

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Question of Belief

It was a wise epigram, thrown out by a famous authority on languages, that to know but one language was to understand none. The epigram is still more expressive when one applies it to religion instead of to language. The devotee of one religion is the man who knows least about it. He cannot understand its origin, and he is unable to forecast its destiny. It appears to him as something original, complete, and final, when in reality it is none of the three. He is without sense of the meaning of the doctrines to which he pins his faith, for the reason that in his own day it is a thousand chances to one against them having any vital meaning whatever. His interpretation of them is almost certainly to be the wrong one, because it will be in terms of present-day life, whereas they began as an expression of a life that is past. Did he understand that past and the conditions that gave rise to these doctrines, he might find them none the less interesting, but he would not—in the religious sense—believe them. In religious matters, belief is in inverse proportion to understanding. The man who understands religion does not believe it. He really knows it—as a scientist knows the "thunderbolt," which to the scientist carries its message of man's forgotten past.

An illustration once occurred in an article from "Our Medical Correspondent." Someone had written a paper on the not quite original theme concerning the—I believe, imaginary—connection between cancer and pork eating. Whereupon "Our Medical Correspondent" discerns in this "the latest scientific support for the Mosaic code," and also that it suggests "the physiological reason for the dietary imposed upon the Hebrew race." When a "Medical Correspondent" reaches this stage, one's first feeling is one of sympathy with his patients. For it must be a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a man whose capacity for scientific thinking is such as to lead him to attribute to a semi-civilised people knowledge which it is absolutely certain they could not have possessed. For a people who were demonstrably destitute of knowledge concerning phenomena of a much more accessible character to have been accurately informed on minute points of micro-biology, is so glaringly absurd that the assertion carries its own refutation. Moreover, in the whole of the Bible, there is not a single instance of a disease or an epidemic being attributed to this diseased food. All is supernatural. The Mosaic prohibition of pork has no more connection with hygiene than the Sabbath has with an early closing agitation.

It is all a question of taboo. But what is a taboo? Well, taboo is one of the most important things about

primitive religion, in fact, it is religion, primitive or modern. The word itself is Polynesian, but the *thing* is widespread. It is common in English houses from the slums to the Royal palace. It will be on show when the Royal Princess is getting married. There is nothing that may not be taboo to the primitive mind. Roads, foods, objects, persons, clothing, names, anything and everything may become taboo. To look for a logical connection between the taboo and the punishment for infringement is useless. Even amongst moderns, with the fear of the supernatural in the dim background the power of taboo is great. It is all-powerful in primitive lives where the fear of the supernatural is supreme.

The whole significance of "taboo" is religious. A thing becomes "taboo" not because it is something forbidden; it is forbidden because of certain supernatural consequences that will follow the breaking of the taboo. When a certain food may not be eaten, or, if eaten, in a ceremonial manner only, it is because of supernatural associations. The Jew who will not eat pork is illustrating a survival of animal worship. Our sabbatarianism is a taboo because the Sabbath is said to be a day devoted to God, although it is derived from a "sabbath" which was observed because the supernatural influences controlling that day would have made the doing of certain things dangerous. The refusal of Jesus to permit a woman to touch him, after the resurrection, is an example of the belief in a dangerous supernatural influence that was supposed to be associated with females. When court etiquette demands that a man must not come into close contact with a king, we have an example of the belief that the king is an incarnate god, and that close contact with an ordinary human would be dangerous for the latter. The god-king was a live wire that needed insulating for the benefit of the subject. The taboo placed on revealing the real name of the Bible god was due to the belief that an enemy of the god might work magic with a name, and so the power of the god might be undermined. The real name of the Egyptian god Ra was kept secret for this reason. In parts of South-east Europe a child is given two names, the real one that is kept secret to avoid magic and another pseudo-name for general use. Sacred prostitution, the prostitution of a virgin in the temple, is again an illustration of a taboo. For only by this method was it believed that a man could protect himself from the supernatural influence emanating from intercourse with a virgin.

All totems are taboo. What is a totem? It may be defined as an object, animal, vegetable or even mineral, to which man pays religious worship. All savage tribes possess these totems, and as primitive customs linger the longest with Royalty, and the aristocracy of a country, we see these totemic survivals in the animal symbols that

figure in coats of arms. The Lion of England, the Cock of France, the Bear of Russia, the Eagle of Germany, the wolves, foxes and other animals have all a totemic origin. The precise way in which these totems are selected is of no consequence to our present purpose. They are often chosen in dreams—as a consequence of certain ceremonies at puberty, or by some imaginary benefit conferred on the individual or tribe. The important point is that, once the totem is selected, it is sacred. If a tribe has the bear for a totem, it will offer it religious worship—for supposed benefits received; for the savage religion moves along lines of cash payment—and that tribe will refrain from eating bear flesh. A neighbouring tribe that has the wolf for a totem, will eat the bear readily. And so on through the whole range of natural history. To select an animal as a totem is to make it sacred. And all sacred things are taboo. If they are eaten at all, they are eaten ceremonially.

