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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Religion and its Mysteries

THERE is little doubt among competent students that one of the tap-roots of religion is the belief in magic. And for the belief in magic to flourish mystery is essential. For this reason religions of all kinds have made much of "the mysteries," while priesthoods have done their best to protect them from the profane gaze. And in this case protection meant preventing examination and explanation. A mystery explained loses at once all its religious influence. To be properly religious it must be dangled before the public gaze as something beyond the power of the normal mind, and of the meaning of which only a privileged few have the slightest conception. In this way the priests of all ages and of all religions become mystery-mongers. From the performances of the primitive magic-worker as depicted by Tylor down to the Roman Catholic priest juggling with the consecrated wafer, or the Nonconformist minister receiving a mysterious "call" to another—and better paid—situation, there is a fundamental unity underlying all their diversity. The old lady who indignantly repudiated any understanding of the sermons of her much-admired minister, in this way represented an important psychological truth. To have understood the sermons would have destroyed for her their religious value; and with the average religious mind, the thing it most resents is explanation, the thing it most loves is the unexplained and unexplainable.

Mystery is thus a veritable ark of refuge to the religious practitioner. Not all of them are candid enough to plainly avow their indebtedness in this direction. They prefer to veil it under much verbiage about "mystical insight," which is so often a grandiloquent way of writing nonsense. "I would give nothing," said one of our bishops, "for a religion which had no mystery." This is, no doubt, true; as is also the opposite—that a religion without mystery would give nothing to him. To think of any occupation demanding understanding or ability that would bring his lordship a fiftieth part of his present income is an impossibility. It is only as a mystery-monger that he has a marketable value. And it would surely be the blackest ingratitude if, mystery having done so much for the bishop, the bishop did not in turn say something in defence of mystery.

According to our priests, there are five mysteries "kept secret from the beginning" which are "revealed" by Christianity. "Revealed" evidently does not mean explained, unless we are to take mere statements as the equivalents of explanations. The first of these five mysteries is contained in the question: What is there behind the world we see? Christianity says that behind this world there is a living Person, who loves and watches over us. Thus, mystery number one is

removed. But what on earth can anyone mean by asking: What is there behind the world we see? How do we know there is a "behind" at all? To ask: Is the world as presented to my consciousness a true picture of the world as it exists apart from my consciousness? is at least an intelligible question, even though an unanswerable one. But as the question is put, it is meaningless nonsense.

Christian authorities not only know there is a "behind," but what is there. It is a living "Person." And the proof? Merely that a bishop says so, his creed says so, and that is enough. So that to get rid of one difficulty we add another, and because we have two difficulties instead of one, Christian intelligence is satisfied. What is Conscience? Conscience is the voice, not of God, but of man's own nature and experience. Conscience is the sense of right in social conduct developed as the result of actual contact with society. Conscience as the voice of God is possessed only by those who believe in God. With that belief it is born and with that belief it dies, and all its intermediate fortunes are in accordance with the strength or weakness of that belief. But into the Christian conscience there enters not a single element of morality. In the last analysis a Christian, if true to his creed and profession, loves and serves his neighbour, not because it is for the neighbour's good, but because it is the will of God.

Out of this unreasoning and blind glorification of God comes a corresponding depreciation and humiliation of man. Were there no God and no future life, a Christian says, what would be the use of loving and serving my brother? This is a sentiment that finds frequent expression both in the pulpit and in the religious press of the day. Theoretically, Christians think so meanly and ungenerously of humanity that they would not render it any service whatever were there no God to command and reward it. Practically, the majority of them fortunately ignore the theory; and yet it cannot be denied but that the influence of this theory has seriously retarded the moral development of the race. To do everything for the glory of God or for Christ's sake is to insult and bedwarf human nature. But this theological conception of life is so woefully degrading because it is so wholly false. In reality, the brother is the only intelligible object of our service. He who cannot serve society for its own sake is still in the bonds of ignorance and superstition, and does not understand even the alphabet of morality. What we all need is to realise the categorical imperative of the Conscience of Life, to be trained in the scientific truism that what makes life worth living is life itself naturally and wholeheartedly lived, "the lord of Mind guiding the eyes, and with no branch of Reason's growing lopped."

Yet to the non-religious and spiritually unilluminated mind the situation is anything but clear. God's love and watchfulness is clearly not *very* evident, or there would

not be needed so many attempts to demonstrate their existence. The people of Italy once had a most striking testimony of the way in which God watches over them. He watched the city of Messina growing, generation after generation. He watched the population increasing, and the people laying plans for their future prosperity, and then because he keeps an account of all we say and do, he suddenly blots the whole thing out. Not revengefully or carelessly, it must be remembered, but, as other religionists have informed us, in order to put an end to jerry-building in Italy. The Italians may, by this time, be quite convinced of his watchfulness, but one may reasonably imagine they will have their doubts about "living under a canopy of love." It had to be revealed to them. And there is no use in a religious revelation unless it contradicts all past experience and is in conflict with that of the present. Otherwise it would lack the element of mystery; and, as has been said, a religion without mystery is worthless.

