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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Peter Charron

AMONG my ragged regiment of seventeenth century publications there is one that should appeal with special force to Freethinkers. It is an old volume, calf-bound and battered, like some old veteran resting upon his laurels, of Charron's *Wisdom*, translated by Sampson Lennard, and published in St. Paul's Churchyard in 1670 by Ranew and Robinson. At that date the work was already nearing its centenary, at any rate it was published in 1600, so that it had already travelled over sevenths of that period. 1670 was not, however, the date of Charron's first appearance in an English dress.

An edition was issued by Blount and Apsley some twelve years earlier, but as I do not possess a copy it may be just as well to say nothing about it. Not that the possession of a book, or the reading of a book, is absolutely necessary to writing about it, as many of our newspaper reviewers prove, but it is at least a convenience, and I prefer to write with as many conveniences as possible.

Peter Charron, writer of "a book which made a great noise," as Bayle quaintly puts it, was born in 1541, a period when scientifically and religiously the world of thought was drifting away from its old moorings, and the geographical discoveries that were enlarging men's views of the physical world was being fairly paralleled by the wider intellectual vistas that were beginning to open. From his father, a librarian, he probably inherited his literary tastes, but could hardly have inherited much else. A librarian with 25 children to support, must have found life anything but a light burden, and the statement that he was in "straitened circumstances" may therefore pass unchallenged. His father did nevertheless give his son as good an education as the times permitted. At an early age he was sent to the University at Paris, studied law, graduated and practised for five or six years, and finally entered the Church. Eloquent as a preacher, he attracted the favourable notice of his Bishop, who raised him to the post of canon, but ultimately, after some difficulties with a couple of the powerful religious orders, he adopted the profession of a secular priest, a character he sustained until his death, which took place suddenly in the streets of Paris in 1603.

Not the least among the influences that moulded the intellect of Charron was that of Montaigne. There is a distinct flavour of the father of French Scepticism running through Charron's work, a flavour that becomes more pronounced in the later writings. This is agreeably observable in the section dealing with the treatment of children, Montaigne's advice to Madame de Foix that children are to be reasoned with, not beaten, to be taught "to sift all things with discretion, and harbour nothing by mere authority or upon trust," so that they be instructed "to quit (their) weapons unto truth as soon as they shall discern the same, whether it proceed from the adversary or from himself," and to remember that "it is

not a mind, it is not a body that we erect, but a man," being closely followed by Charron's teaching: "We do condemn that custom which is common in all places to beat, and to box, and with strange cries to harass children, and to keep them in fear and subjection, for blows are for beasts that understand not reason. He that is once accustomed thereto is marred for ever. . . . Neither is it enough to make them give their judgment, but that they maintain it, and to be able to give a reason of their saying. . . . We must teach him to take nothing upon credit and by authority; this to make himself a heart, and not to suffer himself to be led by the nose like an ox; but to examine all things with reason, to propose all things, and then to give him leave to choose. And after the mind comes the body, whereof there must likewise be a care taken, at one and the same instant with the spirit, not making two works thereof. Both of them make an entire man."

In addition to the book "which made a great noise," Charron also issued some sermons—said to have been written in order to divert attention from the heresies of *Wisdom*, and also "The Three Truths," a work only less famous than the one with which his name is usually associated. "The Three Truths," however, was orthodox, if not severely so. It was aimed at the Church's three opponents, Atheists, Mohammedans, and heretics. Against the first it was argued that there existed a good and a true religion. Against the second that of all religions the Christian religion was the only true one, and against the third, that of all Christian communions the Roman Catholic is the only true Church. Published in 1594, in spite of some rather heretical tendencies, the book was received with applause by the Catholic world and ran through several editions.

Six years later, 1600, Charron published his greatest work, *Of Wisdom*, in three books, which shows a marked change in opinions, and even in method, when contrasted with the earlier publication. The opening of the seventeenth century in France was not an ideal time for the putting forward of advanced opinions, and one can readily understand why the appearance of this book stirred up much opposition and abuse. Three times the sheets were seized while the work was passing through the press, and on its appearance, the task of answering the work was entrusted to one Garasse, a Jesuit, the nature of whose reply may be gauged by the following excerpt:—

I have defined this brutish, drowsy, or melancholy Atheism to be a certain fantastical humour, which has introduced Diogenism into the Christian religion, by which humour a man besotted with his languishing and lazy melancholy laughs at everything through a dull, ridiculous, and pedantic gravity. . . . In our time the Devil, who is the author of Atheism, and the ape of the works of God, has raised two profane men, Christians in appearance and Atheists in reality, to imitate Solomon in writing *A Wisdom*,

the one a Milanese (? Cardan) who wrote in Latin, the other a Parisian who wrote in his mother tongue, both equally pernicious.

