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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Two Theories of God

A FEW years ago a young girl was brutally murdered. The murderer was never found. The parents of the girl had inscribed on the coffin "Thy will be done." The local parson, however, objected to the inscription, on the ground that it cast a doubt over the watchfulness of God. But the parents refused to alter the inscription. Certainly the inscription did not show much trust in the watchfulness of God and his angels. Religiously, the child belonged to God, and morally it was God's responsibility to protect her against ill-treatment. Perhaps that was the feeling of the priest, and he was trying to prevent scandal as well as he could. There was sense in his argument that it reflected on the goodness of God and his angels. For a God ought to protect his children. In English law if a man saw another ill-treating a girl and did nothing to protect her he could be punished. He becomes an accessory to the fact. A god who can only work his will so long as some human is at hand is not of much value. It looks as though the proper way of stating the case would be to say to God, "Thy will be done," that is, if someone is near to do what is required.

Judging from authorities there are two theories of, and about God. God is omniscient, and omnipotent. That is, that he knows everything and can do anything. There is biblical warrant for that. We are also assured, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of God. But it must be noted that God's knowledge owing to his omniscience does not help the sparrow through his omnipotence.

But everything that is in the world, the good and the bad, the wise and the silly, the pain and pleasure, are parts of his plan, and exist by His will, and would not exist if He made up His mind that they should not be. There is nothing which happens without His knowledge and without His sanction. He means well, but He is perpetually baulked and His good intentions are continually frustrated by man or Satan or both.

The other theory turns God into a limited liability company and is chiefly valued by Theists because it gives a few vague ideas—a kind of cloudy pantheism without the logical force Pantheism so often displays. According to this we must not saddle God with responsibilities for what occurs because he can do nothing without our co-operation, and which if it is withheld, His intentions, which are always good, are frustrated. It is the motto of the old American mining camp. The piano was being played, but the listeners were not pleased, and at last the owner cried, "Gentlemen, please don't shoot the pianist, he is doing his best." That was a reasonable request, because in that case, the victims were not asked to admire the performance, or to worship the performer, but merely to restrain the expression of their feelings within the limit of polite society. But in this case we are asked to refrain from blaming God because He does not do all things well, and to praise Him would look like

sheer sarcasm. A god who is merely a fellow-worker in the universe does not meet the requirements of the Theist. It leaves the order of things, including the passions, the weaknesses, and the follies of man untouched, and is saving God's character at the expense of his judgment. It leaves him neither supreme power nor supreme wisdom, he is no more than a well-meaning blunderer in a world in which his own existence is the greatest blunder of all.

There remains the usual resort of the bemused believer, that all before him is a mystery, that we only see through a glass darkly. But if we could see clearly enough, or see the end of it all, we should see that all is for the best, and that God's plans work out well in the end. And if we do not get all that we ought to have in this world, we shall get it in the next. Then we shall see that all our pains were for our good. That they were really blessing in disguise. We are not suffering, we only think we are, and, although we grumble to-day, there will come a time when we shall thank God for treating us as He has done. But because we cannot see the end of things, therefore much of our pain may eventuate in pleasure. May it not also happen that much of our pleasure may result in pain? If we have to wait for the end before we can pass an opinion, then the opinion that God is good is as unwarrantable as any other. We don't know, and on this theory no one knows, and if no one knows, can we conceive anything more supremely idiotic than to pay thousands of parsons, to tell us all about it? How do we know that our wrongs will be redressed hereafter? No one comes back to give us reliable information. The churches which profess to have in their possession the secrets of Heaven are proven to be false in their statements, and dishonest in their promises. Numbers of priests of one kind or another, tell us stories which slowly but surely people refuse to accept.

An analysis of the religions of the world make it quite clear that while all religions may, in the first stage, be quite honest, it is not long before lie after lie takes the place of all honesty. In all parts of the world, and with every kind of religion, there comes a time when the development of mind becomes greater, and religion becomes weaker. Indeed we do not need to go back very far in our own history to find something like this. When a man dies suddenly an inquest is held, and if the cause of death cannot be found, the Coroner passes a verdict that the death was an "act of God." It has been recorded that a jury once returned a verdict "A visitation of God—under suspicious circumstances." In that verdict there is a volume of philosophy. If a man is struck dead by lightning, that is an "Act of God." The ship that sinks, again gives us "the hand of God." And so it goes on, generation after generation. But the more and more we know about the gods and their history the faster is their decline. And with the decline of the gods, Man bids to become the master of his own destiny.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE CRIMINAL TRIALS AND EXECUTION OF ANIMALS

IN ancient Israel the ox that gored a man or woman to death was stoned until it died, while its innocent owner escaped punishment. But it is recorded in Exodus xxi that: "If the ox were wont to gore in times past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner shall be put to death." Also in Genesis ix the barbarous custom of blood revenge is even more comprehensively commanded when Jahveh claims the life of every man and beast that has been guilty of homicide, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

Blood revenge persists to-day among many savage and semi-civilised stocks and even lifeless objects that have accidentally caused death are destroyed. Even when a native falls from a tree, the tree is deemed responsible for his injury or death and his relatives assemble and cut it down. When a tiger or other carnivorous creature devours a hunter, his tribesmen incur disgrace unless they slay a tiger or other predaceous animal in atonement.