The next great mystery of Christianity is that "sin could be forgiven"; but the real difficulty is, why should the love and care of God have ever allowed the wrong to have taken place? It would surely have been much better to have kept a young man pure than to watch him fall and then tell him there is a way out. Still, the fortitude of man might have been equal to even these calamities. Speaking as a thorough unregenerate, I do not care the value of a brass button whether, in the religious sense, sin can be forgiven or not. I am most concerned that wrong actually takes place, and it is of little interest that the wrongdoer may be pardoned.

Let us take a case. A man, by the ruthless exploitation of labour, or by control of the land, forces up rents, creates overcrowding, and generally induces conditions of living that lead to widespread demoralisation. The evils resulting extend over a steadily-increasing area. By-and-by the individual in question, having made his "pile," is brought under the influence of religious mystery, sees the error of his ways, retires from business, and devotes his attention, for the future, to religious work and to the task of getting people to "tread the paths of purity." Well, but all the evil resulting from his past conduct remains quite unaffected by his—probably sincere—repentance. The children who have lived dwarfed lives, the young men and women who have grown up lacking the essentials of a sane, healthy existence, still remain, and it is stupid to pretend that the news of sin forgiven can atone for, or remove, the evil committed. It is part of the demoralising influence of Christian teaching that it should ignore the social effects of wrong action and treat it as a matter of individual concern. The truth being that wrongdoing is far more social than aught else.

If one asks our bishops *how* wrongdoing can be wiped away by the conviction that sin can be pardoned, we are met with the triumphant answer, By "the wonderful and extraordinary mystery of grace." It would be presumptuous to ask in what way this "wonderful and extraordinary mystery" operates; it is enough for a bishop that it is there. And so he begins in mystery, proceeds in mystery, and ends in mystery. And not the least of the mysteries surrounding the situation is why a professedly civilised people should continue to support a profession resting upon no better basis than a survival of primitive superstition, the present chiefs of which are the true intellectual descendants of the fetish-mongers of our earliest ancestors.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## ANTIQUATED THEOLOGY AND MODERN THOUGHT

PROFESSOR RADOSLAV TSANOFF'S "Religious Crossroads" (E.P. Dutton, New York, 1942, 15s.) is a very remarkable analysis. Exceptionally well written and arranged, this important work surveys the whole religious landscape and impartially presents both the philosophical and spiritist points of view. The results of modern Biblical criticism are unconditionally accepted, while the vast vision of the universe which science has disclosed is welcomed as a progressive revelation of Nature and her laws. Traditions, however venerable, must bow before the illuminating discoveries of later days, and verities, wherever revealed, must be treasured by all true lovers of their kind.

Our author, however, is disconcerted by the increasing rejection and disregard of all forms of faith among the cultured classes of Europe and America. He urges that the ethical teachings attributed to Confucius, Buddha, Christ and other reformers must be preserved at all costs, but, while welcoming the benefits bestowed by applied science, he gravely deplures, as we all must, the misapplication of the terribly powerful forces that recent research has placed at man's disposal. Also, he fails to conceive that purely utilitarian ethics can ever successfully replace our lost faith in spiritual aspiration and guidance, despite conclusive evidence to the contrary.

Professor Tsanoff is fully alive to the difficulties of Pantheistic philosophy, nor is he unaware of the many perplexities that encompass the theistic theory, while the problem of evil and the idea of immortality bristle with so much uncertainty, that he seems constrained to adopt what may be fairly called an agnostic position. The author readily allows that prayer in its most remote form has been derived from the incantations and spells of primitive peoples, who not only supplicate their deities but, when their prayers and sacrifices are disdained or ignored, proceed to threaten their gods with violence or neglect. The Zulu angrily asks the indifferent deity why he is so mean and tells him that if he does not mend his manners his worship will be ended. "Not only is the Zulu thus naively audacious" asserts the Professor, for "even Martin Luther once challenged God in an amazing and of course uncharacteristic outburst: 'If we should become angry towards Thee, no longer bring honour and tribute to Thee, how wouldst Thou then continue?' Moses praying to Yahveh not to destroy the people in the wilderness, is cited as appealing to the Lord's pride: the Egyptians would think that the Israelites perished because their god could not preserve them in their long journey!" Departmental deities are found in many savage cults with specialised functions. Again "the various saints have served the Roman Catholic populace a similar purpose and have been invoked in special circumstances. 'St. Wendel in cattle disease, St. Blasius in sore throat, St. Lucia in affection of the eyes, St. Apollonia in toothache, and so on.'"

The late Sir James Frazer regarded an alleged after-life as "that great mystery of which fools profess knowledge and wise men confess their ignorance." Various philosophers unable to fathom this enigma ignore its existence, while others express the opinion that several unsolved problems so greatly transcend its importance that one need not waste one's time in probing it. In his "Ethics" Spinoza accorded with this view when averring that: "a free man thinks of nothing less than death and his wisdom is a meditation not on death but on life."