A step further, and we shall have reached the true meaning of the Mosaic prohibition of pork. To the Jew, the pig was, and is, an "unclean" animal. And, misled by a word, the modern religionist—who knows little or nothing about religion—concludes that unclean means unhygienic. And this is quite erroneous. In religion there is no connection whatever between the two things. In religion, "unclean" and "holy" are interchangeable terms. An unclean animal is a sacred animal—sacred, that is, either to all the members of a tribe or to certain people belonging to a tribe. In relation to the person or persons affected, the sacred animal possesses a supernatural influence inimical to the person or persons affected. That animal must not be killed, or if it is killed, it must be done ceremonially. If eaten, the same rule applies, although, generally, eating a holy animal is forbidden. Thus, on the Largo coast, the heir to the throne is forbidden to eat pork. The kings of ancient Egypt could eat no flesh but that of veal and "Our Medical Correspondent" is thus very wide of the truth. The Mosaic prohibition of pork is no more an anticipation of modern bacteriology and hygiene than is the prohibition of the eating of rabbits. One need only consider the long list of dietetic prohibitions in the Bible to realise this. It is a question of a religious taboo. The pig was a totem with some Semitic tribes, as the bear, the wolf, the hyena, the lion, the fish, were with others. The pig was a holy animal, and therefore those who ate it as an article of common food became unclean. The fish was another totem, and this is proved by the eating of fish on Friday evening, the commencement of the Sabbath. The Sabbath itself is an example of another taboo. It was the day dedicated to Saturn, the slow-moving planet which modern astrologers assert casts a malign influence. The consequence was that anything done on that day became unlucky, and work was therefore taboo. Religion is one long string of taboos—names, dress, practices and things. It is with profound justification that Frazer remarks: "When all is said and done, our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences from him." I need not dwell at present upon how numerous are these resemblances; the pity is that men, in the name of modern science, should strive to give to purely savage superstition the sanction of present-day knowledge.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## A DICTATORIAL EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PRELATE

WILLIAM WARBURTON was born at Newark in 1698, and became Bishop of Gloucester in 1760. Articled to an attorney in 1714, he was ordained priest in 1727 and presented to the living of Greaseley. He considered himself, and was commonly regarded as the great infidel slayer of the age. Vain, arrogant and insolent to all who gainsaid him, he was naturally viewed with aversion by most of the intellectuals of his time. For, even those defenders of the faith who dared to dissent from his dogmatic pronouncements, Warburton treated with scornful contempt.

Dr. Lowth, an able critic of the contentions of Collins, Tindal, and other sceptics, deeply resented Warburton's treatment of himself over a mere difference of opinion. So, after culling from Clarendon's "History" a reference to a Colonel Harrison who had served in a lawyer's office, and was later notorious for his overbearing manners, Lowth ironically reminded Warburton that he also had been an articled clerk. "Now, my Lord," Lowth proceeds, "as you have been in your whole behaviour and in all your writings remarkably distinguished for your humility, lenity, meekness, forbearance, candour, humanity, civility, decency, good manners, good temper, moderation with regard to the opinion of others, and a modest diffidence of your own, this unpromising circumstance of your early education is so far from being a disgrace to you that it highly redounds to your praise."

In his "English Thought in the Eighteenth Century," Leslie Stephen notes that Warburton retained his legal outlook to the last, and that "his most prominent and least amiable characteristic was the amazing litigiousness which suggested Lowth's sarcasm."

Indeed, Warburton was never happy unless he was at variance. Bigots or infidels were all those who departed but a hair's breadth from his avowed opinions. Still, in a moment of misgiving, Warburton affects to regret the necessity of assailing his Christian contemporaries, while he tried to persuade himself that his deep devotion to truth made him aggressive.

Not that he confines his attacks to those he stigmatises as libertines and bigots. In his "Divine Legation," Isaac Newton, the Rabbins, Voltaire and the then Bishop of London are all overthrown and Warburton marches in triumph over their corpses. As Stephen observes: "Deists, atheists and pantheists are, of course, his natural prey. Hobbes, 'the infamous Spinoza,' Bayle, Shaftesbury, Collins, Toland, Tindal, Chubb, Morgan and Mandeville, and, above all, his detested enemy, Bolingbroke, are 'examined and confuted' till we are weary of the slaughter. But believers do not escape much better. If, as he elegantly expresses it, he 'trims Hume's jacket' for not believing in the miracles, he belabours Wesley still more vigorously for believing that miracles are not extinct."

In truth, Warburton hits out all round at friend and foe alike, clerical and lay. Those who protested against the absurd emendations in Warburton's edition of Shakespeare were denounced as imbeciles and liars. Warburton certainly gave no quarter to those who ventured to differ with him and as Stephen remarks: "It is at least amusing in this milder epoch of ours to meet a gentleman who proposes to cudgel his opponents into Christianity and to thrust the Gospel down their throats at the point of the bludgeon."

But even the truculent Warburton deemed it expedient to recruit allies and he secured two faithful followers in Pope and Hurd. The poet was greatly pleased with Warburton's doctored championship of his effusions. The "Essay on Man" was rescued from the charge of conveying second-hand Deism, and its author was delighted to discover that the orthodox Bishop had detected nothing save sound theology in a poem inspired by the sceptical Bolingbroke. This alliance with the literary

dictator of the time raised Warburton very considerably in public estimation, while Pope became convinced that his defender was a profound divine.

Warburton's association with Hurd is even more curious. Hurd was an excellent writer and a discriminating critic of Horace, and these qualifications apparently gained him his bishopric. He evidently regarded Warburton as an intellectual peer and he, in his turn, is lavish in his praises of Hurd. For example: "If Hurd thinks that Warburton's memory will be endeared to the wise and the good for ever, Warburton takes Hurd to be one of the first men of the day, and holds him to be Addison's equal in 'correctness,' while far superior to him in strength of reasoning." Also to this arrogant and conceited couple, "Smollett is a vagabond Scot, Priestley a wretched fellow, and Voltaire a scoundrel."