In Malacca and Celebes buffaloes that killed natives are slain, while in Upper Burma the people punish a river in which a man has been drowned. Thieving dogs are hanged in the Congo Valley in Africa. Even in the ancient legal code of the Persians, the Zend-Avesta, it is prescribed that if "a mad dog, or the dog that bites without barking, smite a sheep or wound a man, the dog shall pay for it as for wilful murder."

In the very heart of ancient civilisation and culture itself, in glorious Athens, animals and inanimate objects were still tried in court for their crimes. And it seems astounding that, as the eminent anthropologist, Prof. Frazer reminds us in his brilliant series of studies, "The Folklore of the Old Testament": "Plato himself cast his mantle of authority over these quaint relics of a barbarous jurisprudence by proposing to incorporate them in the laws of that ideal state which he projected towards the end of his life. Yet it must be confessed that when he came to compose the 'Laws,' the trembling hand of the aged artist had lost much of its cunning, and that, large as is the canvas on which his latest picture is painted, its colours pale beside the visionary glories of the 'The Republic.'" In truth, this is crystal clear when Plato projected a procedure based on the earlier Athenian system and advised the prosecution of an animal responsible for a man's death for homicide and that the said animal, if convicted, should be executed. The sole exception suggested was that of a quadruped contesting in the Olympic Games that happened to occasion death, while, apart from a thunderbolt or other missile flung by the hand of the Deity, every inanimate object responsible for death should, when proved guilty, be destroyed and thrust beyond the boundaries.

These antique ideas and customs survived in other Greek city communities while in Rome both men and animals were at one time sentenced to capital punishment for sacrilege. An old custom traditionally traced to the early Roman legislator, Numa, decreed that "if any man ploughed up a boundary stone, not only he himself but the oxen which had aided and abetted him in the act of sacrilege, should be sacred to the God of Boundaries; in other words, both the man and his beasts were placed outside the pale of the law, and any one might slay them with impunity."

Ideas such as these persisted throughout Christendom and operated until relatively recent times. Domesticated animals were prosecuted in the criminal courts and, on conviction, were done to death. Wild animals, however, were tried in the ecclesiastical courts and the penalty imposed was banishment or death by means of exorcism or excommunication.

The trials of domestic animals were conducted in accordance with the rules laid down in the Jewish Book of the Covenant. In Frazer's words: "In every case advocates were assigned to defend the animals, and the whole proceedings, trial, sentence, and execution, were carried out with the strictest regard for the forms of justice and the majesty of the law. The researches of French antiquaries have brought to light the records of ninety-two processes which were tried in French courts from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. The last victim to suffer in that country under what we may call the Jewish dispensation was a cow which underwent the supreme penalty in 1740."

The charges urged against sinful domestic creatures were generally approved. But the justification of clerical proceedings against a plague of lice, rats, mice, grubs and other vermin, whose activities were all designed by divine Providence, was called for by the impious cavillings of some who doubted. So it was replied that, much as Jahveh cursed the serpent who tempted Eve and Christ withered the fig tree for not bearing fruit in the wrong season, it therefore became obvious that the Holy Catholic Church was divinely appointed to anathematise and exterminate all noxious creatures without any exception whatsoever.

When the countryside suffered from the depredations of insect and other pests, the people preferred a complaint in the ecclesiastical court, and then an expert was sent to estimate the extent of the damage to the crops. An advocate was then briefed to defend the accused, who were summoned to appear three times successively and when they failed to attend the court judgment was given against them by default. The pestilent animals were then ordered to depart, but if they proved contumacious they were solemnly exorcised. But when the vermin, despite all the thunders of the Church including the major excommunication, were seen to increase and multiply to an alarming extent, this was attributed to the malevolent activities of the very Devil himself. Moreover, the clergy asserted that the curses of the Church were powerless to protect parishioners whose tithes were in arrear, and so it was said that if tithes to the priesthood were promptly paid, locusts, caterpillars and other pests would quickly vanish. Indeed, this became the constant theme of countless eloquent and persuasive sermons preached during the Middle Ages.

During the fifteenth century, a law-suit between the commune of St. Julien and a destructive beetle was at last settled by surrendering for their sole use a tract of fertile land. But the acres allotted to the pests proved rich in chemical deposits and the tiresome litigation recommenced. The document recording this curious case exists but its conclusion remains conjectural. Frazer observes that: "All that is quite certain is, that the suit began in 1445 and that it, or another of the same sort, was still in process in 1487."

A law-suit against rats was commenced at Autun in the 16th century and after costly litigation was adjourned *sine die*. Criminal proceedings were instituted against moles in the Tyrol in 1519, and the trials of caterpillars, ants, flies, leeches and beetles took place in several European countries. In 1386 a sow seriously mauled a boy in the Falaise and was judicially hanged.

for her crime, while, amazing as it may seem a mare was burnt alive by decree of the Parliament of Aix as recently as 1697. Moreover, the Pilgrim Fathers carried this Old World absurdity to America where dogs and other sinful animals were executed. Animals were actually produced as witnesses in Savoy, as it was assumed that God would make them speak like Balaam's ass rather than allow the guilty to escape punishment.