Comte's doctrine of Positivistic Immortality proves attractive to our author, as it assumes that the wisdom and virtue of outstanding personalities survive in the memory and influence the lives of posterity. Comte's Positivist Calendar commemorates the beneficent deeds of the distinguished dead. As Tsanoff avers: "The saints, geniuses and heroes of humanity are flaming sparks . . . but even the humblest worker glows abidingly in the stream of the ages. In this consciousness of social piety, the distinction between the living and the dead is erased or transcended. The dead are alive in us, and we may live with them the larger life of those who are to come after us; or rather, in them and in us and in those others Humanity lives and ever-abides." Still, this is not personal survival and this it seems is what most pictists in Christendom so persistently crave.

The problem of evil is ever with us. From the dawn of civilisation reflective men have brooded over the unmerited miseries of human life. The sages of the East discerned no release from evil, save ultimate absorption, Nirvana or Brahma. The Greeks were sensitively conscious of the griefs and ill deeds of their fellows, but wasted no time in mourning over them. Still, the misfortunes of mankind formed the theme of the deathless masterpieces of the Greek tragic dramatists. In Persia the Zoroastrians solved the mystery by assuming the existence of two antagonistic powers—the benevolent deity Ahura Mazda and his wicked adversary Ahriman. Yet the day will come when Ahriman and his confederates will be vanquished, when the world will be purged with fire, and purity unblemished will prevail for ever more.

But in cults where one omnipotent divinity is postulated the existence of evil is harder to explain. As our author concedes: "In the explicitly monotheistic view of God as almighty author and director of all that there is, omniscient, infinitely just and perfect, the actuality of evil becomes a grievous problem. Why should there be evil at all in God's own world, and especially the most flagrant banes of undeserved suffering, flourishing iniquity, frustration and defeat of man's highest ideals and purposes?"

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded)

### MORE ABOUT MARXISM

I FEEL that Mr. Robertson has, in his discussion of my article regarding his book, raised questions which, though outwardly only theoretical, are nevertheless of importance—and not merely to the Freethought Movement. That is the only reason why I inflict on long-suffering readers a further contribution to the argument. First of all, Mr. Robertson denies that his book is a "Marxist analysis of the facts of human history." Perhaps that statement of mine was a little too sweeping, and he did not cast his net quite as wide. But that it is, though possibly unconsciously, Marxist in its whole attitude is clear enough. In the index, for example, there are ten references to Marx, and only five to Darwin, which would mean, to those who are not hundred per cent. Marxists, a little out of proportion in an outline of the history of thought. And Mr. Robertson's view of the problems of causality, as I look at it, derives directly from his Marxism, in that, while he does not specifically give it as the Dialectical Materialist attitude towards these questions, it would appear to be roughly representative of that attitude. I do not profess altogether to understand Dialectical Materialism, which seems to me, in any case, an inconsistent philosophy at best; but I do not think that Mr.

Robertson has made his position any clearer by his explanation of why he does not embrace fatalism. The idea of "cause" is, in the view of most scientists, something in the nature of a statistical aggregate—which is what destroys the mysticism of Eddington, for example, when he held that the fact that we could not forecast the behaviour of a single electron did away with the causal basis of human behaviour.

To some readers, the connection of this with Mr. Robertson's Marxist views may not be clear; but the matter is in some respects wider than the merely limited points which Mr. Robertson and I have been discussing would make obvious. To the person who is not a Marxist there will seem to be a good deal in common between orthodox Marxism and orthodox Roman Catholicism; both tend to be authoritarian, and the nonconformist (or should I say nonconformist?) is regarded as equally anathema by both.

I should, perhaps, explain that when I say "orthodox Marxism" I do not mean the view of Marx himself; I mean the party line of the international Communist Movement of to-day, which increasingly tends to be the view of the government of the U.S.S.R. There is something to be said for Mr. Robertson's view that Stalin's government "is practically successful in building and defending Socialism"; but the question of its continuity with the government of Lenin is not unimportant, since Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism is taken by most Communists as a coherent philosophy, which, like the policy of Romanism, is unchanging; whereas the fact surely is that the U.S.S.R. of to-day is widely different from that which Lenin worked for. I am, I must confess, very much more in sympathy with the Russia of Lenin than with that of Stalin, but not because I am a "red-baiter" in a sense which now seems to be becoming increasingly acceptable to the powers that be in all Western countries. It is because I saw, as far as one can see these things without actually visiting the country concerned, a definite increase in human freedom in Leninist Russia. Under Stalin, however, that trend seems to have been reversed. I think that it is undeniable that freedom in the U.S.S.R. and in its satellite countries is definitely less than in the Western countries; and that is why the claim to continuity is dangerous. It still holds many people with well-reasoned left-wing views, who do not see that the Stalin Government has thrown overboard most of the ideas and policies which Lenin put into effect when he had power. The parallelism with the claim of the Church of England to be continuous with the medieval Catholic Church is exact, but is more practically important, since it has influence in political life, while it is very doubtful if anyone remains a member of the Church of England because of its claim to continuity.