Garasse's reply covered something over a thousand pages of print, but it is only fair to record that at least one churchman protested against its unfair tone. Yet, to a devout Christian Charron's book must have been a most exasperating production. It said much, but it suggested more, and the author's habit of *suggesting* a defence for religious beliefs in one part, and explicitly showing the weakness of such defences in other parts, must have contributed very powerfully towards building up the scepticism which became so marked a characteristic of French thought a little more than a century later.

Of Wisdom aimed at being a species of whole duty of man, a text book on philosophy, morals, and religion. The influence of Montaigne is plain on almost every page: in the praise of suspense of judgment where no clear data are obtainable, in the marshalling of quotations, in the praise of scepticism, and even in the nature of the language used. In scientific knowledge he is greater than Montaigne, in ease and grace of style much inferior, and in reading him one often feels one would willingly sacrifice a little of the knowledge for greater felicity of speech. Over and over again he protests against that anthropocentricism which leads man to think not only that the earth, but the heaven, the stars, all this great celestial motion of the world, is only made for him; and that all the gods are in contention for him alone. And the poor miserable wretch is in the meantime ridiculous. He is here beneath, lodged in the last and worst stage of the world, most distant from the celestial vault, in the sink of the world, amongst the filth and lees thereof . . . and yet he makes himself believe that he is the master and commander of all, that all creatures, yea, those great luminous incorruptible bodies, whereof he knows not the least virtue, and which he is constrained with astonishment to admire, move not but for him, and to do him service. And because he beggeth his living from the beams and light, of the sun, from the rain and other distillations of heaven, he sticks not to say that he enjoyeth the heavens and the elements as if all had been made and still move only for him. In this sense a gosling may say as much, and perhaps more justly and pre-emptorily.

Space prevents my saying all I should like to say concerning a Freethinker who did so much for real Free-thought. He died in 1603. His greatest work was *Of Wisdom*, which with others fed the Freethinkers of France, Britain, and over many parts of the Continent. There were several issues in England, and my own copy is dated 1670. The best account of his life and teachings, will be found in *Bayle's Dictionary*. That too encouraged unbelievers all over Europe. The pity is that the cowards try to "bury" a great heretic as soon as he is dead. We should like to know what these two authors of *Of Wisdom* and *The Dictionary* would think if they were to see the timid way in which the certain so-called Freethinkers of to-day meet their religious enemies.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

SHOWER THY BLESSINGS

"A very successful broadcast drama ('Shower Thy Blessings') retailed the story of a backwoods preacher whose prayers for rain were followed by such a devastating cloudburst that a claim for damages followed from the village atheist whose farmyard stock had suffered irreparable damage."—*The Economist*.

THE GENESIS OF OLYMPIC GAMES

ASTRONOMICAL and mythological theories have been advanced to explain the origin of Olympic celebrations in ancient Greece. Still another explanation, with cogent testimony in its favour, was widely entertained by the Greeks themselves, who believed that all the famed games of antiquity were originally funeral observances held in commemoration of the distinguished dead. They asserted that the Olympic festivals were instituted in honour of Pelops, a dauntless hero of the past, whose sacred resting place was in Olympia, where he was acclaimed above all other heroes and to whom a black ram was annually sacrificed. Once each year, again, all Peloponnesian lads lashed their bodies till the blood ran down as an offering to the spirit of the glorious hero.

In Volume IV of his masterpiece, *The Golden Bough*, the late Sir James Frazer observes that: "In like manner the Nemean games are said to have been celebrated in honour of the dead Opheltes, whose grave was shown in Nemea. According to tradition, the Isthmian games were instituted in honour of the dead Melicertes, whose body had been washed ashore at the Isthmus of Corinth. It is said that when this happened a famine fell on the Corinthians, and an oracle declared that the evil would not cease until the people paid due obsequies to the drowned Melicertes and honoured him with funeral games." The oracle was obeyed and the famine ceased, but later when the celebration was neglected, the famine was renewed and the oracle declared that the honours accorded Melicertes must become perpetual.

These old-time traditions are amply substantiated by Greek observances within the historical period. In the Homeric era, chariot and foot races, spear and javelin throwing, archery, wrestling and boxing, all took place at the barrows of departed princes and warriors. As Herodotus states, when Miltiades, the victor at Marathon, passed away, sacrifices were made to him and equestrian and athletic contests were established in his renown. Moreover: "Near the theatre at Sparta, there were two graves; one contained the bones of Leonidas which had been brought back from the pass of Thermopylae to rest in Spartan earth; the other held the dust of King Pausanias who commanded the Greek armies on the great day when they routed the Persian host at Plataea, but who lived to tarnish his laurels and die a traitor's death. Every year speeches were spoken over these graves and games were held in which none but Spartans could compete. Perhaps in the case of Pausanias the games were intended rather to avert his anger than to do him honour; for we are told that wizards were fetched even from Italy to lay the traitor's unquiet ghost."