The scholarly Dr. Jortin was on friendly terms with Warburton until he mildly suggested that his "conjecture" concerning Virgil's "Aeneid" had not been completely established. Then war was waged against the doubter, and Hurd issued a pamphlet bitterly reproving Jortin for his impudence. A contemporary writer caustically interpreted Hurd's denunciations as equivalent to the succeeding lines of conduct, among others, which all men should observe when viewing the infallible pronouncements of Warburton: "You must not write on the same subject that he does . . . If you find his reasons ever so faulty, you must not presume to furnish him with better of your own . . . You must never call any of his discoveries by the name of 'conjectures,' though you allow them their full proportion of elegance, learning, etc.; for you ought to know that this great genius never proposed anything to the judgment of the public (though ever so new and uncommon) with diffidence in his life."

The infringement of these and other exacting obligations was all that Hurd could urge against Jortin. Warburton was in ecstasies over his confederate's censure, and declared that in addition to finding himself so highly praised, he felt a truly Christian gratification in "seeing Jortin mortified." And in a later letter he said that only "dirty fellows" could suppose that he had no grievance when Jortin's "mean, low, ungrateful conduct towards me," was considered. And all this indignation because Jortin differed with him over a critical question. Yet, as we are reminded, Jortin later "revenged himself on Hurd's master by pointing out a blunder in the translation of a Latin phrase. Warburton, openly unable to deny the error, made a sorry overture to Jortin, which was coldly accepted; but no real reconciliation followed."

Warburton's coarse invective is that of a vain, conceited swash-buckler. He pelted with bullying abuse men whose fame remains undimmed, while he and his diatribes are virtually lost in oblivion. Hume and Voltaire were special targets for his vituperation. With a coarseness of expression rivalling Swift at his worst, he reviles the philosophical writings of Bolingbroke which are "ready to be put to very different uses, according to the tempers in which they have found his few admirers on the one side, and the public on the other; like the *clava utensil* in the "Dunciad," which one hero used for a —pot, and another carried home for his headpiece." And even coarser passages might be cited from the writings of a man who has been extolled as an exemplary Christian.

In his "Divine Legation," Warburton alleges that the Deists had stressed the absence of a belief in a future life in Old Testament times, and that Christian apologists had not met this objection. Warburton admits that the ancient Jews' blessings were all of a temporal character, but the belief in immortality, so indispensable in all Gentile communities in the interest of morality, was not necessary to the chosen people, because they dwelt under divine supervision as the many miracles in the Jewish Scriptures testify. But to what extent this ludicrous suggestion is to be accepted as a sincere expression of Warburton's real convictions remains doubtful.

Like the Jewish Jahveh, Warburton's divinity was both law-giver and judge, whose conduct was frequently justified by comparing it with our glorious British Constitution, which was supposed to be as perfect as any human institution could possibly be. Still, as Stephen notes: "This singular confusion between the attributes of the deity and those of a constitutional monarch underlies all Warburton's argumentation. There is but one God and Warburton is his attorney-general. Like all other persons standing in that relation to earthly potentates, he finds the obligation to defend the policy of his government at all hazards not a little burdensome."

When speculating on Warburton's intellectual honesty, Stephen surmises that the Bishop first paltered with his own understanding, so as to persuade himself that he really believed certain propositions, however preposterous. Then, having cheated himself, he proceeded to delude his disciples. Also, in his "Quarrels of Authors," Isaac Disraeli is cited as saying that Warburton "was throughout guided by 'a secret principle'; this secret principle was 'invention'; in other words, apparently, a morbid love of paradoxical novelty."

According to Warburton's account, the God of Nature and the God of the Jews were one and the same, for they are both God. But the Bishop never tells us what he means by God. Indeed, no theologian or philosopher save David Hume had, so far, dared to face the fundamental problems that environ us. It was reserved to the nineteenth century to clearly reveal the chasm that yawns between the shadows and dreams of theology and the discoveries and manifestations of modern science.

T. F. PALMER.

## THE VERDICT

We come—each one his little part to play,  
To briefly tarry—then to pass away.  
The rich, the poor, the healthy and the sick,  
To win or lose? Is it by chance—or trick?

Such is the Game of Life, my trusting friend,  
And each must play it to its foolish end.  
Who dares to doubt? Do none dispute the rules?  
Though kicked and cuffed we sing and dance like fools.

From cradle to the grave, our mortal span;  
To tread the path of sorrow born is Man.  
Begot by others—he in turn begets—  
And more fish flounder in the tangled nets!

But when we draw that faltering last breath  
And sink exhausted in the arms of Death—  
To know the peace of Nothingness—Who cries  
"Confound those canting priests and all their lies!"

W. H. WOOD.

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## ACID DROPS

The Rev. George Braithwaite, according to the Sheffield "Star," does not find the religious outlook very heartening. He has discovered that "The Christian religion is in grave danger, and with it the fabric of the Christian morality, and our whole standard of life." There is nothing new in the Christian Churches being in a declining state. They have been weakening for many, many years, and, naturally, the weakening gets the more marked with the passage of time. If we may trust the New Testament, some of the followers of Jesus "bolted" very soon. The world would have been better if the break-up had been greater.

But what has this to do with the "fabric of morality"? The "fabric" of morals is fundamentally identical in origin, use, and modifications. It is indicated in the animal world before it reaches the human, and it is in character differing in expression, but identical in origin. The worst of these preachers is that they seem to believe that "morality" can be thrown off or taken on as one would use a hat. There are different expressions all over the world, but the precise manner in which it is expressed is determined by the social form to which we belong. It would not be a bad move if all preachers were made to write an essay on scientific morals, their understanding, their origin and function.

According to the "Catholic Times" for September 6, Roman Catholics in Wales have not a very pleasant time. The chief character at a meeting was Bishop Petit, and he soon found that while the Welshmen were very religious, they "hated Roman Catholics and their religion." His lordship has hopes, although the native Christians "lustily hated the Catholic Church." But Catholic Petit believes we are becoming converts. We are not surprised. It has been recognised for a long time by Freethinkers that the final struggle for religion will be between Atheism and Roman Catholicism. All things are pointing that way, and we have no doubt as to the result.