I am afraid that I have wandered a little in this article. But it is more in the nature of random jottings around Mr. Robertson's article than of a direct answer, which, in any case, is difficult to give on these vague matters. But I hope that Mr. Robertson will agree that this is not a question where any sort of emotional urge will give us the truth. We have to be reasonable and look at the matter with an unbiased eye. And that is what no good party man, whether his party be a political or a religious one, seems able to do.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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## ACID DROPS

Anglo-Catholics had a high old time with Mass and Te Deum when they ended their Congress a few days ago. The Bishop of London appeared in gold cope and mitre, there was a procession to the sanctuary, and plenty of blessings showered on the congregation—everything being done “strictly to the rite of 1662.” Numbers of people who were unable to get into the Church, as soon as they heard the Sanctus bell, grovelled on their knees in the roadway as did the congregation inside. Protestants and Protestantism were as much despised as if the Pope had directed the proceedings.

The Bishop of Barbados let himself go against “spiritual wickedness within ourselves as well as without . . . for the devil is unrelenting.” In fact, so high must have been the sanctity of the grovellers that the poor old devil simply could not get a look in, and must have retired baffled and humiliated. 1,200 of the saints then formed a long procession with a galaxy of bishops, deans, and deacons, and large numbers of crucifers, thurifers, taperers, servers, and the inevitable boy scouts and girl guides. What holiness! What saintliness! It only required a few cardinals and a Pope to make the proceedings thoroughly representative of primitive Christianity at its best—or worst.

Our contemporary, “Picture Post,” has been, we understand, banned in Eire; while Graham Greene, a “convert” to Roman Catholicism, and therefore “Plus royaliste que le roi,” whose book “The Heart of the Matter” has been excessively praised by some R.C. theologians, and condemned by others, now finds his book also banned in that model R.C. country. This contemptible religious censorship in God’s Green Isle proves pretty clearly what would happen to other works of art, literature and music, if the celibate priests of the R.C. Church had their precious way. We wonder what the “Universe” or the “Tablet” would say if they were banned in a Protestant country?

Some women are still hankering to be parsons, and no doubt the time will come when female priests, canons, deans, bishops, and archbishops will strut around in white collars and clerical hats, and maybe, even in clerical trousers. But we note the Methodists have once again rejected by a majority the ordination of women in the Methodist ministry. However, one day women will receive a “call” to God Almighty, and not all the powers of Hell will then prevail. We wonder then whether it will be religious eloquence or physical beauty which will fill their churches and chapels?

No one more than the Rev. W. H. Elliott, in our nationalist newspapers and on the radio, boosted up “true” Christianity and its wonderful regenerating effect on poor, erring humanity. Indeed, his mail-bag overflowed with thousands of supporters all yelling for Jesus Christ, for only “our Lord” could save the world against the growing Materialism which so shocked the Rev. gentleman. Well, Mr. Elliott had the chance in his new parish in Warwick to put his teaching into practice, and he appears to have made a sorry mess of it. What with idle gossip and ungodly gossip and “the utter disloyalty” of some of his more pious parishioners who had the temerity to call him “a nine days’ wonder” and to add that “he wouldn’t last more than six weeks,” Mr. Elliott found the task of bringing his flock into the fold quite beyond him. It was wearing him down—and this

in spite of leaning on the Rock of Ages and “our Lord’s” help and guidance. In plain words, Mr. Elliott and his recipe of “true” Christianity for all our ills were complete failures. We are not surprised.

It was not to be expected that miracles at Fatima, Portugal, would long be allowed to go unchallenged by other “shrines,” so we are not surprised that Lourdes has just cured an incurable war-injured spine suffered by a young man until a few months ago, when he had his first dip in the miraculous waters. He is now helping to carry a cross in a religious procession. It should, of course, be added that we have only the word of the young man in question that he had an incurable injury, but such insignificant details never bother good Catholics when it is a question of miracles.

Bishop Marshall (R.C.) has come to the conclusion that the reason Catholics “drift” away from their religion is that they are really ignorant of it. This is rather strange considering that priests never let go a child once it is in their grip. The Bishop thinks that their religious education as given in the schools is “not able to help them meet the difficulties in later life.” Which probably means that when a Catholic begins to read history and science for himself, he realises that the Church has been teaching him naïve and childish fairy stories, and has no answer whatever to the problems of life and mind.

Roman Catholic priests never seem to be able to get away from sex in some form. For example, Bishop Swint, of West Virginia, resolutely refused to allow Catholic girls to enter a beauty contest on the grounds that it was “totally immoral and pagan.” He threatened to excommunicate any who did. We are glad to report that one of the girls defied the Bishop—and won the first prize. And the “Universe,” though of course agreeing with the Bishop, rather proudly admitted that two previous competitions had been won by Catholics.

A recent broadcast of the trial of “the brides in the bath” murderer, Smith, who was executed, managed to point out that Smith was a “confessed atheist.” The difficulty of proving his “atheism” was apparent in a letter written to his brother-in-law wherein he sorrowfully declared his hope to meet his “loved one” in Heaven in the presence of the God of Love; and in the fact that he took Holy Communion and prayed long and fervently with the chaplain on the eve of his execution. Realising that something was wrong, the commentator hastily assured his listeners that Smith was a hypocrite. He certainly was—but a thoroughly Christian one.