In 1457 a sow and her litter of six piglets were tried for murder at Savigny and the sow was duly dispatched. The records of this and various other cases of a similar character still exist. Another case which reflects little credit on the intellect of our Christian ancestors was the trial at Bale of an aged cock accused of laying an egg. The Court decided that the Devil had entered into the bird, much like the demons who were expelled by the power of Jesus and driven into the Gadarene swine. So the cock was sentenced, not as baleful bird, but as that of an evil spirit that had assumed the fowl's form.

T. F. PALMER.

BUBBLE AND SQUEAK

THE first essential for healthy gods is an environment of ignorance. They wilt on contact with enlightenment, and perish under the rays of science. But in a civilized and enlightened society a well organised and not too scrupulous character can capitalise a holy corpse, be certain of the allegiance of the ignorant, and attract supporters from all other ranks, who for personal reasons, and timidity, volunteer their help. The number of church customers continue to decline year after year, but the financial going is good, and that compensates for the same few faces in the same regular places.

A gallant attempt to put up a good show was made at Amsterdam when delegates from 135 member churches in 39 nations attended a World Council of Churches. It was a wonderful exhibition of Christian brotherhood—so long as sectarian differences were kept in the background. Even the prayers had to be carefully sectioned and coated with the respective sectarian syrup so that there was a bite for everybody. It was the old Christian story, they agree very well as human beings, the trouble begins when they start to talk and act as Christians.

Then the well advertised Lambeth Conference of Bishops, drawn from all corners of Christendom. Among other things they found the most pressing need to-day was the rapprochement between religion and science, and the harnessing of scientific means to Christian ends.

We must remember they were bishops and not expect too much. After all who would go to a Conference of Bishops for science and sense, and we can leave it at that.

"The third day comes a frost, a killing frost." In other words the British Association met in Brighton, and "Nature" the leading scientific journal in this country is quite upset and sulky. The President of the British Association, Sir Henry Tizard in his presidential address completely ignored the Bishops and their Lambeth Conference suggested reunion of science and religion.

But the leader writer in "Nature" should remember that Sir Henry Tizard was talking science to an assembly of scientists, and Christianity was quite out of place there. He pointed out that the improvements in society were due to the application of science. That is true, and Jesus does not come in at all.

"Nature's" anxiety to accommodate the bishops could only result in nonsense, and it is surprising indeed

to find a reunion between Christianity and science finding support in any journal dealing with science. How is it proposed to unite the Christian story of creation, with its non acceptance by science? How will Jehovah's dust man be harmonised with the evolved man of Anthropology? In what way will Biblical chronology and Geological time be made to agree? How will the science of Astronomy chum up with that wonderful Wednesday recorded in Genesis when God made the sun, moon, and stars? Will miracles be merged with physics or chemistry? Will the National Health Service be scrapped and our doctors trained to wrestle with devils, and will special creation and evolution be made one. Will Christ crucified be preached in terms of molecules and isotopes?

We might continue along those lines but one of the big London dailies deserves a word. It is usual to have an official church service for those attending the British Association meeting. This year at Brighton it was omitted and the "News Chronicle" seems rather sad. From the report in that daily it would seem that church going scientists, and non-church going scientists were very disappointed at the omission.

Surely the local committee responsible for the arrangements is to be congratulated on limiting their efforts to the scientific purposes of the Association. Brighton has more than sufficient churches to accommodate all church-going members of the Association. There is no hardship there, or lack of opportunity to worship.

The pathetic case is that of the non-church going members of the Association. They must have been grievously disappointed at missing a church service, still they were saved one bit of hypocrisy, but perhaps that was part of the regret.

Again it is an old story of Christian impudence and intolerance. Freedom and justice for his religion does not give him sufficient satisfaction. He must encroach upon the rights of others.

It seems a self assumed Christian attitude that nobody else has any rights until Christian demands are satisfied. In this case of omitting a religious service at the annual meeting of scientific men and women, nobody's freedom to worship or not to worship is interfered with; nobody's rights are infringed. In fact it is the only way in which the religious and non-religious beliefs of members can be met with fairness to all. But fairness means nothing to the Christian where his religion is concerned. In this particular instance he almost claims it as a right to spread a Christian net over the assembly and dose them with religion until it pleases him to release them to attend the proper purpose of the Conference.

But let us not forget that Christians are encouraged in their impudence and intolerance by that brand of unbeliever who is grieved because he missed the opportunity for attending a church service.

R. H. ROSETTI.

FREEDOM

(It is Thomas Henry Huxley who is supposed to be speaking): "If I may bring a message from my age to yours I would say three things, first, do not let the advance of science slacken, for knowledge is power, and the pursuit of truth is one of the ultimate and eternal imperatives for man. Second, do not allow science to be divorced from morality, your age has different views on morality from mine, but we agree that moral rectitude is another of the ultimate imperatives and that it is linked with something outside ourselves; and finally, there is Freedom, it is better for a man to go wrong in freedom than to go right in chains, therefore I say to you, hold fast to truth, justice and freedom, these are still the only foundations on which any enduring new world can be built." —"On Living in a Revolution," Julian Huxley.