Again, when a Spartan commander fought with the Athenians and while dying learnt that his army was victorious, was subsequently adored as a hero, while his bravery was henceforth commemorated by annual games and sacrifices. Timoleon also, the saviour of Syracuse from domestic tyranny and foreign conquest, was honoured by a magnificent public funeral when a herald loudly proclaimed that his people would eternally honour him with musical and other festivities as the champion of liberty and the restorer of their free constitution to the Sicilians. Funeral games and prizes were instituted to preserve the memory and cherish the spirit of the dead Mausolus, and the preparations ordained by Alexander the Great to celebrate the virtues of his dead friend, Hephaestion, embraced 3,000 competitors who

a little later, contended during the funeral games of the Greek conqueror himself.

Nor were these observances confined to the mighty dead, for soldiers who had perished in battle, or those who had been slaughtered in cold blood by their foes, were thus celebrated. Indeed, until the second century A.D., the graves of those who fell in the conflict at Plataea with the Persians, were held sacred and sacrifices were offered to their ghosts. Wine was poured out as a libation by the chief magistrate of the city, who cried aloud: "I drink to the men who died for the freedom of Greece." Games were also played in remembrance of the heroic dead, while in Athens itself, sacrifices to slain soldiers were observed and celebrations, superintended by the minister of war, were conducted to appease the resentful ghosts of the fallen.

In Thrace, similar customs prevailed, where respect was paid to the burial mounds of brave men, and prizes were given to victors in the combats waged in their vicinity. In Rome it was much the same, where games were played and gladiators fought in honour of those recently dead. Many other instances of these mortuary customs could be cited where the celebrations designed to honour or propitiate the spirits of powerful personages were conducted on an extravagant scale.

Among various less cultured peoples, these customs are found. We learn that: "At Futuna, an island of the South Pacific, when a death has taken place, friends express their grief by cutting their faces, breasts and arms with shells, and at the funeral festival which follows, pairs of boxers commonly engage in combat by way of honouring the deceased. Again, when any eminent person is cremated in Siam, boxing matches form part of the festivities. Among the Kirghiz, the anniversary of a wealthy native's death is celebrated by a banquet and many pastimes, including races, wrestling and shooting matches, with valuable prizes for the victors. Even the Bashkirs, a Tartar tribe, conclude their funeral ceremonies with horse races, while some North American Indians combine athletic displays with their mortuary observances."

Customs such as these appear worldwide, and, as Frazer justly urges, one cannot lightly reject "as improbable the tradition that the Olympic games and perhaps all other Greek games were instituted to commemorate real men who once lived, died, and were buried on the spot where their festivals were afterwards held. When the person so commemorated had been great and powerful in his lifetime, his ghost would be deemed great and powerful after his death, and the games celebrated in his honour might naturally attract crowds of spectators. . . . This theory might account for the origin not only of the Greek games, but also for that of the great fairs and public assemblies of ancient Ireland, which have been compared, not without reason, to the Greek games. Indeed, the two most famous of these Irish festivals, in which horse races played a prominent part, are actually said to have been instituted in honour of the dead."

According to Irish tradition, not only were these fairs held near the burial mound of the hero or heroine commemorated, but blessings were bestowed on those who most religiously obeyed the commands of the dead, while those who ignored these injunctions met with misfortune.

There are other features of these ceremonies which the foregoing considerations do not completely explain. But these are probably later additions, and that fear and appeasement of the corpse are everywhere evident in these customs is undeniable. As a further instance of this, we find that the Abchases of the Caucasus suppose

that the omission of tribute to the departed will incur calamity, both to person and property. As already noted, the Isthmian games in Greece were said to have originated in a time of famine and when due honours were paid to the memory of Melicertes the famine was stayed, only to recur when the ceremonial was neglected, and not removed until his honours were permanently restored. After a critical survey of the evidence, Frazer tentatively decided that, "on the whole, the theory of the funeral origin of the great Greek games is supported not only by Greek tradition and Greek custom but by the evidence of parallel customs observed in many lands."

T. F. PALMER.

"YES, MADAM?"—NO, SIR!

CURIOUS are the conceits of Man. For instance, nothing so pleases his personal vanity as to be the gracious recipient of the most grovelling servility; a complex no doubt inherited from his slave-owning ancestry. Deep in the dark recesses of the subconscious almost every man sees himself as a near-Nero, demanding the favours and flattery of the masses.

Class-distinction, seemingly, has nothing to do with it because this consuming desire for deference is common to all classes. Even the dustman's wife, when buying her piece of blouse-material, expects to receive the shop assistant's "Madam," the same as any Duchess. And yet, in these enlightened days, it is more than possible that the shop assistant is a Duchess's daughter!

Now, in America, where democracy is not just a convenient disguise for tepid Toryism or pale Socialism they manage to jog along without the addition of any fancy tags and labels to their names. They have long since dispensed with the employee's obsequious "Sir" in ordinary business conversation: the employer is quite happy to be addressed as "Mr. So-and-So," "Boss," "Chief"—or even by his Christian name!