The R.C. Mayor of Wolverhampton, Ald. H. Lames has certainly “hit the headlines” but we think he has hid himself open to condemnation from his spiritual masters. There seems, however, to be a few lessons not yet learned by the Mayor; one is, a Mayor should not favour one section of the community over another, be they Catholic or Protestant, his first duty is to the community as a whole. Another lesson he must learn is that to expect “toleration” from members of his faith has as much chance of realisation as of getting blood from a stone. Roman Catholicism and toleration are a contradiction in terms. Freethinkers can still learn from the Church of Rome, which never loses an opportunity in making its presence felt, and this despite the fact that in Wolverhampton Catholics number less than 10 per cent. of the electorate.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## SUGAR PLUMS

At the Anglo-Catholic Congress recently held in London some speakers made a determined effort to bring the Bible back to the pre-eminence it enjoyed in the heyday of the Church. But the going is not so easy as when it was possible to persecute or excommunicate a man for heresy. Canon Ramsay was obliged to admit that "millions in our land neither open a Bible or possess one," but, he claimed, "that was being altered," and we are at last beginning to see how wrong was the shallow and optimistic liberalism of Biblical criticism, and the cry now is "back to the Bible." Canon Ramsay has a lot to learn if he thinks that the Bible will ever again hold any place as a revelation from God. The drastic criticisms of Bible credibility and authenticity, mostly made by writers who claim to be Christians, has destroyed every vestige of its authority as a "Divine" work. We now know that the Bible is just a collection of primitive myths and legends.

We are indebted to "Wanderer," of the "South London Press," for the following gem. To add any comment would spoil the effect: "Clothing coupons have been a headache for many bishops attending the Lambeth Conference. . . . Application was made to the Board of Trade, and extra coupons were granted." The "Wanderer" adds, "The bishops received the extra coupons with mixed feelings for across the back of each set was stamped, *For Theatrical purposes only.*"

We can think of nothing more piteous than a God dying for lack of food. By reports and observations we know that myriads of gods, big, little, black, white, brown, yellow, vanish into nothingness from starvation. The kind of food, of course, differs. Some gods depend upon food that has been roasted, some prefer human blood. Still others like praise and worship, but one fact stands out, the food must be plentiful, or the gods die. In view of the foregoing, we are rather surprised at the Rev. G. A. Finch, of St. Hugh's, Market Harborough, who refused to allow two girls to attend his Confirmation class because they "stole a day from God." We feel for the Rev. gentleman, for he must realise that a god cannot afford to do without even two potential worshippers; and to steal a day from God is as bad as stealing his rations.

## ON DETECTIVE FICTION

IN a recent article, Mr. John Rowland, who is a clever exponent himself of detective stories and has published a number of thrilling interest, rightly gave credit to Edgar Allan Poe as being the true originator of this genre of fiction. The three stories in which Poe introduces his famous detective, Dupin, have in them many of the clichés which, however disguised, form the main motives of many of our baffling crime stories and these mysteries are solved in the modern detective story in much the same way as Dupin solved his.

Edgar Allan Poe was, in fact, not only an innovator here, he was an innovator in a number of other branches of fiction. It was he who, in "William Wilson," gave us the "double personality" story so brilliantly followed by Robert Louis Stevenson in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." And in Poe's "Gold Bug," he led the way in two other beloved types of story—the treasure hunt and the cryptogram. Both have been well exploited by dozens of writers for boys—and for grown-ups, too.

Then again, though many sea stories had been written before Poe wrote his "Arthur Gordon Pym," unless my memory fails me, it is to this, the one long story he wrote, that our Kingstons, Jack Londons, and scores of our penny dreadful writers of sea stories went for a good deal of their inspiration. In our superior way we are apt to despise some of these unknown or forgotten purveyors of sea and crime fiction, but they could tell an exciting story and that always has some merit. How many readers remember "Jack Harkaway" whose adventures thrilled our grandparents when they were boys—and girls, too? Bracebridge Hemmyng, his creator, knew all the tricks of "blood and thunder," but it was not all that; he could tell a tale, though not quite so superbly as Edgar Allan Poe did in "Arthur Gordon Pym."

And this leads me to point out that the amateur detective, once created, led dozens of other writers to try their hand at mystery stories. If Wilkie Collins' "Moonstone" stands supreme of its kind in England, years before it was written, any number of detective stories had appeared which achieved great popularity. Emile Gaboriau in France had given us "L'Affaire Lerouge" as well as "Monsieur Lecoq" and many others which, translated into English, went through many editions and are still read; while the thrillers of F. du Boisgebey must have had enormous circulations in many languages. And these writers were two out of dozens.

In America, Poe's lead was quickly followed, and I am sure there must be some of our older readers who remember Anna K. Green's "The Leavenworth Case" and "The Mill Mystery," Lawrence P. Lynch's "Shadowed by Three," Frank Pinkerton's "The Great Adams Express Robbery" and "Cornered at Last"—to name but a few out of scores. As a small boy I can even remember reading of the exploits of "Old King Brady," quite a great detective in his way, and of Inspector Byrnes, who was the hero of a number of stories written by Julian Hawthorne, the son of the famous and better known author of "The Scarlet Letter." In England, long before Conan Doyle gave us Sherlock Holmes, we had a number of thrillers from Dick Donovan and equally thrilling crime stories like Speight's "In the Dead of Night" and Florence Warden's "House on the Marsh." If I sit back and think about them I could name dozens.