BACKGROUND OF RELIGIOUS CRITICISM

"A CRITIQUE OF HINDUISM," by Laxmanshastrji Joshi, has already been ably reviewed so far as Hinduism is concerned. The author, however, prefaces his subject with a first chapter devoted to the Principles of Religious Criticism, the postulates of which are even more important to be dealt with.

"Religion," he states, "evolves with the evolution of society. The institutions of religion, therefore, correspond to the stage of development or degeneration of a given society. Criticism of a religion is a branch of general social science; for religion is a creation of society and its evolution is a part of social evolution. Society is historical; every single aspect of it is, therefore, historical. It is necessary to examine every historical event as a link in a causally connected chain of events. These considerations will also apply to religion." (Pages 2-3.)

At different times, according to their reach of means and knowledge, men have striven to explain their surroundings so as to be in a position to influence the alleged forces towards the furtherance of individual aims. However, conditions of life were improved not by the invention of this or that theory but by the discovery of certain laws beyond man's will, which, though working uninfluenced by him, enabled him to create material tools and develop material production. Thus, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in man's brain, not in man's better insight into "eternal" truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange, i.e., social conditions. The trends of ideology are governed by the class interests of the set of people among whom it arose.

Religion being a necessary attitude under certain social conditions, the propagating of secularism and the disruption of religious dogmas

"with the help of rationalism was an essential but insufficient step towards the progress of man. It was insufficient because it did not touch the crux of the problem, which consists in explaining religion as a social force. Religion is backed and supported by a certain social structure and atmosphere, created and determined by a set of historical circumstances. It is an easy task to bring into light the follies of religion. But the real question is to explain why for centuries together, religion dominated man and was looked upon as a resort in spite of those follies being there from its beginning to date. It is this all important question that is often side-tracked in the attempts to expose its follies and errors." (Page 6.)

Mere knowledge is not enough to bring social forces under the control of society. Primitive Man, with no means of production at his disposal so as to safeguard his bodily existence, was entirely dependent upon Nature and chance. In his lifelong struggle for survival he cannot afford time to hatch out philosophical doctrines, but accepts everything as Matter like himself. But Matter seems to act; so Chance is mentally reflected as a host of spirits, inherent in Nature and *amoral* as Matter. They are neither good nor bad, but peevish and whimsical, now offering, then refusing food.

Ignorance of the laws of Nature, primitive Man "deified" Nature. Ignorant of the working laws inherent in society, modern Man, though familiar with the laws of Nature, still believes in supernatural forces, for religion is the phantastic reflection in Man's mind of

extraneous forces obviously controlling their daily life. In this reflection the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural power, equally inexplicable, dominating Man with the same apparent necessity as the forces of Nature had obsessed the primitive. The phantastic personification, which in the beginning merely reflected the mysterious forces of Nature, at this point acquire social attributes and become representatives of the agencies of history. Hence, what above all is necessary to dispense with religion is a *social act*. When this act has been accomplished,

"when society by taking possession of all means of production, and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are now held by means of production, which they themselves have produced but which confront them as an irresistible, extraneous force, when, therefore, Man no longer merely proposes but also disposes—only then will the last extraneous force which is reflected in religion, vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect." (Fr. Engels.)*

Man's outlook has always changed along with social changes; as a result, religion, too, has passed through many a form, through a number of gradations all of them indicating a continuity of development, corresponding to the development of society.

"This continuity does not and need not mean an uninterrupted progress from the primitive to the modern times. There are to be seen a number of ups and down on the way. But history goes to show that society has generally progressed all along, notwithstanding these ups and downs. Nations rose and fell but culture evolved and progressed on the whole, and with it evolved religion." (Pages 9-10.)

Entire nations and cultures have disappeared, but for all this, though disappearing individually, they had their achievements inherited by others. Such as Man is the sum total of all his previous stages, culture is the sum total of all preceding achievements by the nations of the world. Trade exchange furthered cultural exchange and the pooling of scientific attainments.

Human sacrifice was a religious sanction in a community who did not produce their material life and therefore had no room for idlers nor slaves. When surplus production was made possible, prisoners were no longer slain and eaten, but turned into slaves, consequently mercy replaced cannibalism as a part of religion.

In the antique society of slave owners, with little distinction in the social gradation among them, gods were devised as more or less equals among themselves. The clear-cut hierarchy of feudal times was consequently represented by one heavenly Lord who, by ascending higher and higher, left behind him his former fellow gods as strictly subservient castes (arch-angels, angels, saints and so on). Monotheism, once the reflection of oriental despotism and now that of capital power, is nothing but an external form of religion with all forms of sub-deities co-existing, among them the gods of suppressed cults or social strata surviving as the devil.

The spirits of the nomadic tribes were firmly attached to localities as their peculiar place of abode. The gods of the settled peoples are movable and can be exported in a convenient and readily adaptable form. Tribal and national deities became extinct together with their adherents. With the pooling of experiences and the en-

* Anti-Dühring (pages 354-5).

uing development of world trade, the necessity for a unique world god arose. This blending process started in Rome, the "caput mundi." Unable to bring about their emancipation on their own, the slaves took refuge in an imaginary Saviour, powerful enough to overpower their worldly lords.

"Man changes and develops himself in changing and transforming the forces of nature, adapting them to his own use. History furnishes no instance, nor will it ever do so, of a backward primitive level of material life accompanied by a high and developed spiritual one." (Page 15.)

