

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXVII.—No. 30

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Roger Bacon and the Awakening of Europe

TO the student of modern European history there is no period so full of interest, so replete with fascinating problems and character studies, as that between the close of the thirteenth century and the opening of the seventeenth. It is but 300 years all told, a mere episode in the life of a nation; yet what a contrast is the end of this period to the beginning! The thirteenth century shows us the Church powerful in Europe, reigning without a rival save for the declining Mohammedan power in the south-eastern portion of Spain. The feudal system was still unshaken, and the people, as a people, had scarce begun to exist. In science the Ptolemaic system, with its flat and stationary earth, still held sway, and all cultivation of the physical or mathematical sciences was open to the charge of necromancy or magic—a charge that meant a long imprisonment, if not death. Literature was practically unknown, the legends of half-mad monks being the chief material supplied to such as were able to read, who were as few as they could well be. Ignorance, despotism, and superstition reigned on all hands, and with them their accompaniments of almost unbridled evil, misery, and degradation.

The end of the sixteenth century lands one in a new world. In science the labours of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo had completely shattered the conception of the universe upon which Christianity rested, and had laid the foundations of a structure that was to be completed in our own day by Darwin, Lyell, and Spencer. In philosophy the names of Descartes, Da Vinci, Montaigne, Bruno, and Bacon mark the inauguration of new methods of thinking that were bound to prove fatal to the claims of the Church. In religion the revolt against the paralyzing power of Rome was an accomplished fact; and, although Protestantism was at bottom quite as illiberal as the older form of Christianity, its success rendered religious unity forever impossible, and to that extent made for a wider intellectual life. And in literature, to take England only, the names of Sydney, Spenser, Jonson, Shakespeare, and Marlowe are brilliant indications of the new world of life that had replaced the reading of monkish legends—partly the ravings of dementia and partly deliberate imposture.

It is difficult to name a precise date for the commencement of an historical movement; but I do not think that we shall be far out if we select the thirteenth century as giving the opening of the attack upon Christian beliefs, and of the downfall of a Church that had ruled Europe, almost unquestioned, for over 800 years. From the beginning of the fifth century the Church had dominated Europe, and before its growth and rule the learning and civilisation of antiquity had nearly disappeared. The museums, libraries, and colleges of Rome, Alexandria, and Athens had all been

burned or otherwise destroyed; the civil and municipal independence of the Roman people had vanished; the whole status of society, mentally, morally, and socially, seemed to sink lower with the passing of each generation, until the predicted end of the world in the year 1000 seemed but a fitting conclusion to a society that was in the last stages of social degeneration.

It is usual for religious historians to attribute the inconceivable ignorance of these centuries and the decay of the ancient learning to the barbarian invasions; but I have never been able to find adequate justification for such a statement. The barbarians who overran the empire in the fifth and sixth centuries—itsself an event that could not have occurred had not the stamina of the Roman people been sapped by the growth of theology—the barbarians were far from unteachable, as their subsequent history proved. Indeed, it was Theodoric the Ostrogoth who made an attempt, and for some time a successful attempt, to revive the prosperity and learning of Rome during its last days. And, secondly, it would seem that the barbarians underwent a marked deterioration after their contact with the Christian communities.

It is impossible to relieve Christianity of the lion's share of the responsibility for the ignorance and social degradation that existed from the end of the fourth to the fourteenth century. From the earliest times Christian leaders had set themselves strenuously against all Pagan learning, and there was none other. "Philosophy," said Tertullian, "is the patriarch of all the heresies"; and under the actual persecution of Christianity ancient learning flickered out its life in the barbarous murder of Hypatia (414) and the closing of the Greek schools of philosophy (529) by the Emperor Justinian. Henceforth the Church ruled, "and the disastrous influence she exercised on letters and science may be estimated by the simple fact that during the nine centuries of her undisputed dominion not a single classic writer, not a single discoverer whose genius enlarged the intellectual horizon, not a single leader of modern thought, arose to dignify her reign." The darkness of the Dark Ages was deepest when the power of the Church was least disputed; that darkness began to break when the doctrines of the Church began to be called in question; the dawn was coeval with an insurrection.

From the long nightmare of the Christian ages Europe was aroused by the influence of Mohammedan civilisation, brought about chiefly through the Crusades, but assisted also by commercial and scholarly intercourse when Christian vigilance could be evaded. There is scarcely a writer of note and ability from the year 1000 down to the close of the fourteenth century who did not owe his learning directly or indirectly to the Mohammedan universities. It was in this manner that Christian Europe was once more brought into contact with the fertilising literature of Greece and Rome; it was in the classics of the Pagan

world as preserved by the Mohammedans, and in the civilisation reared by the followers of the prophet, that Christians found the impulse to development that their own creed had failed to supply them with. The world had to take up the story of civilisation where Christian bigotry had dropped it centuries before, leaving the eight or nine hundred years that intervened a hideous nightmare, with hardly a redeeming feature to relieve the haunting horror of its remembrance.