Does the employee's "Sir" or "Madam" add one farthing to the value of the goods purchased? Of course not. The only thing it does is to satisfy the customer's sense of self-importance. But is the customer of any special importance, except in his own estimation? All humans come from the same stock-pot; they are all flesh and blood, even if some are more fatty or more anaemic than others. There is no reason whatever why one piece of flesh should be called "Sir" or "Madam" by any other piece of flesh.

Already I can hear those dear old choleric Colonels spluttering behind their moustaches—"Dammit, Sir, the man's mad! How in Hades shall we get any sort of respect or discipline in the armed forces unless a subordinate addresses his superior as Sir?"

For myself, I am quite unable to see what possible difference any little three-lettered word can make to respect or discipline. I am not suggesting that the Private should call the General "Old Coek" or anything like that: but if a Private can address a Sergeant as "Sergeant" then why shouldn't he also address a Captain or a General as "Captain" and "General"? Is it any more disrespectful or mutinous to address an officer by his rank than by the title of "Sir"?

Lickspittle insincerity can serve no useful purpose in our lives. In the feudal ages the title "Sir" may have had some sort of significance, but it has none to-day; and to perpetuate it merely for the sake of flattering self-important nobodies is unworthy of any society presuming to call itself civilised.

W. H. WOOD.

ACID DROPS

The Roman Church has always had its weather eye on the "poor," wheedling them with compliments and love and grace, and such phrases as "the salt of the earth." So we are not surprised that Bishop Marshall recently told an audience that it was his "firm belief" that the conversion of England would not come from the intelligentsia but from the poor. The idea that the Roman Catholic poor in this country who, in general, have the intellect of sheep and whose credulity and superstition are unequalled anywhere, will bring 45 millions of people back to the Pope is just a kind of thing we expect them solemnly to swallow. Perhaps the Bishop winked an eye at his brother priests when he said it. One thing remains unchallenged—not only is the Roman Church losing in numbers, but so are also all the other Churches. Even the parsons who are broadcasting what should be the Glad Tidings are now forced to admit that the Great Revival is certainly not just round the corner.

A former chapel-goer revisited a Chapel "after 45 years of backsliding" said after the service that he no longer felt the "peculiar sensation" down his spine that he used to experience when the preacher—with pointed finger—used to thunder from the pulpit on sin, Hell and damnation. In everyday language that "peculiar feeling" would be described as *Fear*, the very foundation of religion. Science is beginning to explain *why* Man believed in gods, the existence or non-existence of the gods has long ago been explained.

The oath of loyalty to the Roumanian Republic that will be required from Roman Catholic clergy under the new Roumanian Constitution is unlikely to cause any uneasiness among Catholic clergy. Compared with the crimes that have been committed for "the greater glory of God" throughout the history of Catholicism, such a simple action as an oath of loyalty will be a mere bagatelle.

We are, however, puzzled at the attitude of the Roumanian Republic, for it must be well-known that a Catholic's loyalty is first to his Church, i.e. Rome, with loyalty to his country a bad second. Oaths have been, and no doubt, will be broken again if the supremacy of Mother Church is challenged.

Some people are never happy unless they are miserable—or making others miserable. Witness the gallant Parson, Bible in hand striding full of righteousness in the middle of a cricket pitch to stop a game on Sunday, or the true to type "Methody" who objects to one of his flock buying ice-cream on a Sunday. But then the Christian religion has never been noted for its happy outlook, even its Founder is referred to as the "Man of Sorrows," and "Jesus wept"—if the good Book be true—so copiously that we are not surprised that his disciples scattered to the ends of the world.

We are often told how empty and barren is Atheism, but compare the Christian outlook with Ingersoll's philosophy, "The time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here, and the way to be happy is to make others happy." This from an atheist.

By hook or by crook the Roman Church has to be "news," and if the balderdash of Fatima will bring publicity, even if hostile, it certainly helps to keep the

Pope and his gang in the public eye. Again, as Lourdes is always news, it was a shrewd move on the part of the authorities to invite some German prisoners of war to the shrine just to show that in Christ all are brethren. Whether the miraculous powers are declining, or because of the presence of the Germans, the pilgrimage did not bring forth a single miracle. But there were two cases of "amelioration" out of 10,000 pilgrims. We have to be thankful for small mercies these materialistic days!

The religious world was thrilled when that gallant Christian gentleman, General Franco, radioed a prayer in which he implored St. James, the spiritual father and patron of Spain, to save Europe, to confound her enemies, to open the Iron Curtain, and to restore the virtues of the Gospel—concluding with, "And if the world in all its madness cannot free itself from war, protect once more your beloved Spain." We gather from this that St. James has been set a handful, and it is a pity that we cannot even guess at his reactions at this touching appeal. But we wonder whether even a St. James could save Spain if, in the present crisis, Russia had it all entirely her way?

One of the arguments now being used against ordaining women in the Church of England is that it would be an additional obstacle in the way of union with the Church of Rome. Well, we can only repeat what we said the other day. When women are determined to be ordained, the Anglican bishops will hastily prove that the "call" comes from God Almighty, and then nothing will stop their ordination. Not even the awful threat of separation from the Church of Rome!