If, therefore, somebody clings to the idea of having discovered the ultimate perfect truth, it is self-deception. Our ideas, ideals and idols continuously change.

"So long as the internal conflict and the class struggle will remain in society, religion will continue to dominate it. The control of the religious institutions passed into the hands of the economically dominating class ever since the rise of private property and it is they who gave religion an organised form. To defend and preserve the antagonistic interests in society has been the task performed by religion since then and thus the hands of the propertied classes have been strengthened. Time and again religion has suppressed the internal social conflict arising out of the glaring inequalities of possessions and privileges. For it is a product of the forces that influence and shape the future of Man, but cannot be understood or controlled by his action. Even in the present-day capitalistic society, the sword of uncertainty hangs over the future of all, rich and poor, the capitalists or the workers. Depressions, bankruptcies, losses, debts, unemployment and various other evils continue to threaten all. It is difficult to do away with this social anarchy without ending the economic anarchy; and the way to it is through a "socialistic" reconstruction of society. . . . With the socialistic reconstruction of society, disappear these mysterious social forces themselves. It is quite natural then that their reflection too should vanish." (Page 43.)

Our Secular Movement, sprung up from Utopian Socialism of the Owenite era, has to catch up with the general changes in society and knowledge. We have to face very material facts and to adapt our activities accordingly; to this end, Joshi's book is a very valuable contribution.

PERCY G. ROY.

A NOTABLE CONVENTION

AUGUST 7 and 8 marked a red-letter day in the history of American Freethought. On those two days the first Congress of Freethought, Rationalists and Humanists Societies was held at Chicago. Delegates from twelve societies, and several hundred sympathisers attended. The very names of the societies which sent representatives are indicative of the wide platform and varied organisations. They included such bodies as The Joint Committee of Czech and Slovak Organisations, The Czech Rationalist Federation of America, The Freie Gemeinde of Chicago, The Friendship Liberal League of Philadelphia, The Los Angeles Liberal League, etc. The meeting was an unqualified success and arrangements were made for a similar congress next year at Milwaukee. Several other societies sent greetings and promised to send delegates to the 1919 meeting.

When one thinks of the colossal size of the U.S.A. and the distances which delegates had to travel, the meeting showed that America was not lacking in enthusiastic support of Freethought.

After the election of officers a programme was submitted and approved, dealing with Constitution, Organisation and Publicity. It was felt that an official paper with a national appeal was desirable although naturally local organisations would still publish their own journals which would deal with matters affecting their own States. Forty-seven of the Christian churches had just finished a convention at Amsterdam. Their object was to promote or, let us say, try to promote unity amongst the Christian churches, judging by previous results, rather a hopeless task. The R.C.s refused to attend, claiming that their church contained all the truth. Every church has made this claim and tortured and killed those who disagreed with them. Thackeray expressed it well when he said that the churches were hating each other for the love of God.

Hundreds and hundreds of years of scrapping will not be so easily obliterated because representatives of 47 churches join together for the first time. It is common danger which tries to bring about a reconciliation, the waning power of the churches and the growing strength of their opponents. Freethought without any history of murky past, ought to find it easy to combine for its followers are all marching along the same road—the road that leads to freedom.

Freethinkers and Rationalists in Britain will wish their American comrades all success in their crusade to free men's minds from the poison of religion and priestcraft.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

THE "THREE IMPOSTORS"

I HAVE a volume entitled "The Historical Life of Joanna, Queen of Naples," an interesting narrative of stirring events including an account of the well-known publication, "Three Impostors," the authorship of which has puzzled Freethinkers.

Voltaire wrote of this subject in his "Essai sur les Moeurs et L'Esprit des Nations," remarking that the misfortunes of Joanna were most extraordinary, during her reign when Petrarch visited her Court, and the University of Naples was founded by Frederick the Second; but, the chief concern of this "History" is the virulent accusation by Pope Gregory the Ninth, that Frederick and his Chancellor, Pierre des Vignes, were authors of a publication, sent to Bishops and Princes in Europe, asserting that the World had been deceived by three impostors, Moses, Jesus and Mahomet. Then, Tiroboschi, the Italian historian, gave publicity that Frederick with his Chancellor wrote "The Three Impostors," and Voltaire quotes from the Pope's accusation, "that we have proof, dated July 1, 1239, of the true authorship of 'The Three Impostors' which caused great excitement."

Pierre des Vignes was arrested, being "anti-Christ," and confined in a fetid dungeon where his eyes were plucked! All these events, and even more terrible punishments were ordered by ecclesiastics, because thinkers would not accept as facts the religious statements of Moses talking to God up a mountain; of Jesus with the Devil on the roof of the Temple; and of Mahomet's journey to Heaven riding a milk-white donkey.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

ACID DROPS

Cardinal Griffin has discovered an easy way of converting England back to Rome—it is only one of a thousand other ways advanced by Catholic priests, but obviously the Cardinal thinks it infallible. "If we want to bring back," he declared the other week to his usual sheep, "Our Blessed Lord to the people of this country we shall do it by bringing back Our Lady." Bringing back "our Blessed Lord" to England really means making England a kind of appendage to Rome and under the thumbs of Italian priests; but notice the implication that "Our Blessed Lord" is not in England, an implication which will amuse (or otherwise) the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Moderator of the Free Churches and the heads of the other Christian sects in the country. What love and harmony there is between the Church of England and the Church of Rome!