All great movements have their precursors, and in this instance the first clear indication of the new spirit that was moving over the chaos of Christian barbarism was given by the Franciscan monk, Roger Bacon, the most commanding figure of the thirteenth century; in many respects the most remarkable character of the Middle Ages. Born at Ilchester, in Somersetshire, about 1214—the precise date of his birth as of his death is uncertain—he must have belonged to a wealthy family if we are to judge from the amount of money he is said to have spent in acquiring information. How far he was representative of a school it is impossible to say; at all events, there would have been few in Christendom that equalled him in the thoroughness of his grasp of a scientific method, or his knowledge of physical science. Educated at Oxford, the memory of him is still preserved in the name of Brasenose College. The brazen nose is all that remains of the wonderful brass head that Bacon is said to have constructed, and which possessed the power of emitting sounds similar to those of the human voice. Many wonderful stories are told concerning this head, but the only clear result is that it fastened on Bacon the dangerous charge of commerce with the devil. Roger soon exhausted all that Oxford had to give him in the shape of knowledge, and, as was then the custom for promising students, travelled to Paris and carried off high honours there. But neither Paris nor Oxford could give to a man of Bacon's mental temper all that he desired. It was in acquiring and disseminating this wider knowledge that he paid to the Church the toll it has levied upon all thinkers and reformers who lived in the days when its power for evil was still uncurbed.

The difficulties in the way of such a student in the thirteenth century were enormous. From the Christian world around he could get nothing. To turn to the Jews and Mohammedans was to invite the charge of heresy; to study the stars was to hold intercourse with Satan; to know more than the ignorant rabble of monks around the most unforgivable of crimes. Books were often not to be obtained, and, when obtainable, only after much difficulty. Bacon himself complains: "The philosophical works of Aristotle, of Avicenna, of Cicero, of Seneca, and other ancients, cannot be had without great cost; their principal works have not been translated into Latin, and others are not to be obtained in ordinary libraries or elsewhere. The admirable books of Cicero de Republica are not to be found anywhere, so far as I can hear, though I have made anxious inquiry for them in different parts of the world, and by various messengers. I could never find the works of Seneca, though I made diligent search for them for twenty years or more." Few words, but they help us to realise vividly the intellectual vacuity of his age and the immense injury done by Christianity to the world of letters.

Unable to find what he required in Christendom, Bacon turned elsewhere. Moslem and Jewish doctors became his

instructors—whether by personal contact or by writing only is not clear, save that their influence is plain. Through him we again trace the influence of the East on the West, and it is for that reason that I have selected him as the incarnation of the new spirit. Discouraged by twenty years of disappointing labour, ruined by the money spent upon purchasing of books and manufacturing of instruments, disgusted at the ignorance of the monks, whom he describes as knowing no more of the properties of a circle than its power to keep away evil spirits, despairing of making any impression upon the thick wall of ignorance behind which Christianity had entrenched itself, Bacon joined the Order of St. Francis, among whom books and study were looked upon as hindrances to a pious life.

His new masters forbade him to write anything under pain of imprisonment, and Bacon does not appear to have disobeyed for some time. But the craving of his mind was not to be suppressed. "Some few chapters on different subjects, written at the entreaty of friends," called down the attention of his superiors. Deprived of writing materials, Bacon was sent to Paris in 1257, like a badly-behaved schoolboy, to await the pleasure of the General of his Order. His pleasure was soon expressed. To prison Bacon went, and remained there for ten long, weary years, deprived of writing materials, books, instruments; the first in modern times to be persecuted for a philosophic heresy; the first also of that long list of victims that Christianity sacrificed upon the altar of its ignorant idolatry in the futile attempt to suppress the awakening European intellect.

(To be continued.)

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AS A NUCLEUS OF WORLD GOVERNMENT

IN the Battle for Peace, the main enemies are apathy, ignorance and prejudice. Those who are neither apathetic, ignorant nor prejudiced are mostly rogues, and if the battles against the first three are won, the rogues can be mopped up afterwards.

If our strategy is sound we can afford to make tactical mistakes and still win through, but if it is unsound no amount of tactical brilliance will redeem us. The strategic objective of all peace-builders should be to establish a nucleus international government that will live and grow. We have to create a new nation—a nation of nations, not a league of nations.

Even if every citizen in a certain geographical or ideological area could be persuaded to endorse a Charter of Rights and a Federal Constitution, this would not necessarily ensure the success of the Union. The League failed because the States Members would not work its Covenant. True, a continuous series of near-miracles is required if a covenant between sovereign states (e.g. UNO) is to function. It is far less difficult to make a popular constitution work, but it is none the less true that it is not enough to bring an international government into being; it must also be made to operate. We must also recognise that the constitution will not be established at all unless the prospective constituent peoples believe it can be made to succeed, and for this they will have to feel a high degree of mutual trust.

Will the peoples of Europe trust each other to operate an international constitution, when many of them have not yet learned to wield a national one, or to unite their warring factions within their respective frontiers? Would, for instance, a maritime nation surrender sovereignty over its navy to an international authority derived from an electorate of which a majority have never even seen the sea? Will a nation that is at present responsible for the defence of a quarter of mankind

scattered over the face of the earth, surrender its arms to a metropolitan body on which its own sister nations are not represented? Can the people of this island afford to cast British foreign policy—such as it is!—upon the troubled waters of clashing antipathies and hatreds into the linguistic whirlpools of Europe? A majority of our fellow citizens might answer these questions in the negative; others would perhaps be prepared to put them to the test of practical experiment.

The practical course would appear to be to build world unity on the unity which already exists. If the member nations of the British Commonwealth were to discuss among themselves the establishment of a Commonwealth Parliament for Commonwealth defence, the proposal already mooted on several occasions over the radio and in "The Times" and other newspapers, could be revived, namely: that our friends in Western Europe should be invited to join in at the outset, since their defence problems are inextricably involved with our own. (Incidentally, their voting power would serve to redress the balance between the United Kingdom and the various Dominions. In a community where all are minorities, minority rights are better respected.)

Such an initial federation would be a promising nucleus, for it would have "induction points" all over the world for the recruitment of new members. It would have friendly "bridge-heads" on the Continent of Europe. Canada and Australia would be links in its liaison with the U.S.A. Once the United Kingdom joined in, the whole of the rest of Europe could be expected to come in without fear of German preponderance, and with every prospect of extending a genuine welcome to Russia if she has yet prepared to participate.

