbreak of the world war there was a rush to the churches and the priests took full advantage of it. This was quite natural. Hitler was God's instrument of punishment for our manifold sins and wickedness. The existence of this mutual pact was in fact disclosed by Hitler himself. Since the end of the war, however, there has been a distinct decline in church attendance, a process well explained and expressed by a now neglected poet:—

Midst pleasure, plenty and success,
Freely we take from Him who sends;
We boast the blessings we possess,
Yet scarcely thank the one who lends;
But let affliction pour its smart
Quickly we quail beneath the rod;
With shattered pride and prostrate heart
We seek the long-forgotten God.

Yes, indeed! And you will find the same process repeating itself in the next war for Christian civilisation. Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON, Bingley.

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LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Feminism—a Retrospect," Mr. H. L. BEALES, M.A.

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