But there was one point in Mr. Rowland's article about which I really must protest. He refers to Edgar

Allan Poe as "Poe the weakling, the drunkard, the wastrel (I do not think those terms are too strong). . ." It would interest me very much to have, not a mere opinion from a critic of Poe, but the actual authority from whom Mr. Rowland got this description. It must be someone who knew Poe intimately and whose word can be trusted. I have read a good deal for and against him, but perhaps I have missed Mr. Rowland's authority.

In the meantime, may I point out one or two facts which perhaps are apt to be forgotten? Some men can drink hard and long but they never become drunk—nor, for that matter, do they get a drunkard's liver or delirium tremens. Others, like poor Poe, are upset after a glass of mild beer, or a small tot of whisky. I knew a man who, for twenty years to my knowledge, thrived on a half bottle of whisky a day—he was a first-class journalist and could write a review of a philosophical book or one on the art of boxing equally as well as a political leader for a national newspaper, and then go out and report a fashionable wedding without turning a hair. He was never drunk. On the other hand, many people with Poe's temperament, would be violently sick, ill, and drunk, after one small glass of an intoxicating liquor. Poe simply could not take it, and he suffered torments, and imagined he had been drinking heavily when actually he had not. And his enemies, and he certainly had some as a result of his drastic criticism of mediocre works, took care after his death to bespatter his name with mud and worse. The mud stuck and even after the gallant attempt of J. H. Ingram to rehabilitate the name and fame of Edgar Allan Poe, we still find people preferring the libels and lies of his enemies rather than the first-hand testimony of people who knew and worked with him like George Graham and Mrs. Whitman.

The short stories of Poe are magnificently written, and I venture to submit that no drunkard could have composed "Eureka," the least read of all his works, a Pantheistic prose poem, or his forthright and sane literary criticisms which form so large a part of his output. And what can we say of his poems—does their enchanting and beautiful music show the wastrel and weakling?

To judge Poe as one does an ordinary normal joiner, or navvy, is surely unfair. His was a highly strung temperament, and his constant struggle to earn enough to live upon, especially after his marriage, would have broken a physically stronger man. It has never been easy for a poet to earn much money, and over 100 years ago in America it must have been very difficult.

Edgar Allan Poe is certainly the greatest *creative* genius the U.S.A. has produced. It is a great pity that the lies and libels of his enemies should so often be perpetuated when dealing, not with his life, but with his work.

H. CUTNER.

## EARLY ENGLISH FREETHOUGHT

### II.

It is evident from the letter of the Emperor Frederick II to Henry II that that freethinking monarch desired an alliance with England against the usurpations of Rome. From the avidity with which the report had been spread that even Edward John contemplated turning Mohammedan rather than submit to Rome, we may judge there were those who would have welcomed such

an alliance. It was, however, rather political opposition, excited by papal aggression and clerical corruption, that manifested itself than any specific dissent from religious dogmas. When, early in the fourteenth century, charges of infidelity were sought against the Templars little was elicited to substantiate the charge.

In challenging the orthodox school of realism, represented in England by the followers of Duns Scotus and Anselm, William Occam, the invincible doctor, proved himself on the side of progress and free inquiry. Nominalism was in spirit inductive and critical, realism deductive and dogmatic. Occam allowed theology the dominion of faith just because it was seen to be irrational. He taught that knowledge had a double inadequacy arising from the needs of thinking and of expressing thought in language, and by denying that causes should be multiplied, and that universals existed out of the mind; and by opposing scholastic logomachy he was a progenitor of the philosophy which, under Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and Mill, has gone hand in hand with knowledge of things as they are, instead of as they may be supposed to be. Occam proved his title to invincibility, by his resolution in opposing Pope Boniface VIII and John XXII. "Defend me with your sword, and I will defend you with my pen," he wrote to Philip the Fair. He boldly contended against the supremacy of the Pope in temporal affairs, and attacked the lucre-loving propensities of the pretended followers of Jesus. To argue as he did on the principle that the Church and the Papacy were human was, in that age, temerity entitling him to the honour of excommunication. It indicated the whole gulf which separated the teachings of authority from those of reason and conscience. But in that age new ideas did not pass rapidly into the current of the nation's blood.

Had Wiclif, the details of whose career are too well known to need entering upon here, confined his teachings to Oxford, he would neither have gained the ears of the people nor have drawn down the wrath of Convocation. This he escaped for some time, for the indignation excited by the arrogant renewal in 1365 of the papal claim of feudatory tribute, and the great western schism of the papacy which arose in 1378, greatly facilitated the spread of his views, and Wiclif was unmolested until the Church was aided by prejudice arising from the abortive peasant rising under Wat Tyler. Wiclif's services as the morning star of the Reformation have been amply recognised, and by his appeals to the laity and his translation of the Bible for their use, a merit which he shares with John Purvey, he did much to direct the future course of the Reformation in England.