Atheism, according to the "Universe," received a terrific set-back the other week. It appears that a Catholic mission was being held in Oxfordshire, and an East London cycling club gathered round to hear Fr. John Heenan. Their leader, "a self-professed Atheist," heckled the gallant missionary with the inevitable result of seeing many of the club's members returning to "listen attentively" to the talks—to which also "there will be a sequel early in September." Although it does not say so, we gather the sequel may be that the "self-professed" Atheist will join the Church.

We are always hearing of these overwhelming defeats at the hands of the Catholics—though our own experience is that rarely or never will a Catholic discuss in public with an Atheist, "self-professed" or otherwise. With a Protestant—especially with one who knows nothing of Protestantism—Catholic speakers are always ready for a battle; with an Atheist, who knows his job, they run away as fast as they can. And this goes for Fr. John Heenan, too.

The "Church of England Newspaper" asserts that although there has been conflict between religion and science, that is the case no longer, and points to Copernicus and Mendel as examples of the collaboration between science and religion, "for both were Abbots of the Roman Catholic Church." The C. of E. newspaper forgets, purposely or otherwise, one important point, and that is that the scientific findings of Copernicus and Mendel were not published until after their deaths, when the long arm of religion could no longer reach them. It would appear that the two "Catholic abbots had no illusions as to the conflict between religion and science.

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SUGAR PLUMS

At the recent Lambeth Conference the Archbishop of York declared in a sermon that "the holiness of the Church will be seen in its unity." The operative words are "will be"—the Church will be united, one day, some day, perhaps. At present, there are close on 300 Christian sects all squabbling as to what is Christianity, and one of them, the Roman sect, hating and despising the others, wickedly and vindictively. The only unity the Archbishop of York will get is when the Roman Church swallows the Anglican Church.

Cardinal Griffin, of course, feels that this question of "unity" should be pressed to the utmost. He, however, blames the Devil as "the cause of division, disruption and dissolution," and the only way to beat the Devil is by everybody submitting to the Pope. "It was, in fact," he said recently, "by God's divine providence that Rome was chosen as the centre of the Catholic Church"—and who should know this better than a divinely appointed Cardinal? So the only way to "unity" is complete submission to Rome, and as that looks very far away, the Devil is still in possession of the field.

Our Catholic journals never cease quoting the late G. K. Chesterton—but we should have thought the latest quotation would be better buried than so often repeated in triumph. Even Roman Catholic sheep must blink their eyes when they see it. "The first fact about Christianity," wrote Chesterton, "is that it created a machinery of pardon, where the State can only work with the machinery of punishment." The "machinery of pardon"—with Bruno and countless other "heretics" burnt at the stake, with the tongue of Vanini torn out with red-hot pincers while he was alive, with the hundreds of thousands of the victims of the Inquisition, tortured infamously all over the world—these things are "the machinery of pardon!" How Chesterton must have laughed at his gullible fellow Catholics!

Ignorance is a necessary condition. I do not say of happiness but of life itself. If we knew everything, we would not endure existence a single hour. The sentiments that made it sweet to us, or at any rate tolerable, spring from a falsehood, and are led to illusions.—
ANATOLE FRANCE.

CHRISTIANS MUST FIGHT!

ONE does not expect a stirring call to arms from a—more or less—out of the way seaside resort; still less so from Jersey which, while happily a lovely isle in which to spend a holiday, has never been exactly in the forefront of scientific progress. Its religion, like that of the Isle of Man, and I speak from personal knowledge, is still in the Victorian era of the 50's of last century. Even their newspaper editors, who have to be abreast of the times in some degree, share the horror of the town-folk in "infidelity," and appear to be even frightened at the thought that such things as Atheism and Agnosticism stalk the world.

In the Jersey "Evening Post" of 21st July, appears a leader headed "Christianity Must Fight!" by which, of course, is meant that individual Christians must fight; and the writer is almost petrified with agony at the thought that "religion is derided as a drug, an opiate, a handicap," and that even Christians cannot be "bothered with prayers."

The "Evening Post" has been stung to action because at a recent examination at a local school, some of the children were actually unable to write the "Lord's Prayer." That they are not a whit the worse—some of us think all the better for it—does not seem to strike the leader writer. The Lord's Prayer is a meaningless jumble of words which even professed Christian teachers cannot understand. It is made to be solemnly repeated by large numbers of children all over the country some of whom, by constant repetition, can repeat it like a parrot, with exactly the same understanding as a parrot—not that this matters to any Christian teacher. As the Rev. S. R. Knapp of the Gouray Vicarage proudly proclaims of his 44 junior children, "though they had a good knowledge of the prayer," the children "did not understand some of the words used." Why should they? Faith does not depend on understanding; in fact, the very essence of faith is that you need not understand what you are required to believe. Hence this incessant call that Christians must fight.