It must be remembered that the admission of every new member to any nucleus federation would set up new stresses and strains, which must be taken up and stabilised before the process is repeated. This may be one reason why so few of the existing national federations have expanded in this manner.

Eminent statesmen have proposed that the "geographical unit" of Europe should also be regarded as the political unit most likely to constitute the nucleus of a world federation. At its Eastern frontier would partition Russia; this alone demonstrates the absurdity of looking upon Europe as a natural political entity. And how could a European nucleus grow? By "absorbing" Russia, the Middle East and North Africa? Would such expansion make membership look more attractive to the other nations still on the waiting list?

One can sympathise with proposals for a nucleus to consist of the British Commonwealth and the U.S.A., or for a democratic federation open to any country anywhere in the world, despite considerations of geography and defence strategy, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the first step in each of these schemes should be to try to thrash out a common British Commonwealth policy on the question. Otherwise, if the Government of Great Britain and Northern Ireland takes the initiative it will be apt to give the impression that we are prepared to sacrifice the Dominions for Continental or American ties.

A common argument in favour of European federation is that all the other wars have started there." Even if, for the sake of argument, we accept this premise, we need not accept the implication that the next war, if any, will start in Europe. Besides, if we always applied the remedy where the pain was, the Faculty of Medicine would be in sorry disgrace today.

Once created the federation must live and grow. But its actual creation also has a bearing on our problem. A horse that is led to the water is more likely to drink than one that has to be driven. The federation that is least difficult to create will be most likely to flourish. Let us explore the lines of least resistance; otherwise the task will prove to be immeasurably beyond our strength.

If this country were to be divided over the issue of international government as India is divided over the religious question, we should have failed indeed. But the idea of a federation of the British Commonwealth and the democracies of

Western Europe enjoys wide support. The series of pamphlets written by Lionel Curtis, Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, which culminated in his book "World War, its Cause and Cure"\* has been welcomed—in at least six languages—by a large and representative section of the press, ranging from Commerce, Agriculture and Shipping, to the various political and religious creeds, from the organs of the Protestants, Catholics, Freemasons, Christian Scientists and Atheists to those of the Empire and Crown Colonial associations, and in the London, Provincial, Suburban and foreign press. In no instance is the need for better Commonwealth unity disputed.

It would perhaps be a fair criticism of the Curtis school of thought to say that some enthusiasts give the impression that the British Empire has a greater responsibility to uphold world peace (and a greater responsibility for the two failures) than have the other Powers. Such zeal may be excessive, but it errs on the right side. If we all considered it our duty to strive to accomplish more good than our neighbours the world would be a better place than it is.

And the fact remains that the British Commonwealth is pledged to help maintain world peace, but is inadequately organised for the purpose of pulling its proper weight. The 130 million people in U.S.A. speak with one voice to the world, as do the 170 millions in the U.S.S.R. The 80 millions in the self-governing territories of the British Commonwealth speak with six dissonant whispers, or sometimes with a U.K. voice and several dutiful echoes. Due to our lack of organic unity we have been inadequately equipped to aid in the prevention of two wars which our apparent disunity had invited.

Mr. Churchill and Field Marshal Smuts, instead of preaching to Europe, should help us put our own house in order, the better to fit ourselves to urge reforms on our European friends. Britain's most signal contribution to world order would be to embrace the principle of federal union that already unites the States of America and binds together the Republics of Soviet Russia. Let us consign to the limbo where it belongs the perverted principle of "a league of sovereign governments" which has twice in this century deluged the world in blood.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

\* Oxford University Press, 7s. 6d.

## CHRISTIANITY AT WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

THE following is an extract from "Die Burger" of October 10, 1945. "Die Burger" is a Nationalist daily printed in Cape Town.

The words are those of South Africa's New Order ersatz Fascist, one Oswald Pirow, in defence of some otherwise obscure pillar of the Dutch Reformed Church charged with defamation of character. This advocate of the "Holy" Father's New Order, vide Quadragesimo Anno of May 15, 1931, was trying to persuade the Transvaal Division of the Supreme Court that any person who believes in Communism or Trade Unionism (of the genuine kind) is, *ipso facto*, guilty of blasphemy, and that every Christian is therefore in duty bound to blacken his character. Personally I entirely agree with this opinion which seems to me to be logically flawless in view of the paramount importance of a Christian God in any Order, old or new, which tolerates organised robbery and murder. The following is a rough translation of Herr Pirow's legal effusion:—

"The Act of Union stipulates the acknowledgment and maintenance of the Christian faith in South Africa, and this is further determined by Act 9 of 1925, which acknowledges the sovereignty of God and declares blasphemy an offence. A person who advocates atheism in South Africa therefore technically commits a crime. The Church is part of the machinery of State, and the court must undoubtedly take into consideration the opinion of the three Afrikaans Churches as expressed by the highest bodies, the Synods."

No one can deny from this that Herr Pirow's views are fully supported by his Christianity.

JOHANNA DU TOIT.

## ACID DROPS

The Roman Catholic, press and Churches, have always on hand a fine stock of ready-made angels, miracles, and miracle-workers. So we are not surprised to learn that, as there are many Roman Catholics in Russia, the "Mother of God"—there seems to be more certainty of the mother of Jesus than of his father—has decided to give Russian R.C.s a helping hand. That sounds good and in order—people in trouble, angels in attendance, and ultimately everything will be set right in Russia.