"Chaucer," says John Fox, the martyrologist, "was a right Wiclavian, or else there never was any." A recent German investigator, Mr. H. Simon, of Schmalkalden, whose essay is published by the Chaucer Society, has come to the same conclusion. He finds that there is good reason to believe that those portions of the *Canterbury Pilgrimage* which touch most closely on the points at issue between Wiclif and the Church of Rome have been grossly tampered with by clerical copyists. The picture of the simple parson, he thinks, represents one of Wiclif's itinerant preachers, not a Catholic priest. It is known how sedulously it was reported that Chaucer, before his death, made his peace with the Church. A recantation, the spuriousness of which is universally admitted, was appended to his works, and remains itself a proof of our poet's heresy. That he largely sympathised with Wiclif is certain, and his contempt for the clergy and the corruptions of the

Church continually appears in his delineation of such characters as those of the Pardoner and Sompnour, who

"would suffer for a quart of wine  
A good fellow to have his concubine."

But Chaucer was no "Wielifite."

Our morning star of song was our first great Humanist. In Italy he had heard, with Petrarch and Boccaccio, the first creakings of the ice of the Middle Ages which announced the coming spring of Renaissance. His sympathies were too broad to be confined within the bounds of a sect.

In Langland's *Piers Plowman* we also find the hypocritical clergy scourged and a new prominence given to reason and conscience in the direction of the human mind.

J. M. WHEELER.

## BUDDHISM AND FREETHOUGHT

IT was a pleasure to read Mr. R. J. Jackson's informative article under the above heading. I, too, see no reason why Buddhism must necessarily be in conflict with Freethought.

It should be clearly understood that Buddhism is a philosophy rather than a religion. It is a "way of life" and in our so-called Western civilisation its teaching could be followed with considerable advantage and benefit. After all, it is essentially a peaceful doctrine and is certainly one of the most tolerant in the world.

Sir Edwin Arnold, who has perhaps done more than anyone else to popularise Buddhism in many lands, speaks of it as possessing "the eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom."

The Buddha maintained that belief in a Deity was not necessary—the Noble Eight-fold Path is the Buddhist way to The Happy Life, and the truest happiness for him is the happiness of a good character. The ideal of Buddhism is intelligent self-knowledge.

By the practice of Yoga exercises the Buddhist achieves complete co-ordination of mind and body. Mind-control, breath-control and body-control—secrets unknown to the West—enable Yogi adepts to perform seemingly impossible miracles. But they claim to possess no special, supernatural, or divine gifts—and can explain everything as the working of Natural Law.

Unfortunately, our complicated, artificial, and belligerent life in the West is quite opposed to the simplicity and utter serenity of the Buddhist outlook. In our world, where every man is busily occupied cutting his neighbour's throat, caring not who sinks so that he may swim; and where he is ever-rolling and increasing his little ball of filth like the common dung-beetle, Buddhism receives little but scorn and ridicule. The idea of silent meditation, and contemplation of the Ultimate Reality, the understanding of the Inner Self and of the unlimited power of Thought can have no meaning to the man who lives to out-smart his own brother, to frequent dance-halls and dog-tracks and who prays to God on Sundays for a bit of luck on the Stock Market!

I believe the following lines by an unknown writer express the ideals of Buddhism far better than any words of mine:—

"The wisest man can ask no more of Fate  
Than to be simple, modest, manly, true,  
Safe from the many—honoured by the few:  
To count as nought in World or Church or State,  
But inwardly, in secret, to be great."

W. H. WOOD.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of Executive Meeting held July 22, 1948

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Hornibrook, Rosetti (A.C.), Seibert, Bryant, Griffiths, Ebury, Woodley, Morris, Taylor, Barker, Mrs. Quinton, Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to the Kingston Branch.

In accordance with the rules of the Society, Mr. P. V. Morris was nominated by the Bradford Branch for a seat on the Executive.

Preliminary arrangements were reported for indoor meetings to be held during the winter where suitable halls were available.

The Executive decisions on conference motions remitted to the Executive were ordered to be sent to the branches submitting the motions. Matter for inclusion in an N.S.S. handbook was submitted by the committee in charge and ordered to be put into the printer's hands.

A grant was made to the Bradford Branch N.S.S. towards the cost of its indoor work for the coming season.

The Secretary reported proceedings at the meeting of the London Committee of the World Union of Freethinkers, including the postponement of the International Congress in Rome to 1949, and the likely holding of an International Freethought Congress in the U.S.A. in 1951.

Matters concerning Glasgow were raised and discussed and left undecided pending further information being obtained.

The Secretary reported the delivery of another consignment of N.S.S. leaflets which were now available for free distribution.

It was decided that no meeting be held in August, and the next meeting of the Executive was fixed for September 2 next.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. E. C. SAPHIN, JAMES HART, G. WOOD, E. PAGE.

### COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.

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

Crawshawbooth.—Friday, July 30, 7-45 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.  
Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWASI and J. HUMPHREY.

Great Harwood.—Saturday, July 31, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (on Blitzed Site, Ranelagh Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. G. THOMPSON, W. PARRY, W. C. PARRY.

Nottingham (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

Padiham.—Monday, August 2, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers' Pool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. SAMMS, G. L. GREAVES.