Carlisle is another centre where the Lord is losing some of his worshippers—and without worship gods dry up like a worn-out apple. The Bishop of Carlisle says that this decline is due to "tens of thousands of people not now knowing the meaning of life." We do not know just what is covered by the people "not knowing the meaning of life," but it is quite plain that the Bishop of Carlisle is learning what empty Church seats mean.

In our small personal affairs there is such a thing as righteous suppression of the truth—even such a thing as commendable lying. Under certain circumstances avowal of convictions is as hateful and mischievous as under most circumstances dissimulation is. But in all the large matters of the mind—in philosophy, religion, science, art, and the like—a lesser service to the race than utterance of the truth as he thinks he sees it, leaving the result to whatever powers may be, no man has a right to be content with having performed, for it is only so that truth is established.

The Archbishop of York is working hard to control marriage so far as it is possible for him to do so. He cannot interfere with legal marriages, in fact, he cannot, as a religious dignitary, marry anyone. To do that he must get a licence from the Secular State, and for the time he ceases to be an authority representing God. Knowing that he gives notice that he will not marry any couple when one of them has been divorced. And that raises a consideration that the press has kept silent over. We are a free people—after a fashion—and this is an illustration.

For example. When a man takes on a Government post of any kind, he must fulfil his duties whether he believes such duties good or bad. It is not his place to say yes or no, it is to carry out his duties conscientiously. Now, before any priest may marry a couple he—the priest—must receive a licence from the Secular State. And for that purpose not only must the man be licensed, but the building, or a room, must also be licensed. At no time is religion brought in. As a churchman, the Archbishop has no power to declare a man and woman to

be husband and wife. The fact of one being a divorced person does not appear. More than that, we believe that if the refusal occurs, that would be good ground for a man losing his authority concerning marriages. All this must be known. Why is the law not fully obeyed?

The Bishop of Rochester, Dr. Chavasse, says that England is in a bad state. He says that up to about 1870 England was the most religious country in the world. To-day, the situation has changed—of course, for the worst, and that is simply not true. If Dr. Chavasse will look back and compare the state of things, to-day he will find things are very, very much better than things up to 1870. Aside from the war, which always lowers the social level, the condition of things is very much better than the Victorian period could offer. We suggest that Dr. Chavasse should study the state of things from the beginning of the last century until 1870—his own date given—he will find that his statement is suitable only for the pulpit, not for the man of common-sense and those who have respect for human nature.

We would like our Bishop to run through the five volumes issued by J. L. and Barbara Hammond, depicting the state of the country which so captivates our priest, and finishes off with the volumes of "London Labour and London Poor," written in the "fifties," and Trevelyan's "English Social History." He will then see what this period he loves was really like. Also he might think what the large number of heretics and Atheists had to do in the fight for the bettering of life. It is time that our loud mouth Socialists paid some kind of tribute to the Freethinkers who worked for a better life for the people. The Church people were wide awake when they tried to kill heresy. Our present advanced people might get the truth of those who really worked for human betterment.

The "Universe" is delighted that there was no "fuss for Huss" on the day marked out for commemorating that brave martyr's stand for truth in Bohemia and Moravia; this year's celebration attendance was smaller than ever. Of course, one cannot expect a Roman Catholic journal to tell its readers who almost know nothing of Huss except, perhaps, his name, what really happened; nor can one expect any apology for the treacherous treatment meted out to this great reformer by fully-believing Catholics in the name of "Our Lord" and "Our Lady." But it may be worth while to note the contemptible act of treachery which put Huss in the power of the Catholic Church and enabled it to burn him at the stake.

Huss was the outstanding champion and hero of national sentiment in his country, for he preached so that the common people understood him. As he was imbued with the spirit of Wyclif, he aroused the hatred of the Church, and was finally excommunicated in 1410. But he was invited to attend the Church Council at Constance in 1414, and did so on the promise of full security, which was given him. In spite of this, he was immediately arrested and imprisoned and, refusing to recant his "heretical" opinions, he was condemned to be burnt to death and met his terrible fate "as steadfastly and as bravely as he had lived and preached." This was the man the "Universe" jeers at with "No fuss for Huss." The leopard never changes its spots.

Mr. Arthur Rank—who is a Methodist by the way—has been invited to see a Roman Catholic film dealing with the life of St. Vincent, made by the French, to arrange for its distribution in England. Roman Catholic films have almost always had great success, and the Church is shrewd enough to assess the tremendous value of such propaganda. The Protestants have never so far equalled it, and the missionary value of, for example, Bing Crosby, must be very great. But one must really hand it to the Church which has boldly grasped its opportunity to get in first, and is following up its victory with all the resources at its command; and, not the least doubt of it, is duly impressing the weak-minded not only of the value of religion in general, but of the Roman brand in particular. Even Mr. Rank might be converted.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

Just a reminder that the Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S. opens its season's work on October 12, at the News Theatre, at 7 p.m. The speakers are Chapman Cohen, G. L. Colebrook and J. T. Brighton. In addition, on Saturday, October 11, a dinner has been arranged at the Douglas Hotel, Grainger Street, Newcastle, at 6.30. Those who wish to attend please apply for tickets, 7s. 6d. each, to Mr. J. T. Brighton, 23, Brown's Buildings, Chester-le-Street.