The drawback is that we can never be quite certain that the heavenly helpers are really at work. Generally, these alleged miracles from heaven turn out to be very cheap tricks. If these heavenly visits were to non-believers, we might be more certain on the matter. What about a visit direct from heaven to the "Freethinker" offices. These angelic visits are very badly arranged!

The "Universe" puts on record the fact that a boy aged 8 was run over and killed by a lorry. Also the boy had just taken his first Holy Communion. We regret the killing of the poor little boy, but we are wondering where lies the moral, and what is it like? It seems to report that the child should have been lifted into safety. But he died—just as a non-worshipper of God might have died. Does it mean that the regular guardian of R.C. children was off duty or that he was careless, or that he was looking at the interesting sight of the Crown princess taking a walk? We are much puzzled. The things are badly managed. It would have been better if some people had seen the child floating to heaven on the shoulders of "Our Lady." The thing was bungled, and there will not be joy in heaven. In fact, the angels may be punished for not doing the trick better.

"The Church Mission to Jews" is very hard up. The Society wants at least £17,000. Unless values have gone down considerably, £17,000 will not go far to convince a Jew that Christianity is the true religion. It is many years since we paid close attention to converted Jews, but it then was marked as the most expensive conversion on record. And even when a Jew is converted he does not always wear well. He gets back to his old habits.

A sixty-year-old Spanish lady came to a church, joined in the praying, and was at once cured of loss of voice and paralysis of the right leg. It was all done by the carrying of a sacred statue. Now we may, seriously, accept the fact of the cure. Without any saints, any prayers, or any miracles. Any respectable doctor—and some not respectable—will tell the world that this kind of trouble and cure is as common as daylight. The Catholic Church is, as usual, building on the ignorance of the people. The same kind of cure is practised, and complaints are removed, by hundreds of "quack" doctors. The only difference in the cases is that for this method a travelling "quack" may be summoned, but when it is done in the interests of a religion or a Church, nothing is said by the authorities.

Not many people will take "The Daily Express" on religion very seriously. We hasten to say that the remark applies to most of our other papers. It is a question of business and "lugging the mugs." Any medical man will tell whoever cares to inquire that men and women may quite innocently mimic a special disease, and get rid of it by a sudden shock. The people who see Jesus in their sleep, or hear him when they wake, are not of necessity dishonest; it is a form of complaint that has deceived many otherwise sober people, and will deceive them again. The shame is that our religious leaders should use these well-known self-deceptions in the interests of religion.

But the humbug becomes unmistakable when we get the newspapers telling us that the British people have lost their habit of regular church going. That is one of those humbugging nonsensicalities that so many papers have not yet outgrown. Historically, England never was an official Christian country. It was just a nation that enabled religious bodies to act in certain ways. The Church was permitted to enjoy power and practise deceit, but that was all. England never was and

is not a Christian country. That was settled in the House of Lords. And we are glad and proud that we had a hand in it.

As to the British having lost the habit of regular church-going we are afraid we cannot put that down as due to a slip of the mind. The facts are so well known to be otherwise. In the early times, people went to church because the priests threatened them, and their Lords and owners ordered their semi-slaves to church. As things went on, the order to attend church was made stronger, and that alone gives the lie to our scribbler. And to-day the increase of those who do not go to church covers nearly three parts of the population. We will not say that the "Daily Express" does not tell the truth as regards church-going; we just put it down to the "Daily Express."

In one of our religious papers, a "Parish Priest" says that books for sermons and instruction should be written more simply for the people. He has not rightly diagnosed the complaint from which the Churches are suffering. It is not really difficult to understand what the Bible says and means. It is, in fact, the understanding of what the Bible has to say that is part of the cause for empty churches. There is a story of an old Scotch lady who was asked whether she really understood all that her well educated preacher said. She replied at once, "I would not be so impudent as to understand so great a preacher." If that "Parish Priest" will look more carefully into the situation he will find it is because the people do understand the significance of the religion he is preaching that is emptying the churches.

The Home Secretary, Mr. Ede, recently declared that he "was gravely disturbed" at the amount of money spent on taking polls for and against Sunday cinemas. He pointed out that the Lord's Day Observance Society had received a bequest in consequence of which, "these polls had been contested with a great deal more vigour than before," and naturally the other side was obliged also to spend money. He hoped "these practices" would cease. It is not quite clear whether Mr. Ede does not like merely the spending of the money, or the continual loss of votes by the Lord's Day Observance Society—but, of course, the whole thing is a crying scandal. What the Home Secretary should do is to allow any cinema to open on Sunday, and the people who don't want to go can stay at home or go to church, or do anything else they like, so long as they stop interfering with their neighbours. That is the rational thing to do, and Mr. Ede knows it. And, anyway, it will come to that.

The Bishop of Sheffield is a very dare-devil kind of Christian leader. He has appointed a woman, and an unmarried woman, to the post of "Domestic Chaplain." This is the first time a woman has been appointed to the post, but the Bishop explains that there is no question of the lady "performing anything that is a ministerial or priestly function." Well, St. Paul said that women should be silent in Church, and Jesus, when he selected his followers, never picked out a woman. But neither objected to them helping them. But to place a woman on the same level, that was too, too much.

Speaking in the Liverpool Cathedral, the Rev. C. R. Claxton complains, as do other parsons, that "Thousands who had worshipped in that church were now turning away from God." We can appreciate the discomfort, but the Canon may be comforted in the fact that this is the complaint that is heard all over the country. This is not wholly due to the war period, it is the normal consequence of people being wide-awake where religion is concerned. To take a very old, and much-used, saying, "You may fool some people all the time, but you must not think that therefore you will be able to fool the people all the time."