In addition, "the conversion of England and Wales could be completed within a generation," added the Cardinal, "if every Catholic in the country were to bring into the Catholic Church one non-Catholic and if this process were to be progressively repeated." But isn't that just where the rub is? The only way a non-Catholic can be made into a Catholic is to prove that Roman Catholic Christianity is true—and not all the power of the Vatican with its hundreds of Popes, Priests and Cardinals can do that.

The secretary of the Synod of Cardiff District Methodist Church expressed concern at the growing secularisation of Sunday. We can appreciate his concern. Within our lifetime, Sunday has changed beyond recognition, and people are forsaking the churches for much pleasanter pursuits. Freethinkers should, however, not think the battle is won, nor slacken in their efforts at the complete secularisation of Sunday. Lord's Day Observance Societies, Methodies and Holy Joes in general still wield enough power to make Sunday a day of gloom and boredom in many parts of the country. The Statute Book still carries an Act—The Sunday Observance Act, 1625, which makes it illegal for anyone to move from one Parish to another for the purpose of sports or pastimes on Sunday.

At the recent Conference of the Society of Jews and Christians on Methods of Education, a good time seems to have been had by all. Christians patted Jews on the back, and Jews returned the compliment. Even when the Rev. I. Swift of Dollis Hill Synagogue said that "the development of Christianity is 'by-passed' in the traditional Jewish school," he was careful to hand out a bouquet by referring to the "growing awareness of Jewish contribution to Western civilisation, and the debt the Jew owed to Christendom." We could illustrate some of the debt owed but content ourselves with recommending a perusal of the history of Christianity in relation to the Jews.

The very Rev. F. Corbishley emphasized the fact that in religious education what counted most was the teacher. Therefore in all Catholic schools the teachers were either members of religious Orders, or were trained by members of those Orders, who undertook their work with intense devotion. In plain English this means that Catholic school children are fed on religion with education claiming second place. An example of Catholic education can be seen in the first question of the catechism "Who made you?" Answer: "God made me." And thus, in

six words, the whole theory of Evolution is demolished—or is it?

That past master in the making of sloganberry jam, Mr. H. Morrison, in an address to the Labour Party, Southern Regional Section, said with the usual political phraseology, "We have to socialise men's minds, without destroying their individuality and enterprise." Only a politician could think of that one, for how one could be done without the other, only Mr. Morrison knows. It behoves Freethinkers, however, to watch very carefully all attempts to dragoon the people, and any infringement of our hard-won liberties must be resisted. Freethinkers must oppose any attempts at regimentation whether from the Right, Left, or Centre.

It has been the fashion for the Churches of England and Rome to sneer at the Greek Church in Russia, and this was all the easier done because rarely was the Russian Church allowed to reply. It was never really England or Rome which was responsible for the disunity of Christendom, but the ignorant heads of the Orthodox Church; and their uncouth appearance, so marked a contrast to the saint-like Roman priests, helped to emphasise the contempt Rome always had for Russia. And now the Russian Christians have met in Conference in Moscow, and have issued a Declaration which proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that, just like what other sects feel about themselves, so the Greek Orthodox Church feels about itself—it is always right and everybody else in Christendom is wrong.

It is Russia now that wants an undivided Church, and it attaches no small blame to the Anglican and Roman Churches for all the current disunity. If only England and Rome would admit that they have been often quite wrong in their interpretation of faith and worship, a good start could be made towards unity. It seems to us that now that Russia is taking a big place in the world of politics, so the Russian Church feels it can do the same in religion, and it is no longer content to be treated by the other two big Churches as a sort of stupid and dirty ignorant little sister.

Anglican reaction to the Moscow Declaration takes the usual form of insisting that the Greek Orthodox Church is very badly informed on points of Anglican doctrine, and Russia should be put right by a committee of theologians. In other words "talks" should be arranged, and further talks—and, of course, many more after that. After all, what difference can talks extending over a century of time make to a religion that has already lasted nearly 2,000 years? Moreover, "unity" will be as far away as ever—though, in the meantime, it is true that the advancement of science might engulf all the Churches and give us an era of reason and sanity.

"Artifex" of the "Manchester Guardian" has it that the "intensely moral Secularism of the days of Bradlaugh which thought it could get rid of the supernatural element in Christianity, whilst retaining the beautiful moral teaching of the Carpenter of Nazareth, is dead." This is indeed news, but of one thing we are certain, Bradlaugh with his keen legalistic and logical mind could never have regarded some of the moral precepts of the carpenter as beautiful. The moral bankruptcy of theology was the reason for Bradlaugh's attack. The assertion by "Artifex" is on a level with the usual Christian humbug.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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SUGAR PLUMS

The Vatican is considering making the "Assumption" of the Virgin Mary into a dogma—so far, of course (though all devout Catholics believe it) it is nothing but a legend. In case this is not well known, we might point out that actually there are three "Assumptions," the first, at her death, when her soul gracefully ascended to heaven; the second, at her resurrection three days afterwards, when up went her body to be reunited to her soul, and the third time, when she was made Queen of the Angels in Heaven and Lady of the Universe. As there never was a scrap of evidence outside the New Testament that Mary ever lived at all, and as there is no record that she ever died, not even in the New Testament, Christian theologians have found it very difficult to substantiate the Assumption.