The World Union of Freethinkers (London Committee) announce a public conference in Birmingham from October 24 to 26 on "Human Progress and Vatican Reaction." The speakers include Prof. Sargent Florence, Avro Manhattan, Chapman Cohen, Charles Duff, Ilsa Barea and John Katz. Tickets for the whole course, including refreshments at reception, 7s. 6d., or any single session, 1s. 6d. with programme, from Gerald Bunn, 236, Middleton Hall Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham 30, or from N.S.S. Offices, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

The West London Branch of the N.S.S. has organised a fine programme this winter, and we note that Mr. H. Cutner is to open a discussion on, "Is Freethought Dead?" to-day (October 12) at 7 p.m., at the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road. The subject should attract a good audience.

We have been fighting the largest war the world has ever seen. Mark, we say the largest war, not the greatest, although these two words are used by most people as identical terms. But the fusion only leads to confusion. The mother did not get the courage to risk—or give—her life to protect her young. The dangers that threaten the man striving to gain the conquest of man over nature will risk his life over and over again with little praise if he fails and easily forgotten when he succeeds. The courage that comes from the desire to know, injures no one. If he succeeds he is soon forgotten. The soldier uses the courage that belongs to the human race, and the people foolishly hold that the courage he has displayed as something he has gained on the field of battle; and that in spite of the lesson that we are getting from all parts of the world.

Speaking as a man of God, the Rev. W. J. Parker tells his followers that the "shortage of coal is due to God's anger with the British nation," and he asks: "How can we expect anything

else when we 'choose for Food Minister a militant Atheist.'" Well, that certainly reads as common sense—that is, religious common sense. But by any other rule it is just damned idiocy. God should discriminate as he throws things about. The human rule, if any, would be to kill the Atheistic Bread Minister. Instead, he goes on quite happily, and other people—from children to old men and women—suffer. It is bad justice—damned bad justice. But God has been doing that kind of thing for so long that people take it as the regular thing to do.

It is a mistake to suppose that the great need of the world is broad thinking or liberal thinking. There is, as a matter of fact, no shortage of either. What the world really needs—what it always needed, and still needs—is strong thinking. Putting on one side the political and social worlds, we can take as an illustration the situation in the world of Freethought. And here there is no question if those who have really abandoned all Christian and Theistic beliefs could be brought to the point of saying so without apology, or evasion, or qualification; they are sufficiently numerous to command recognition, and to put a stop to that petty persecution and miserable boycotting which still prevails. But what we find in a large number of cases is an attempt to narrow differences in such a way that the advantage nearly always rests with the religious believer. The Atheist in fact becomes the Agnostic in profession, then the agnosticism of philosophy is confused with the agnosticism of theology, until, as a grand *reductio ad absurdum*, we have a religious agnosticism emerge, and we are assured that we are making progress. But we are not. It is a step wholly in the wrong direction, a form of compromise that John Morley in his better moments wrote so forcibly against. And how can we expect that the religious world will ever yield Freethought the respect that is its social due while so many who have ceased to believe in religion spend so much of their energies in placating the common enemy?

## THE "OLD CODGERS"

THE "Daily Mirror," in its issue of September 16, prints a letter from a "bereaved father" who writes to the "Old Codgers" for help and advice. The letter states: "I need help. I have lost my youngest son. I am entirely without religious convictions. All those around me seem to derive some ease because of their belief in a god . . . There is nobody in this world more lonely than an atheist. I have read much materialistic literature and it seemed satisfactory to my reason, but it took something away too."

Far be it from me to make light of the sorrow which the death of a loved one brings to us all, but there is nothing to indicate that this sorrow is less poignant in the case of a Christian who believes in a god than it is in the case of an Atheist who doesn't. That those around the bereaved father seemed to derive some ease because of their belief in a god may easily have some much more satisfactory explanation. However, we must return to the "Old Codgers." They say: "You want to be assured that there is a god? Every day the sun rises, and light comes to the world. Whence comes it? From your materialistic books? Every Spring the trees and plants break into beauty of leaf and flower, the fields into plenty. How? Who started it? Materialistic books?" Are we to believe that such arguments can carry conviction to anyone who has "read much materialistic literature?" If what is considered to be beneficent attests the existence of God what are we to say regarding that which is definitely not beneficent? From the picture of beneficence is conveniently excluded the earthquake and the volcano, storms at sea, wars, famines, plagues, and deadly diseases.

The argument from what is supposed to be beneficent is open to further question. Passing by the query as to where the light from the sun comes from we come to that of the seasons. The seasons depend upon the inclination of the axis of the

earth towards the plane of its orbit, and this inclination, as Buchner points out, "does not even seem to be in any way conducive to our advantage; and if it were in our power to change this slope . . . we should most certainly do it, and thereby bring about a greater equality in the seasons." ("Force and Matter." Fourth English Edition; p. 141). If we view the matter aright we see no sign of foresight, no indication of intelligent and methodical organisation of the world, no marks of solicitude, no trace of the intervention of a Heavenly Father in our destinies. We are asked to believe that God created the world for the benefit of mankind: that he created the sun to shine by day, and the moon to shine by night, and, as a kind of make-weight, he made the stars also. Two-thirds of the surface of our little earth is covered with water, and is more suitable for the raising of fish than of human beings. On the land, most of its surface is unsuited for man to live in comfort.

Those who avail themselves of the argument for design are never consistent. At one moment they are pointing to the regularity of the seasons and the benefits of nature as evidences of design and of a Supreme Designer, and at the next they are on their knees praying for rain or fine weather. It is not very complimentary to the god who sends the rain and the fine weather to tell him when he ought to send them. Nor can there be much comfort in the thought that when the prayer for rain is answered it may be sent to the wrong address, and that while the land is still desolated by drought it may be raining in torrents on the sea.