At Edinburgh the outlook for the Churches is so black that it is proclaimed something must be done by new methods to bring back people that the churches have lost. But the people are all right, it is the religion that is wrong. The only thing the Churches can do is invent a new religion. The old one is shrinking very rapidly. The Scotch may be slow in making up their opinions; but when a resolution is made the Scot is not easily fooled.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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For "The Freethinker."—H. R. Strange, £1.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, and not to the Editor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

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Picture 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

Printing paper is to be cut, and that means less space for news. We suggest that some space might be saved if papers took it in turns to give us a picture of the Princess Elizabeth. We have seen her in all sorts of dresses, standing and sitting with a man she will marry, we have seen her on horseback, sitting in a car, etc. One of a family of very ordinary character. If advertising must go on every day, why cannot the papers take it in turns, one picture of the Princess every day, but in a different paper? It would be one way of saving space. We feel certain that the Princess would not object. They must be tired of these continuous exhibitions. We hope that while in Scotland the Royal Family will have a quiet holiday, and a good one, and keep calm.

What a lot of downright lying took place concerning the National Day of Prayer recently ordered by the King. Of course we know that these things do not come from the King, although his name was given. It was really one of the capers of the Churches. We said this at the time, that the whole of the arrangements were pure bluff, and a friend now sends us a copy of the "Maidenhead Advertiser" for 11th July which justifies what we said concerning the bluff. There were 100 empty seats at the Church of St. Mary. Only seven of the members of the bodies attended. A large number were not even represented. The Vicar of St. Luke's said that the people were probably excited by the Ascot races. And so the record has only one or two announcing good "houses." The Roman Catholic Church claimed a full house, but if truth were known they obeyed orders. We said at the time people were getting tired of these pantomimes, and we were right.

The following appeared in the "Daily Telegraph" of recent date.

"Giordano Bruno of Nola has been called the Italian knight errant of philosophy. He travelled to England in 1583 and stayed for two years. He found Oxford as full of pedants as Geneva.

He was befriended by Sir Philip Sidney, and he thought highly of Queen Elizabeth's mental equipment. During his visit, his tract championing the theories of Copernicus was printed in London in 1584.

A rare survivor of this "Cena de la Coneri" appeared at Sotheby's yesterday in a further portion of the Leicester Harmsworth library and brought £120, £20 more than it cost in 1921."

It was very brief, but it consisted of one of those great and daring men who paid for efforts to restore the love of knowledge and science, Giordano Bruno. His name will never be forgotten among those who loved learning and hated ignorance and cruelty. He was one of the greatest men of his day. It was well said of him by our own Tennyson that "Bruno was a poet holding his mind ever open to new truths. He was author of our modern philosophy. He died the most desolate of deaths." They were words we should not forget.

Bruno was burned at the order of the Church in 1599. He was charged with heresy, along with twenty others, and his judges and accusers were substantially one, he was, after cruel torture, declared guilty and he was burned to complete a Christian holiday. The character of the man was shown by the last words to his brutal body of priests that he was not so afraid of death as were his tormentors. Time has justified his contempt for the "great lying creed." Today, Bruno lives as one of the great men of his time who helped to weaken the great curse on civilisation, while he grows greater with the passing of the years. We hope to give a fuller account of Bruno and his influence later.

We are asked to issue the following notice:—

The West Ham and District Branch meet regularly on the last Tuesday in every month at The Loco Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford, E. 15. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 29th July, commencing at 8 o'clock. Local Freethinkers and friends will be given a cordial welcome. For further information write the Hon. Secretary, F. G. Warner, 83a, Dawlish Road, Leyton, E. 10.

We hope that Freethinkers in this district will note the above. There are enough friends in this district to make this branch of the N.S.S. one of the strongest. We hope to have "good tidings."

The second R.P.A. Annual Conference will be held at Wadham College, Oxford, from Thursday, July 31, to Monday, August 4. Dr. Joseph Needham, F.R.S., head of the Division of Natural Science, UNESCO, is the President and Prof. A. E. Heath, M.A., is Vice-President. Prof. Gilbert Murray and Prof. B. Farrington are included in the list of lecturers.

## LUCRETIVUS

(Continued from p. 263)

THE best English edition of Lucretius is H. A. J. Munro's, which includes a close and vigorous translation and voluminous notes. His translation, however, can be better appreciated by Latin scholars than by ordinary English readers. A good free rendering from one language to another should read like an original work, and the greatest admirers of Munro—"the man who restored the Latin language to Britain," as Adolph Wagner, the eminent German Latinist, called him—could not say this of Munro's rendering. In this article I am responsible for all translations to which no name is appended, though I have been guided throughout by Munro's work. I wish also to express my indebtedness to J. D. Duff's edition of the fifth book and to John Masson's "Atomic Theory of Lucretius," as well as to the latter's various articles in the "Classical Review."

"On Nature" is written in six books and contains between seven and eight thousand lines. Lucretius is the interpreter of the Epicurean philosophy. All things consist, ultimately, of atoms and void. Nothing can come from nothing. Creation has never taken place and annihilation will never take place; what we call destruction is merely change from one form to another. Mind and soul are functions of the body, and when the latter perishes they cease absolutely to exist. Belief in the interference of gods in the destiny of the world and the fear of death keep men in a state of constant mental perturbation. Epicurus is the divine philosopher who first brought mankind freedom from all violent passions and superstitious fears.