The obvious truth is that the myth-makers, having invented the story of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, were obliged to do the same for his Virgin Mother; and the parallels between the Assumption of Mary and the narratives of the last days of Jesus have long been noticed. The only way to stop criticism in the Roman Church is by making anything thus criticised into a "dogma"—and then perhaps the threat of eternal fire in an indestructible Hell for all subsequent critics may well shut their impudent mouths.

One would think that an association with a title such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science could not possibly descend to such depths of ignorance and petty dealings, as on the occasion of their opening session when an Abyssinian prince was ordered to leave his seat and sit in the space reserved for negroes. One can surely reasonably expect that scientists whose work can only flourish in an atmosphere of freedom, should have left such measures as the colour bar to Nazis, Fascists and South Africans. Of a certainty, these American scientists have yet to learn that the advancement of science is not solely dependent on the whites, and their segregation of blacks and whites is in the best tradition of Hitlerism. We blush for shame for our "white" colleagues.

To forestall any criticism, we add that titles, royal, or otherwise, mean nothing to us; "a man's a man for a' that." Our criterion is not what is a man's ancestry, his race or colour, but what is his contribution to Humanity. We would far rather have as our epitaph

Heine's "I was a soldier in the army of human liberation," and that means the liberation from racial myths.

The Glasgow Secular Society opens its indoor session in the McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, to-day (October 3) at 7 p.m. Mr. R. H. Rosetti will be the speaker and his subject is "God or Man?" Admission is free, with some donation tickets. We hope the local saints will gather their forces and give the Society a real good send-off for its winter work.

On Thursday, October 14, Professor J. B. S. Haldane will lecture in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, at 7-80 p.m., on "Technical Progress and Moral Progress." The lecture is under the auspices of the National Secular Society, and we hope readers will help to make the date known among their friends, and make a point of attending themselves. Admission free.

The Rationalist Press Association has arranged a course of six Monday evening lantern lectures by W. E. Swinton, Ph.D., F.R.S.E., on "Reconstructing the Remote Past." The first lecture is on Monday, October 4, in The Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, Westminster, London, S.W.1, at 7 p.m. Course tickets, 12s. (Members R.P.A., 9s.), from the R.P.A. Offices, 4-6, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

THE MYTH PROBLEM AGAIN

I.

A READER in Brighton sent me a short while ago, a copy of a pamphlet written by the Rev. G. Maurice Elliott entitled, "Did Jesus Really Live?" and asked me what I thought of it. As so many Rationalists are still where Renan left them on the question—indeed, I think that at least 80 per cent. of Freethinkers agree with him—that for those who are interested, a few words in criticism might be worth while.

And first, what has always astonished me in this controversy is the way in which some almost unknown parson in a pamphlet of less than 16 pages is absolutely certain that he has demolished quite easily such massive works as those written by John M. Robertson and the other mythicists. All he feels he is called upon to do is to repeat some of the old arguments of Paley, a few from Dr. Conybeare with as much emphasis as possible that he was not a Christian and, hey presto! Dupuis, Robert Taylor, Dujardin, W. Benjamin Smith, Arthur Drews, and the others are completely wiped out.

In this particular pamphlet, Mr. Elliott drags in Tacitus, Suetonius, Josephus, Pliny, as if what they had written had never been examined by the Mythicists. Hundreds of pages of argument are thus easily dismissed in a couple of lines, especially as Mr. Elliott knows perfectly well that most, if not all, of his own readers have never read a line of Robertson and the other writers. I will even go so far as to say, on the internal evidence of this pamphlet, that Mr. Elliott himself has never read Robertson's six books dealing with the myth problem—and I must add as well, that I am sure he has never read any of the others, either. In fact, though he confidently quotes Dr. Conybeare, I doubt whether he has even read that writer's "Historical Christ."

Conybeare is a God-send to these Christian apologists. His book was published by Watts as was an earlier one—"Myth, Magic and Morals"—and Conybeare is thus

always hailed as a Rationalist. Like many modern churchmen, he had come to see that the New Testament was a storehouse of legend and myth, but believed that in the main it was "historical" in the sense that one could reject the miraculous and the absurd, the resultant residue being indisputably authentic. His position seems to me to have been analogous to that of Bishop Barnes. The Bishop believes, and I am sure quite sincerely, that Jesus Christ is "our Lord," the Son of God, while Conybeare believed that Jesus was the "historical Christ," that is, the genuine Messiah sent by God Almighty to save the world. His book is entitled, "The Historical Christ"—though some of us feel after reading it, the author should be called the "Hysterical Conybeare."

Conybeare's attack on the "Myth makers" is just silly, and he seems to me to have never understood the Mythical theory at all. If he had read Dupuis' "Origin of All Worships," though our knowledge has increased tremendously since that epoch-making work was written, he could never have written some of the unmitigated rubbish he did write.