There can be little new in the foregoing to anyone who has read much materialistic literature, and on such a one the suggestions of the "Old Codgers" as to design could have little effect. Nor could their suggestion that all through history men have faced torture and death stoically solely on account of their certain knowledge of an after-life. Giordano Bruno, the heretic, faced death at the stake with as much dignity and courage as any Christian martyr.

We now come to the final argument. The "Old Codgers" say: "In this world there are 1,859,850,000 people who believe in a god. They give Him Different names, Jesus, Allah, Buddha, but to them He is God; and we Old Codgers believe that He is indeed but one God acknowledging all those who believe in Him, whatever faith or creed." They do not refer to the number of sceptics who have rejected the belief, nor to the thousands in whom such a belief has never been developed. They link the names of Allah and Buddha with that of Jesus as all on an equal footing and as all equally representing the same God. The implication is that it is the same God by whatever name he may be called. This may pass muster among the uncritical if the names are confined to Jesus, Allah and Buddha. But the objects of veneration are much more extensive than this. Among these we may mention the sun, the moon, the stars, the cow, the hawk, the cat, the pigeon, the lamb, the rabbit, the lizard, the leopard, the tiger, the jackal, the bear, the goat, milk, rock, trees, and the sexual organs of men and women. We are not concerned with the rival merits of this burlesque menagerie. We are only concerned to point out the kind of evidence on which the monotheist relies. If the argument of the "Old Codgers" is right then the God of Christianity is only one along with the lascivious Venus, with Bacchus, with the ill-natured Juno, and the lewd Jupiter.

The "Old Codgers" conclude: "You want help. Suppose we say we believe that somewhere that loved son of yours is looking down on you, sad in the knowledge that he can never again welcome you because you do not believe." What a consolation! To tell a bereaved father that his son can never again welcome him because he does not believe in the unbelievable. To this father we would say that the materialistic literature which he says seemed satisfying to his reason, is equally satisfying to the emotions. That: "Upon the shadowy shore of death the sea of trouble casts no wave. Eyes that have been curtained by the everlasting dark will never know again

the burning touch of tears. Lips touched by eternal silence will never speak again the broken words of grief. Hearts of dust do not break. The dead do not weep. Within the tomb no veiled and weeping sorrow sits, and in the rayless gloom is crouched no shuddering fear." (Ingersoll.)

Instead of sorrowing for the departed let us rather rejoice that they should have lived to fill our lives with gladness, tenderness and affection. Let us console ourselves with the thought that they have not lived in vain, and that they will still live on in the influences they have left behind, and in the tender memories that are a constant accompaniment to our thoughts, and a never failing solace in our darkest hours.

F. KENYON.

## PETRONIUS

ONE of the most interesting remains of Roman literature is a satirical tale in prose liberally interspersed with verse, and entitled *Petronii Arbitri Equitis Romani Satyricon*. This superscription shows that the author was a knight, and there is abundant evidence, both scriptural and mural, that the Petronians were an aristocratic family. The great historian, Tacitus, relates that a certain Caius Petronius was regarded as arbiter of amenities under Nero, and committed suicide to escape the probable consequences of Nero's ill-will, excited by a jealous rival. Pliny recording that man's sad fate calls him Titus Petronius; but as the Romans in general, and their aristocracy in particular were multinominous, the difference between Caius and Titus is negligible, as one and the same man might have both names. But it is very remarkable that neither Tacitus nor Pliny, nor any of their contemporaries, when referring to this Petronius, mentions his having composed a Satire, for that attributed to him is brilliantly written, and contains a multitude of salacious details strongly appealing to the carnally-minded. It is also noteworthy that Tacitus in speaking of Petronius does not use the word arbiter as a personal noun, or even as a title, but merely as a qualitative epithet. It is true that Tacitus represents his Petronius as having in the night preceding his death written an account of Nero's misdeeds and as having sent him this incriminatory document. But both the length and the nature of the existing Satire prove that it was not the missive then sent for Nero's perusal. The surviving parts which are only a small portion of the original work could never have been written in a single night; whilst the subject matter is quite different from that described as having been set before Nero in the above memoir. At a subsequent period, however, when the latter work, if ever accessible, had long ceased to exist, ignorant persons might confound it with the one still extant. A.D. 66 was the year when the above Petronius ended his life.

Michael Hadrian who edited the present issue of the Satire says that Terentianus Maurus, a friend of the famous poet Martial, whose birth occurred A.D. 43, recalls how, "the eloquent arbiter resorted to (a certain metre) in his books." But this reference may not apply to the Satire even though it contain verses in that metre. According to Hadrian, it was not until the fourth century that writers began to notice the Satire of Petronius. He names four of this period, and three in the next two hundred years. Although these authors refer to the Satirist both as Arbiter and as Petronius Arbiter, none of them identifies him with the person whom Tacitus described, nor does any of them attribute to their Petronius the high offices and the social distinctions which fortune successively afforded to the Petronius of Tacitus before and after his reception into Nero's court. There are, however, two brief sayings, A and B, which exist, or once existed respectively in Martial (born A.D. 43) and in Statius (born A.D. 61). The first of these was cited by Jerome in the fourth century as from Petronius; whilst the second was in the

same manner cited by Fulgentius in the sixth century. From the precedence which these citators give to Petronius over Martial and Statius his priority to them has been inferred. But, as this argument rests upon the supposition that the Petronius here in question was the one described by Tacitus, it assumes the point which it pretends to prove. Moreover, instead of Martial and Statius having borrowed from an earlier Petronius, a later Petronius might of borrowed from them. It has been observed that Martial has some incidents and characters similar to those occurring in the Satire; but the examples given appear more like rudimentary elements of the Satire than imitations of it. Dr. William Smith in his "New Classical Dictionary," London, 1850, says:—

A great number of conflicting opinions have been formed by scholars with regard to the author of the "Satyricon." Many suppose that he is the same person as the C. or T. Petronius mentioned above, and though there are no proofs in favour of this hypothesis, yet there is good reason to believe that the work belongs to the first century, or not later than the reign of Hadrian.