"When humanity lay helpless on the ground, a foul object crushed by the oppressive weight of Religion, who showed

her head from the heavenly regions threatening with hideous aspect us poor sons of a day, it was a Greek philosopher who first dared to raise his eyes to her and to withstand her face to face. Him no rumours of gods, no thunderbolts, no sky with threatening murmurs checked; nay, all these urged him on and emboldened him the more in his desire to penetrate the firm-set barriers of nature" (i., 62-71).

A few lines further on he refers to the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father, King Agamemnon, when about to sail against Troy—a subject which had been dealt with frequently by the Greek tragedians, and had evidently made a strong impression on Lucretius. The recorded sacrifice of Iphigenia is probably quite legendary; but such superstitious barbarities were certainly known to the Greeks at one period of their history. F. A. Paley says: "The Artemis of Tauri and Brauron, and the Diana of Aricia, required, like the Moloch of the Phœnicians, to be glutted with human sacrifices." The concluding line of the following passage is, in the original—

"Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum"—

a line which has perhaps been more quoted than any other in Latin poetry:—

"At the threshold of my inquiry let me dispel your fear that it is impious and unholy to take reason for guide in these matters. On the contrary, it is Religion that has ever been fruitful in foul and heinous deeds. You know how at the port of Aulis, the leaders of the Grecian host, the chosen heroes, defiled the altar with Iphigenia's virgin blood. As soon as the fillet binding her maiden tresses had been arranged in equal lengths down each cheek, and she beheld her father with downcast eyes beside the altar, and the priests close by him hiding the sacrificial knife, and her countrymen weeping at the sight, in dumb terror she collapsed upon the ground. Nought did it avail her at this cruel crisis that she first gave the king the name of 'father,' for the Grecian leaders raised her trembling to the altar, not to the accompaniment of hymeneal song, as was meet for her just in early womanhood, but that she, pure amid the impure, might be the sorrowful victim of her own father's stroke, and that thus the fleet might sail with fair wind to Troy. Such are the infamies to which Religion prompts mankind" (i., 80-101).

Lucretius nowhere states that there are no gods, or that he does not believe in their existence; but he asserts again and again that the hypothesis of over-ruling deities is quite unnecessary to account for natural phenomena. How far either the Roman poet or his Greek master believed in the deities to which they refer is a moot point. Munro and Masson consider it as certain that both Lucretius and Epicurus believed in the actual existence of gods—mere ciphers though they were as far as the control of nature is concerned. Mr. Walter Scott (afterwards Professor of Classics in Sydney University, N.S.W.), in a brilliant article on "The Constitution of the Epicurean Gods" in the "Journal of Philology" (1883), says: "The question of the relation of the gods of Epicurus to his physical system has been discussed so often and with such unsatisfactory results, that it is now very generally given up as insoluble." But the three following passages seem to indicate Lucretius' complete rejection of the Theistic position:—

(1) "Since we are forced to the conclusion that nothing exists outside the sum of things, there is no limit to the totality of existence. In whatever part of the Universe you take your stand, in every case you leave the sum of things as illimitable as before in every direction" (i., 963-967).

(2) In ii., 652-657, he seems to assert that the gods are personifications of natural objects: "If anyone chooses to call the ocean Neptune and corn Ceres, and to make a wrong use of the word 'Bacchus' by calling wine by that name, we do not object to his also calling the earth the mother of

the gods, provided he does not corrupt his mind by that foul thing, Religion."

(3) In v., 1,161-1,193, the origin of belief in the gods is ascribed to images seen in sleep. Men when awake see noble forms which appear to them again in dreams, but of wonderful size. Also, men see the heavenly bodies and observe the regular succession of the years, and not knowing by what causes these phenomena happen, they attribute them all to gods whom they believe to dwell in the heavens.

But book v., 195-227, is conclusive as to his view on the question of the divine moral government of the world:—

"If I knew nothing of atoms or the origin of things, yet from the very arrangements of heaven and for many other reasons, I should not hesitate to affirm the impossibility of believing that the gods designed nature for us, so great are the defects observable everywhere. To begin with, what a vast space of the earth is covered with greedy mountains and forests of wild beasts, and rocks and dreary marshes! What a waste of waters separates shore from shore! Again, excessive heat or constant cold robs mankind of nearly two-thirds of the remainder. The arable land Nature would cover with brambles, did not mankind, for the sake of food, laboriously cleave it with the plough and cultivate it. Otherwise there could be no fertile glebe, for the waving corn would not appear of its own accord. As it is, when trees and crops are brought to blossom by much toil, they are often destroyed by heat or cold, or by rain and storm. Why, too, do savage animals and the monsters of the sea, hostile to mankind, find ample nourishment? Why is disease at work spring, summer, autumn, winter? Why does Death go to and fro cutting us down before our prime? Then the infant, like the shipwrecked mariner, lies in naked helplessness upon the ground the moment nature has brought him forth to the light of day. With his plaintive baby-cry he fills the room—and well he may whom the ills of life await in countless numbers."

For years I could never understand the terrible indictment of the heavenly-father theory by the late Robert Buchanan in his sonnet, "Could God be Judged?" except by surmising that he had, consciously or unconsciously, some passages of Lucretius in his mind when he wrote it. For Buchanan was never weary of opposing Atheism and Materialism. To my surprise, a few weeks ago I came across an article on Lucretius written by Buchanan in "The New Quarterly Magazine" for April, 1876, which contains a number of blank-verse translations of passages from "On Nature" which are at once close and poetical. The following is his rendering of book vi., 386-397:—

"If Jupiter and other gods above  
Can shake the glittering regions of the sky  
With awful sound, and wheresoe'er they will  
Hurl down avenging fires, why spare they those  
Who fear not to commit atrocious crimes?  
Why scorch them not with lightning thro' and thro',  
Making a sign to teach us mortal men?  
And why is he whose conscience knows no sin,  
Tho' he be stainless, wrapt about with flame,  
And caught into the fiery arms of heaven?  
Why aim the gods at solitary spots,  
Wasting their labours and their thunderbolts?  
Is it to exercise their arms and thews?"