There is still another difficulty about the Lord's Prayer—though naturally not known to the children. If you take the Authorised and Revised Versions of the Bible you will see what I mean; and it is not unfair to ask why the one gives quite a different set of words from the other. In the Authorised Version prayer there are 66 words; in the Revised Version there are only 55; some words have been changed: as, "deliver us from evil" into "deliver us from the evil one." And the phrase, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" is omitted altogether. Why? Did not Jesus utter them—or did he?

If Christianity is all at sea on the Lord's Prayer, if no one knows what Jesus actually said, or in other words, if the "inspired" writers cannot be trusted in reporting the most widely known of all the prayers of Jesus, how can we trust anything else they reported? The Revised Version, which was supposed to correct all the mistakes in the Authorised Version, has made it impossible now to know what is, or is not, the true Bible. But surely, unless this is settled Christians cannot fight? Or if they do fight—as they undoubtedly do, they fight each other—what is it they are fighting for? Supposing all the Christian champions got together and settled once for all what it really was that Jesus actually said in his "Lord's Prayer?"

The "Evening Post" leader tells us that the "return to real Christianity needs men of the type of Peter the Hermit or John Wesley." Most historians are not par-

ticularly proud of the Crusades initiated by the Hermit whose followers appear to have been the scum of Europe on the look out for loot. Fortunately for Europe, most of them perished. As for Wesley—he actually believed in witchcraft, a belief which led to the cruel murder and torture of hundreds of thousands of poor old women. Does the "Evening Post" agree with the Biblical injunction "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live?" Is that the *real* Christianity it wants?

Whether God does or does not "hold the fate of the world in the hollow of His hand" as the "Evening Post" declares, can only be known to those who have had converse with the Almighty; and it is doubtful if that honour has ever been accorded to a leader writer. The "fanatical" faith of the Communist is really a transfer of the same kind of belief in Christ to Marx and Lenin with one reservation; Christianity preaches a belief in a Paradise in the sky, Communism hopes to bring the Paradise from heaven to earth. Just as Christians are squabbling with each other as to what "our Lord" really meant, and which sect has the "True Word," and are always blaming the other true believers for the fact that Christianity has gone wrong somewhere, so Communists are also blaming other true-blue Communists and Socialists because their Paradise has not yet come. The "sinister and foreboding" shadow of Communism is as thoroughly religious as Christianity though with a lot of useless sacerdotalism rejected.

The point I wish to make here above everything else is that some of us who are proud to be Atheists, and who were propagating Freethought long before "Communism" was identified with Russia, are quite aware that Christians are using their hatred of a political theory as a sword against our unswerving attack on religious beliefs in general, and on Christianity in particular. Political and economic questions cannot be avoided when dealing with such a widespread delusion as religion, and the Freethought movement was bound to have in its ranks people of widely divergent political views. We claim, however, that we have a case against religion based on history and science, and the fact that some Communists are Atheists has no bearing at all on the problem of religion. I know, and the editor of the Jersey "Evening Post" knows, that large numbers of Christians are Communists—and Jews as well as Buddhists and Mahomedans.

He and other Christians, as well as even Rationalists and Jews, believe that Jesus "died on the Cross." If he does not know it, then he might as well learn that a considerable number of Freethinkers are quite sure that the Crucifixion is as mythical as the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, and that in actual fact there is no evidence whatever that the Jesus of the Gospels ever lived. The leader writer tells us that Jesus "preached a real brotherhood"—but did he? Did he not curse the Pharisees because they differed from him? Did he not "damn" to a Hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, all those who disagreed with him? Do his biographers give us anywhere one decent word that he uttered to his own mother? Does he ever mention his (reputed?) father Joseph even once with any affection—and if Jesus had really lived, and Joseph was his mother's husband, he must have had a big hand in the child's upbringing.

It should also be noted that if parents are to be blamed because their children do not go to Sunday school, it cannot be because the parents have not had the benefits of religious education; it was actually compulsory in their day and there can thus be only one reason why they

do not encourage their children to be religious. It is simply that they no longer believe in Christianity and are quite sure it is of no value either as an educative force or as a belief. All that matters these days is a secular education as good as can be had. It is simply a waste of time to study religious beliefs which science and history—taught at the same time in the same school—compel one to discard. How can anyone reconcile the story of Creation as narrated in Genesis with the fact of Evolution?

H. CUTNER.

EARLY ENGLISH FREETHOUGHT

VI.

IN 1585 the Star Chamber was instituted. Through the instrumentality of Archbishop Whitgift, printing was restricted to London and the two universities. The number of printers was limited, and every publication had to receive the approbation of the Primate or the Bishop of London. These efforts to gag opinion were defied by "Martin Marprelate" with his private travelling press. Whether Henry Barrowe, Job Throckmorton, or some other, was the author of the Martin Marprelate tracts, they are deserving of mention both for asserting the liberty of the press and as an early instance of the effective employment of satire against ecclesiastical pretensions. Martin's "pistles" against the "proud, popish, presumptuous, profane, paltry, pestilent, and pernicious prelates" were not without their influence in disentralling the people from their ancient intellectual servitude to the hierarchy.