But Hadrian, the terminal dates of whose reign were A.D. 117 and 138, was a man of literary habits, and his erotic tastes were of a nature likely to be gratified by the descriptions of sexual eccentricities wherewith the Satire abounds. How then could it fail to attract his attention, and that of his beloved friend Aelius Verus, a cultured voluptuary? Perhaps it was written for the delectation of this man's son Lucius Verus, the gay colleague of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who might suppress it after the premature departure of Lucius from this present life.

If the Satire were written by some other Petronius than Nero's arbiter of amenities, the two may have been confused into one at a later time; and the epithet arbiter may then have been mistakenly applied as a personal name or as a title to this composite entity. It is also possible that the Satirist, concealing himself, credited his work to the Neronian celebrity in order to give it more weight.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

P.S.—The edition above used is that of "Amsterdam," 1669.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PRINCE KROPOTKIN.

Sir.—I was greatly pleased at seeing the prominence given to the revolutionary career of Kropotkin in Mr. Palmer's article "Pioneers of Soviet Russia" (September 14, 1947). Owing to Mr. Palmer being a little misguiding concerning Kropotkin's opinions and aims, I have been spurred on to writing this letter, although I think the fault lies more with Stepniak than with his reviewer, Palmer. Being a respecter of the idealistic philosophy of the Anarchists (who are so often unjustifiably maligned), it came as a great shock to me when I read the article and found that no mention was made of the fact that KROPOTKIN WAS THE FATHER OF MODERN ANARCHISM: this may appear an unimportant point at first, but it has great significance. Palmer, quoting Stepniak, says that when Kropotkin left Russia, his influence in that country ended, whereas every student of the Russian Revolution knows that the Anarchist Machnovist movement, composed of the Ukrainian peasants, set up an Anarchist Society along the lines laid down in Kropotkin's works. This movement was later crushed out of existence by the Soviet Government (of which Kropotkin was a "pioneer"). Likewise, neither Stepniak (for good reasons) nor Palmer (for unknown reasons) have mentioned that the Soviet Government continued to murder thousands of Kropotkin's followers, although it did not dare lay hands on the great revolutionary himself, whom it reduced to poverty and obscurity.

Impelled to write this letter, I am sure you will not find my pricking sense of fairness too trivial or too boring, and, at least with hopes of that, I remain, Yours, etc.,

KENNETH H. JONES.

## SOVIET RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Sir,—In your issue of "The Freethinker" of August 24, the first item among your "Sugar Plums" was what purported to be a reprint of a leaflet of an anti-clerical character issued by the Komsomol. Whilst I am quite sure that you published this item in good faith, and whilst I realise that, from your point of view, it is not anti-Soviet in character, I have to state that I am convinced that the whole thing is bogus. It is barely possible that some such leaflet might have been issued by the Komsomol between 1917 and 1922. One thing is certain, it could not have been issued in the last ten, and almost certainly not in the last twenty years.

The Soviet Government pursues a policy of complete religious freedom with equal toleration for all religions. Should your paragraph be generally accepted as true and should knowledge of it be widely circulated, it could do nothing but harm to the cause of British-Soviet relations.

Therefore, I would ask that you investigate the source from which you obtained this information. I am quite sure that if you do, you will find the item very difficult to substantiate.

Thanking you in anticipation of your assistance in clearing up this matter, I remain, Yours, etc.,

R. BISHOP.

pp. Editor, British-Soviet Publications.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

### LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—  
Tuesday, October 14, 7 p.m.: "Some Aspects of the Poetry  
of Sidney Keyes," Mr. JOSEPH BRADDOCK, M.A.

Rationalist Press Association (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—  
Wednesday, October 15, 7 p.m.: "Aspects of Evolution"—  
2nd Lecture: "Palaeontological Evidence," Dr. W. E.  
SWINTON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square).—  
Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Decline of Intellectual Freedom,"  
Dr. C. A. SMITH, B.Sc. Ph.D.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place,  
Edgware Road).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Is Freethought Dead?"  
Mr. H. CUTNER, N.S.S.

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

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

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.:  
MESSRS. G. L. GREAVES, A. SAMMS.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—  
Saturday, October 11: A Whist Drive, 2s., refreshments  
included. All welcome.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanic's Institute).—  
Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "Eastern Europe and the Religious  
Question," Mr. E. V. TEMPEST.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, 270, Sauchiehall  
Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Religion and the Law," Mr. A. I.  
PILPERS, M.A.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (7, St. James Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.:  
"Atheism and Life," Mr. COLIN MCCALL.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—  
Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Newcastle Branch N.S.S. (The News Theatre).—Sunday, 7 p.m.:  
A Freethought Demonstration. MESSRS. CHAPMAN COHEN,  
G. L. COLEBROOK, J. T. BRIGHTON.

Nottingham Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare  
Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Marriage Law Reform," Mr.  
W. S. POLLARD, J.P.

## CATHOLIC EXPERIENCES

## III

MY journalistic association with "The Catholic Gazette," begun in 1917, lasted until 1935, and I became one of the (indeed, perhaps *the*) most frequent writer in its pages. I dealt with historical, theological and general matters. Dr. Vaughan was editor: a scholarly scion of the famous old Catholic family of the Vaughans of Courtfield, Herefordshire. Dr. Downey was co-editor, and an able man: but we had no idea, at the time, that he was destined to be raised suddenly from being a simple priest to the Archbishopric of Liverpool: the most populous—from a Catholic point of view—in England. Later, he started a scheme to build a magnificent cathedral—designed to be larger than the church of St. Peter's at Rome.