It is interesting to read Buchanan's sonnet in conjunction with the last two passages:—

"Can I be calm beholding everywhere  
Disease and anguish busy, early and late,  
Can I be silent nor compassionate  
The evils that both soul and body bear?  
O what have sickly children done to share

Thy cups of sorrows, yet their dull sad pain  
 Makes the earth hideous. On the tomb's dark stair  
 Moan idiots with no glimmer in the brain.  
 No shrill priest with his hangman's whip can beat  
 Thy mercy into these. Ah nay, ah nay,  
 The angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street  
 Are hunger and distortion and decay.  
 Lord, that mad'st man and send'st him foes so fleet,  
 Who shall judge Thee upon Thy judgment-day?"

Laetotius, like his master, is especially anxious to free men from the fear of death, which dogs their footsteps always and everywhere, so that the most distressful life seems preferable to the great Unknown which is in store for us. Indeed, this fear is a greater evil, a greater hindrance to mental tranquillity (the Epicurean *ataraxia*) than belief in the gods. There is no after-life to be dreaded, since body and soul perish together:—

"The mind is begotten along with the body and grows up together with it and becomes old along with it. For even as children go about with a tottering and weakly body, so slender sagacity of mind follows along with it; then when their life has reached the maturity of confirmed strength, the judgment too is greater and the power of the mind more developed. Afterwards when the body has been shattered by the mastering might of time and the frame has drooped with its forces dulled, then the intellect halts, the tongue dotes, the mind gives way, all faculties fail and are wanting at the same time. It naturally follows then that the whole nature of the soul is dissolved, like smoke into the high air; since we see it is begotten along with the body and grows up along with it and, as I have shown, breaks down at the same time worn out with age" (iii., 445-458, Munro).

"Wherefore, again and again I say, we must believe souls to be neither without a birth nor exempted from the law of death; for we must not believe that they could have been so completely united with our bodies, if they found their way into them from without, nor, since they are so closely inwoven with them, does it appear that they can get out unharmed and unloose themselves unscathed from all the sinews and bones and joints" (iii., 691-697, Munro).

"Wherefore the nature of the soul is seen to be neither without a birthday nor exempt from death." "Death therefore to us is nothing, concerns us not a jot, since the nature of the mind is proved to be mortal" (iii., 711, 712, and 830, Munro).

A. D. McLAREN.

(To be continued)

THE LORD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

AFTER reading the account of the latest answer to prayer, in recent "Durham Chronicle," I was left wondering as to the possibility of using this latest example of "god's mysterious ways" to help many of us out of a difficulty during the next few days at least.

The account is one of a prayer meeting at the mining town of Houghton-le-Spring, which started at 10 p.m. and was finished at 1 a.m. When the pastor, who was conducting the meeting, about to leave for his home in Sunderland, some 15 miles away, with no hope of any conveyance, a "blinding storm" was in full swing. The prayerful friends at once prayed for the pastor's safe return to his own people, and very soon a car drove up, stopped, and the pastor was picked up and whisked away—to the delight of his friends and himself. Perhaps I am wrong, but I thought that, so far as the friends concerned, their gladness could be understood. For after several hours, they were a little glad to see him off. However, I began to figure out the possibilities. We are faced with the

inconvenience of a busmen's strike in the North-East at present, and hundreds of people are wondering how they can get to their work, or pleasures, during the next few days. I wondered if prayer meetings at bus stands might ensure streams of motorists and cars, all willing and anxious to pick up the stranded workmen and pleasure seekers. Considering, however, that with the large export percentages, the number of cars available might easily let the Lord down, I was left to find some other explanation of this example of the Lord's answer to prayer. In the end, I was forced to agree that perhaps this was not a case where the answer was to benefit the people as much as it was to benefit the Lord himself. After listening for three hours to the prayer meeting, after a long day's work in other directions, perhaps the Lord provided the car, and the answer, to get the pastor off home and to bed, so that he himself could get a little rest before sunrise, and another busy day.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

- 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. F. PAGE, JAMES HART (Mythology), C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN. Thursday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. F. PAGE, JAMES HART (Mythology), C. E. WOOD, E. C. SAPHIN.

LONDON—INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Growth of Anti-Semitism," Mr. JOSEPH McCABE.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.
- Burnley Market.—July 27, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Crawshawbooth.—July 25 (Friday), 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. A. REILLY.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: A lecture.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.
- Padiham.—Wednesday, July 30, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sabden.—Monday, July 28, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Whence? A Search for Origins," Mr. A. THORNEWELL.

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## BOOKS AND READERS

## III

THREE other books appeared in the middle of the last century which caused the very devil of a row among all classes of Victorians. They were Darwin's "Origin of Species," "Essays and Reviews" and Bishop Colenso's "The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined."

We all know the "Origin of Species"—perhaps the most epoch-marking book in history. Chambers' "Vestiges" was bad enough, but in Darwin's book the Churches recognised that the whole of Bible history, where it concerns the "origin" of man, was completely and infernally undermined. The great Church leaders were under no delusions as to what Evolution meant for them and their creed, and they set to work shrilly and savagely to make mincemeat of the theory. In the past, their greatest card to play had been to attack the character of the infidel writer, and Thomas Paine, Robert Taylor, Richard Carlile, and others, became the target of their foulest mud-slinging—irrespective of what these writers wrote. But Darwin was a very distinguished naturalist and author, and his simple life offered no grounds for such an assault. The Churches' invective was hurbed at the book alone.