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## THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

ANYTHING that cannot be judged by the normal senses has to be examined and defined by the results and effects of its activities on other objects which are subject to sensory perception.

Hence, though no man has seen an atom, a fair conception of its structure has been established, its description accomplished and its properties described.

The application of this simple principle to an examination of God has been attempted in the two previous articles; it is now proposed to carry the analysis to its third and final stage.

The history of humanity shows that, generally, the spread of education and the cultivation of intelligence, combining to form the advance of civilisation, produce human beings who are kinder, more humane in their dealings with their fellows, more generous, more understanding, more *civilised*, more *intelligent*.

Incredible barbarities have been committed by our ancestors in the past. The age of cannibalism is not far away; on the clock of time it is but yesterday when men dropped their fellows from a wall on to spikes which tore their bodies and left them to a painful lingering death; when the rack, thumb-screw, iron maiden and all the other diabolical inventions of the torturers were in daily use.

It is but an hour ago since the last "witch" was burned, when stakes were publicly built and screaming innocent women were dragged to their ghastly deaths. It is but a moment since a man was hung for a sheep, and a boy for a shilling.

Thanks to the spread of education, and to the increasing use of the intellect, these crimes against humanity belong to the past.

But the actual fact of these great accomplishments is in itself an indictment of the ruling God.

A God who created the Universe must be possessed of an intelligence greater and finer than anything yet comprehended by man. His Understanding and Appreciation and Knowledge must far outshine anything that we poor humans can essay. In that case, we should expect His demonstrations and visible manifestations to be more intelligent, more understanding, more able, to an infinitely greater degree, than anything which has been accomplished by man.

Unfortunately, as has been previously shown, such is not the case. The outward manifestations of the invisible God have been most painfully obvious for a large number of mankind. He has afflicted them with volcanoes, floods, and famine. He has tortured them with unseen bacteria which have stricken the good and the bad impartially. He is responsible for a great catalogue of human misery and stands indicted as the most destructive enemy of the human race.

This will appear somewhat analogous if the activities of the finest civilised, intelligent and educated humans are studied in relation to those of God. It has been shown that man strives to help his fellows, to relieve pain and distress and to obviate suffering; the more intelligent and civilised he is, the more does he attempt these great works. It is to be reasonably assumed, therefore, that a God of such infinite intelligence as the Creator of the Universe must possess, would demonstrate these humane and intelligent qualities in like proportion. If He did so, suffering and pain would disappear from the earth and heaven itself would appear. Since no such manifestation has been seen, the conclusion is that either God is less intelligent and less civilised than man, which is absurd, or that there is no God.

Our Reason tells us that a great intelligence would manifest a great goodness. Since nothing of the kind has been seen on earth commensurate with the intelligence which would have been needed to *create* the Universe, it follows that the creative intellect and the invisible God are together non-existent.

DAVID MOORE.

## AN IMPORTANT CASE

THE following extracts from the "Truth Seeker," our American contemporary, will give our readers an idea of one of the most important measures affecting Freethinkers in America that have ever been passed. There is no doubt that the measure will have far-reaching results, and the repercussions may be felt here. In any case it should point the way to a similar move in Great Britain.

The decision was forced by Mrs. Vashti McCollum, a member of the National Liberal League.

### "THE U.S. SUPREME COURT BARS RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS"

In a momentous 8-to-1 decision in the McCollum case, rendered March 8, 1948, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that public schools may not aid any religious group in spreading its faith. It upheld the complaint of Mrs. Vashti McCollum, an atheist of Champaign, Ill., that religious instruction in school buildings during school hours constitutes a union of Church and State and violates the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution."

The implication of the Supreme Court decision seems to be that all released-time religious instruction classes, whether in schools or elsewhere, are prohibited. In the achievement of this grand victory for the separation of Church and State, the "Truth Seeker" and the National Liberal League took leading parts.

After an adverse ruling in a lower court, the appeal was taken to the Illinois Supreme Court.

"The McCollum case was front page news throughout the country. In New York the 'Herald-Tribune,' March 9, published the decision in full, together with lengthy extracts from the dissenting opinion of Justice Reed.

From the clippings reaching the office of the 'Truth Seeker,' it seems that the school authorities who had been permitting religious instruction in public school buildings are almost evenly divided between those who immediately ordered discontinuance of instruction and those who announced that they were awaiting report of their legal department or were making a study of the implications of the decision before taking action.

In Champaign, Ill., where the case originated, the board of education discontinued religious classes in public school buildings. Terry McCollum, son of the victorious plaintiff, will no longer be relegated to a rear seat or forced to sit in a cold corridor while his classmates hear Bible stories."

Dr. Roy G. Ross, General Secretary of the International Council of Religious Education, promised full compliance with the Court decision. The Council, he stated, advises 2,000 communities with schools in 46 states enrolling more than 2,000,000 students and represents 40 Protestant denominations and 669 Councils of Churches. Dr. Ross also announced that the decision will mean the discontinuance of the use of public school buildings for religious classes as is now the practice of 40 per cent. of the 2,000 communities.

J. S.