Browne, like Thomas Bilney, "that blessed martyr" as Latimer calls him, was a Norfolk preacher, and probably from the settlement of the Dutch in Norwich, that part soon became a seat of heresy. The martyrs whose names are recorded as having been executed there, however, all bear sterling English names. Matthew Hamond, a ploughwright of Hitherset, near Norwich, comes first. Stowe tells us he was burnt to ashes in the castle ditch at Norwich (20th May, 1579) for denying Christ to be our Saviour, and saying that the New Testament was but a "storie" of men, or rather a mere fable. In 1583, John Lewes, "an obstinate heretic denying the Godhead of Christ, and holding other detestable heresies (much like his predecessor, Matthew Hamond), was burnt at Norwich." Blomefield, in his *History of Norfolk*, tells us he "dyed obstinately without Repentance or any Speeche"; and, further, that in 1587, Peter Cole, of Ipswich, tanner, was also burnt to death in the castle ditch "for those abominable blasphemies"; and in 1588, Francis Ket, of Windham, Master of Arts, "was burned at the same place for the like heresies." This Ket was a relative of the famous rebel, Robert Ket, whose rising is so graphically described by Froude. Strype says Francis Ket "seems to have been a minister." Bishop Scambler, he informs us, summoned this heretic, "whose opinions were found so vile and horrible concerning Christ that the Bishop was forced to condemn him for a stubborn heretic." Ket was educated at Cambridge, and it is quite possible that he came in contact with Robert Greene, the poet, and Christopher Marlowe, whom Swinburne calls "the father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse."

Greene, a Norwich man, in his catchpenny *Groatworth of Wit*, that "crazy death-bed wail of a weak and malignant spirit," in the passage immediately preceding his reference to that "upstart crow" Shakespeare, alludes to Marlowe as a companion in saying, "like the foole

in his heart, there is no God." Vaughan of Golden Grove, a contemporary, says Marlowe wrote a book against the Trinity, and Thomas Beard, Oliver Cromwell's tutor, in his *Theatre of God's Judgments* (ch. xxiii), says Marlowe "denied God and his Son Christ, and not only in word blasphemed the Trinity, but also (as it is credibly reported) wrote books against it, affirming our Saviour to be but a deceiver, and Moses but a conjuror and seducer of the people, and the Holy Bible to be but vain and idle stories, and all religion but a device of policy." Probably these accusations were only founded upon a report which is to be found among the papers relating to the Court of Chancery in the Harleian MS., which shows there was an attempt to incite a prosecution for blasphemy against Marlowe. Among the "horrible blasphemies" mentioned in this paper are his allegations that the Indians and other authors wrote of times preceding those of Adam; that Moses was but a juggler, and that one Heriott can do more than he; that the first beginning of religion was only to keep men in awe; that Christ was the son of a carpenter, and that "yf the Jewes among whom he was borne did crucify him, thei best knew him and whence he came"; that the sacraments would have been better administered in a tobacco "pipe"; together with ribald allusions to the woman of Samaria and the apostles. It further alleges that one Richard Cholmelie hath confessed that he was persuaded by Marlowe's reason to become an Atheist, and that "almost in every company he commeth, persuadeth men to Atheisme." These charges were never sworn to on oath, and may be taken *cum grano salis*. Mr. E. A. Bullen, in his preface to Marlowe's works, says: "It is a comfort to know that the ruffian who drew up the charges, a certain 'Richard Bame,' was hanged at Tyburn in December, 1591." Whatever Marlowe's opinions, there can be no question about his daring genius. Of his influence upon succeeding poets, Swinburne observes: "To none have so many of the greatest among them been so deeply and so directly indebted. Nor was ever any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmingledly an influence for good."

If any man influenced Shakespeare, it was Marlowe. Did he influence his religious opinions? That Shakespeare was a Freethinker is argued by Mr. W. J. Birch in his *Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare*. "It is hard, indeed, to say whether he had any religious belief or no. The religious phrases which are thinly scattered over his works are little more than expressions of a distant and imaginative reverence. But on the deeper grounds of religious faith his silence is significant. He is silent, and the doubt of Hamlet deepens his silence about the afterworld. 'To die,' it may be, was to him as it was to Claudio, 'to go we know not whither.'" Often as his questionings turn to the riddle of life and death he leaves it a riddle to the last, without heeding the common theological solutions around him. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." It has been debated whether Shakespeare was a Catholic or a Protestant. No doubt he was a Catholic in the best sense, and for this reason his works have always been the opprobrium of pious Puritans.

J. M. WHEELER.

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CORRESPONDENCE

SIR,—Being interested in the problem of Chance and Determinism, Mr. Rowland can be referred to Lenin's treatise "Empirio-Criticism." In addition, a more popular approach has been published in the August issue of the "Freidenker," our Swiss contemporary. Perhaps, somebody is able to translate (and condense) it for the "Freethinker"?—Yours, etc.,

P.G.R.