The curious thing is that the "Origin" at first actually made little popular appeal. The public did not rush to buy as it did "Pickwick," or even the "Vestiges." As Mrs. Cruse notes in "The Victorians and Their Books": "Of the 1,250 copies that were sold on the day of publication most were probably bought by scientists who were already interested in the line of research followed by Darwin, or by theologians who were eager to see how the new theories bore upon the truths of Scripture." It was not until young Thomas Henry Huxley set himself the task of popularising Darwin that the sale of the "Origin" began to increase, and there is no doubt that the theological attacks on Evolution helped its circulation.

Professor Owen violently opposed the book, as did Sedgwick, while Dr. Whewell, who prided himself upon being both a scientist and theologian, refused a copy for the library of Trinity College of which he was the Master. Needless to say, this only made the undergraduates of both Oxford and Cambridge all the more anxious to read it. Bishop Wilberforce—known more impolitely as "Soapy Sam"—tried a sort of hand-to-hand encounter with Huxley in public and got a terrific drubbing. Huxley's reply became a classic.

Wilberforce asked whether it was through his grandfather or his grandmother that he claimed descent from "a venerable ape." Replied Huxley:—

"If I am asked whether I would choose to be descended from the poor animal of low intelligence and stooping gait who grins and chatters as we pass, or from a man endowed with great ability and a splendid position who should use these gifts to discredit and crush humble seekers after truth, I would rather be descended from an ape than a bishop."

Little—that matters—was heard of "Soapy Sam" on the question of Evolution after that.

The father of Sir Edmund Gosse, Philip Gosse, a convinced Plymouth Brother, tried his hand at answering Darwin, and was painfully shocked at being almost utterly ignored. One of the critics of his book "summed up its arguments in the words, 'God hid the fossils in the rocks in order to tempt geologists into infidelity.'" Kingsley felt that if Darwin was right, he would have to give up much he believed and wrote. Cardinal Manning, as befits a true son of the Church and a convert at that, denounced Darwin's theories as a "brutal philosophy—to wit, there is no God, and the ape is our Adam." Manning was certainly shrewd enough to see the havoc Evolution, if true, made of Theism. Darwin could still talk of God and God's purpose in 1859, and it took many years of patient study before he became

the convinced Agnostic he eventually called himself. But Manning also saw to where belief in purely material Evolution was bound to lead. Even Carlyle—though he never read the "Origin" or even wanted to—was amazed at the popularity of the book. But then Carlyle was curiously blind to many new ideas.

In 1860, one year after the "Origin" appeared, came "Essays and Reviews" written by six clergymen and one layman. This book was, in the main, an attempt to combine solid relevant parts of revelation, at attempt to prove that all the really relevant parts of Christianity could be accepted by intelligent people, with the added plea that "he is guilty of high treason against the faith who fears the result of any investigation, whether philosophical, or scientific, or historical." One of the writers, Professor Baden Powell, however, shied at miracles and believed in Evolution—he called it "the grand principles of the self-evolving powers of Nature"—and another, Rowland Williams, admitted that Genesis simply gave a "half ideal, half traditional" account of the origin of man.

If the attacks on Darwin were bad enough, there was perhaps some excuse for, after all, he was not a conforming Churchman. But the "Essays" were written by believers, and two of them at least showed almost rank infidelity. That certainly was the opinion of Archdeacon Denison who declared, "Of all the books in any language that I ever laid my hands on, this is incomparably the worst. It contains all the poison that is contained in Tom Paine's 'Age of Reason,' while it has the additional disadvantage of having been written by clergymen." Whately took nearly the same view, F. D. Maurice was "pained and puzzled," while Kingsley threw away the book in disgust.

The general public bought the book and, of course, it aroused great indignation, and many people agreed with the members of the very religious Lyttleton family in calling it "horrible." The editor and Williams were condemned by the Court of Arches for heresy and suspended from their offices for one year. And on top of it all in 1862 came Bishop Colenso's drastic examination of the Pentateuch.

Colenso's forte was mathematics—we used his book on arithmetic at school—and he gave the various numbers and figures in the Pentateuch a very severe handling. For this he was ex-communicated by Bishop Gray of Cape Town, and came to England to appeal. Again Kingsley was horrified at this further manifestation of infidelity which he considered "especially dangerous to the hundreds of thousands" of people who, not being scholars, took on trust the "historic" truths of the Bible. F. D. Maurice agreed, but it is sad to see Matthew Arnold in the same boat with them.

The Church tried to console itself with the plea that the numbers and figures to which Colenso objected were a kind of Oriental exaggeration and were not "essential to revelation," and no doubt all or most believers were convinced. But no one who reads contemporary accounts of the storm raised by the books I have mentioned can fail to see how terribly the Church was shaken, and how weak were its feet of clay. Colenso and the writers of the "Essays" were reprieved, but the damage was done. "Darwin," said Kingsley sadly, "is conquering everywhere," but it was not until "The Descent of Man" appeared (in 1871) that the full implication of his work was realised. The Evolution of Man as an historical fact could never again be seriously questioned—however much the actual method of Evolution might be discussed.

Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey and Dean Farrer, who preached the sermon, tried his best to prove that the great scientist was no materialist. For him, Darwin had the "deepest admiration for the works of God." It was easy to put the matter thus and we can only protest and let it pass. But the struggle of science against religion is still not finished. That is why, sometimes, it is good to go back a little in history and see something of its grim beginnings.

H. CUTNER.