I became a frequent contributor to "The Catholic Times," "Catholic Fireside" (for which I wrote a serial story), "Universe," "The Month," "The Messenger of the Sacred Heart," and other Catholic periodicals; I wrote many "letters to editors," in defence of Catholicism, in the general press; I contributed to "The Contemporary Review," "Fortnightly," "National," and other magazines. In fact, I became quite a vigorous polemistic writer! In 1919 I joined the Westminster Catholic Federation, and became eventually a member of its Executive and Vigilance Committees. My membership of this Federation led in time to my first major dispute with Catholics. In 1917 it was reported in the press that some Catholics in Sweden had complained to the Government of that country about what those Catholics considered "false statements about the Church" in school books. We on the Catholic Federation thought it might be opportune to take up similar complaints with relation to text books of history used in English schools—especially those of the London County Council. My idea, however, was of open, public criticism and protest—but the Federation in course of time took a different line: that of confidential approaches to the L.C.C. and to publishers, with detailed recommendations for alterations in the books. To my mind this would have amounted to a form of "secret Catholic censorship," and I regarded it as against the public interest, so I resisted it for over a year and then resigned from the Federation, publishing in the press my statement of reasons. It was a long and painful dispute, on the merits of which, after these many years (I left the W.C.F. in 1925), I express no opinion.

A little after that time I came into conflict also with the then Editor of the leading Catholic weekly paper, "The Tablet"—Mr. Ernest James Oldmeadow. I thought his methods of controversy too bitter. They certainly were vigorous: but, again after the lapse of years, I now see that I myself was equally biased in the opposite direction: I would have "appeased" non-Catholics. My "Tablet" dispute lasted over ten years—yet it came to nothing. Eventually, in 1938 or thereabouts, an exchange of friendly letters reconciled Mr. Oldmeadow and me.

At the beginning of these little articles I mentioned that I came of a Puritan Nonconformist family, and also that, after I had joined the Catholics, I became ("paradoxically") an ardent apostle of "liberty against tyrants," as a result of mixing with Irish Home Rulers. These factors were fated to lead to a crisis. My Nonconformist heredity had left very strong tendencies, of a "liberalistic" or even "radical" type, in my outlook. The association with the Irish "anti-tyrant" movement emphasised those tendencies. My W.C.F. and "Tablet" disputes exacerbated them still further. My "conscientious objection," in the 1914-1918 war, put me in a definite "leftist" category. Then came the rise of Mussolini and his Fascism in Italy. To my dismay the Church seemed to greet this movement with enthusiastic welcome. It was a great

shock to me. All my "libertarian," "anti-tyrant" instinct rose in rebellion. At the same time, I studied the Encyclical letters of Leo XIII and other Popes on social problems. Amidst much excellent humanitarianism, I found in them condemnations of the principles of general freedom of thought and expression; insistence that the duty of a properly-constituted civil power is to uphold the (Catholic) Church and discourage heresy; censure of toleration except as a matter of temporary expedience—in fine, I seemed to have discovered that the Catholic Church, to which I had been so devoted, condemned, by the voice even of modern Popes, those very principles of freedom which to me were so dear and vital! It was a grave shock. I had married in 1919.

For two years I underwent a most distressing mental conflict, but eventually, in 1926, I formally left Catholicism. I will not here go into subsequent developments. I never lost a "wistful fondness" for "the old Church." I must admit also that events since 1926 have cast great doubt on my old ideals of "liberalistic freedom." I am now simply "unattached," and the ultimate conclusion is obscure.

This, however, may be related, though it refers to many years after the conclusion of these articles (which describe only a part of my "spiritual pilgrimage"—perhaps later I may continue the story). In and before 1947 I was gravely ill with rheumatoid arthritis and, owing to my wife's inability to manage with an invalid, I had to accept the hospitality of an institution for treatment. Whilst there I saw in a (Church of England) paper the name of an esteemed old friend, a Catholic, with whom for years I had lost touch. I wrote to him a letter expressing a desire to meet him again. He came along, and we had a pleasant talk—but to my surprise his main idea seemed to be that I wished to return to the Roman Catholic Church. He said that on receiving my letter he had interviewed a very eminent prelate, who had given him a friendly message together with the name of a priest who could receive me back if I applied. All this eager zeal of my Catholic acquaintance led to a somewhat embarrassing situation, especially as (a fact evidently unknown to him) at the very same time I was (as I am now) writing in the press as a non-Catholic, though of a moderate, "non-bitter" type, appreciating the good elements of the church. To solve the embarrassment, I had to write two letters. One was to the prelate, thanking him for his message, and admitting (what in a not unemotional nature is not remarkable) that I often felt a "wistful attachment" to "the old religious associations," but that the difficulties of an intellectual kind which had alienated me were still unsolved. The other letter was to my friend himself, and was to the effect that he had been under a misapprehension: for (though I should never close my mind to reasonable arguments) I was still unable to see that the Catholic claims can be true, and therefore in honesty I could not ask to be received back into a Church whose claims—as a result of honest thought—I could not yet see to be correct; even if, as a result of "sentiment," I might often miss the old life.

So at present (August, 1947) it stands: "Non dubium est quicquid cor meum veritatem quaerit—sed obscurum est iter in lucem." Meanwhile, I intend to continue honestly seeking truth notwithstanding difficulties, and irrespective of where it may be found or whereto it may lead.

J. W. POYNTER

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