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. O. SAPHIN, JAMES HART, G. WOOD, E. PAGE.

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RELIGION

- (1) Religion is probably the most indefinite, most personal, and most curious subject of human study.
- (2) Most religious people would maintain it is also the most important study which may be true.
- (3) Yet it is the one above all others which is often barred from discussion; which is taboo in polite society.
- (4) This seems partly because it involves deep personal sentiments; but also because of fear and ignorance.
- (5) Religion is considered esoteric and sacrosanct; a subject not open to general discussion.
- (6) If religion were restricted entirely to subjective personal beliefs there might be reason in this position.
- (7) But it is not so restricted; it is organised and propagated with unusual persistence and vehemence.
- (8) It has a vast influence on communal life; it has been, and still is, the cause of controversy and strife.
- (9) It has been, and still is, an important factor in international relations and is often the cause of wars.
- (10) It enters into the constitution of states, into methods of politics and has a large influence in education.
- (11) It is noteworthy that, while religion is thus such an important subject, it remains indefinite.
- (12) One would consider that a subject of such importance in theory and practice would be freely discussed.
- (13) In modern times the study of what is termed Comparative Religion has become more general.
- (14) It is not logomachy to suggest that even in religion it is advisable to know what one means.
- (15) Clearer thinking as a fundamental factor in clearer speaking and writing applies to religion also.
- (16) To the student of Sociology, therefore, religion is an important and indeed necessary study.
- (17) This study ranges from its theoretical principles to its practices and its influence on humans.
- (18) Here however the enquiry is strictly limited; the question considered being, "What is religion?"
- (19) This subject contains a great volume of principles and beliefs which have greatly influenced human lives.
- (20) Is it possible to discover some central focal principle on which this whole structure rests?
- (21) Science, in all its branches, deals with the objective, with what happens; not why these things happen.
- (22) Religion, like philosophy, differs from science in seeking the answer to this last question, the reason why.
- (23) Both religion and philosophy endeavour to deal with the universe, not in parts, but as a whole.
- (24) Is the approach to religion different from the approach to philosophy and can they be differentiated?
- (25) The dividing line between what may properly be called religion and no religion is of importance.
- (26) To say that religion is a way of life does not define it; but it does indicate a division.
- (27) Religious ways of life differ as widely in their practices as religions do in their theories.
- (28) To maintain that religion is synonymous with morality is inaccurate both in fact and in logic.
- (29) Is there then some common principle in all religions which differentiates them from other view-points?
- (30) The basic fundamental principle of all religions seems to be a belief in the extra-natural.
- (31) Here religion is defined as a belief in the extra-natural philosophy as a subject without this belief.
- (32) Religion will be considered as a belief in some power which is not included in the natural order.
- (33) Such a belief can be invoked as an explanation of any phenomena not explainable on natural lines.
- (34) Philosophy is an endeavour to explain life and the universe without invoking the extra-natural.
- (35) Extra-natural seems the most suitable term in that it includes super-natural and preter-natural.
- (36) On this first fundamental principle of religion others rest, of which three are important.
- (37) First, that this extra-natural power created, or caused, the universe and is itself the First Cause.
- (38) Second, that this power exercises a continuing and varying control over the working of the universe.
- (39) Third, that in this scheme of things humans have a unique position in view of human immortality.
- (40) That is to say, this extra-natural power is First Cause and Controller and humans possess immortal souls.
- (41) These three hypotheses have a necessary and close relationship with one another being inter-dependent.
- (42) Those who hold that this extra-natural power only created the Universe and then left it alone will here be called Deists.
- (43) Such a position indicates an attempt to explain a theological difficulty; yet does not solve it.
- (44) Here the word Theist will be used to indicate those who believe in continuing control also.
- (45) Further that they believe in a varying control, that is to say, intervention in otherwise inexorable working.
- (46) Such intervention is the only evidence of the existence of the intervening extra-natural power.
- (47) This determines the special and unique relationship between humans and this controlling power.
- (48) A First Cause has only academic interest to humans in their present life; intervention is immediate and important.
- (49) But even that steadily diminishing belief is of far less importance than that in human immortality.
- (50) This last is the belief which determines religion in practice and the religious attitude to life.

W. EDWARD MEADS.

WHY?

Canon F. Boyd—who refused some time ago to baptise a child—tries to justify his action in the "Sunday Pictorial." He compares the Church of England to a trade union, in that both have certain rules which members are expected to obey. Fair enough! Those who wish to support the Church should do so. As the Canon says, "If you believe the Church is right, join up, if you don't, stay out." We repeat, fair enough! But why should we, who do not think the Church is right, be forced to subsidise it? The interest on Queen Anne's Bounty has still to be paid since its conversion, and the interest has to come from everybody, not only Churchgoers. We even have to pay a heavier rate because the Church pays none.