In any case, Conybeare might be an authority for Mr. Elliott, but he is no authority for us. In fact, his little work would have been laughed out of court if it had not been that Christians are at their wit's end to combat the Mythicist, and they feel that quoting a Rationalist on their side is a formidable argument. But we admit that Rationalists are mostly on the side of those who believe in the historicity of Jesus, and we can add to the list nearly all Jews.

Mr. Elliott quotes Klausner, for example, but he might have added that for Klausner, Jesus was a Jew first and foremost, and nothing tickles the vanity of the modern Jew more than when he sees that—as Disraeli said—half Christendom worships as a God, a Jew, and the other half a Jewess. The whole of the Klausner's book is written to prove that Jesus was a Jew of Jews, and to thank the Almighty that Christians worship him as a God.

And this brings me to another point. For Mr. Elliott, Jesus is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour, the Son of God, God Almighty himself in the flesh. It is this Jesus that Mr. Elliott insists really lived—but most of his witnesses would have roared with laughter if they had known that they would be roped in to bolster up such hopeless credulity. H. G. Wells and J. S. Mill were, in every sense of the word, Atheists, even if they believed that the figure of Jesus in the Gospels could never have been invented; and one might add that such cultured Romans as Tacitus and Suetonius, and Greeks like Lucian, were equally without any belief in a God or Gods.

Mr. Elliott, as a parson writing with the authority of the Rev. Canon Campbell, Chancellor of Chichester Cathedral, is obliged to believe in all the miracles related in the New Testament—including the two famous ones which I constantly quote—Jesus flying over Jerusalem clinging to a Devil with huge wings, horns, and a tail, and the "Saints" coming out of their graves at the Crucifixion of Jesus and respectfully and reverently waiting for Jesus to come out of his grave first, before going into the city all alive and well; and it need hardly be added that it is not a Jesus responsible for miracles who is considered by Frazer, Wells, and Mill, to have really lived.

What indescribable nonsense Mr. Elliott can write can be judged by his statement that the reason why the Mythicist "thinks" that Jesus was not a historical figure is because the case for his existence "has been so badly put to" him. I am sure that his sheep will agree with him, but it is hard to understand that such childish-

ness could emanate from even the rawest of raw curates. Personally, I would be prepared to write a far better defence of Jesus as a historical figure than anything coming from Mr. Elliott in a quarter of the time. And to suggest that John M. Robertson did not know the case for Jesus is worse than infantile naivety.

Exactly what Sir James Frazer really believed is now impossible to say. He certainly wrote a strong passage supporting the historicity of Jesus but—and this is rarely if ever mentioned—he later wrote an illuminating Preface to Dr. Couchoud's "Enigma of Jesus." It is not easy to see why he should have done this if he had not begun to have a few doubts.

The greater part of his enormous work, "The Golden Bough," is taken up with explaining why various peoples believed in religion, and no such mass of the evidence for credulity, ignorance, and superstition, had ever been gathered before. Even if further research has shown Frazer in a few things sometimes wrong, this does not invalidate his argument. The believers in Jesus are in the direct line of succession to the primitives about whom Frazer wrote so much. His recommendation of Couchoud showed how far he had travelled in his long voyage in search for the truth.

H. CUTNER.

GOD MANIFEST

IN 1796 the Rev. James McGready came from North Carolina to Logan County, in the State of Kentucky. The County was a black spot among the regions of the State, its unpleasant reputation being summed up in the nickname of Rogues' Harbour, bestowed upon it by those who considered the majority of its citizens to be murderers, horse-thieves, highway robbers, counterfeiters, fugitive bond-servants, or runaway debtors, to whom it was a refuge from the officers of justice throughout the Union.

These wretches were occasionally brought to trial, but, said the detractors of Logan, perjury and lax enforcement of the law combined often to enable them to escape their due penalty. The more respectable members of the community therefore thought it fitting to form a lynching organisation known as "The Regulators." Pitched battles fought with "the rogues" sometimes left the latter victorious, but they were ultimately beaten and driven to cover.

Among the more law-abiding citizens there was much drunkenness, and other vice, and, of course, what was to be expected in such settlement, irreligion.

The Rev. James came to cure the vices of Logan, and to give it religion. His doctrine was a modified Calvinism, and he dwelt upon the need of the new birth and the importance of knowing when and where one was born again. He sounded forth also a fearful denunciation of the anger of God upon impenitent sinners. A friend of his said that he would so depict hell before the wicked that they would quake, imagining the lake of fire and brimstone gaping to swallow them, and the hand of Jehovah thrusting them into the awful abyss. Others alleged that the fire of his invective derived additional terror from the hideousness of his face and his thunderous delivery.

In Logan County he seemed to be in a locality suited to his peculiar ability, and, according to many, deserved of its predicted fate.

He was terribly in earnest, and his zeal soon spread to the other members of his Church. It was said that if you came upon a band of McGready's older people you would find them weeping and talking about their souls.

and that if you met his younger people you found them exclusively concerned with their salvation. No doubt this was exaggeration, for domestic affairs must be attended to, and the influence of Venus now and again overcome that of Jesus.

Now in the summer of 1799, when the fame of McGready had spread far and wide, and great crowds were present at all his services, William and John McGee, brothers, the former a Presbyterian, the latter a Methodist, determined, while crossing the pine barrens in Ohio, to turn aside and visit a sacramental solemnity—at Red River, that they might see the remarkable power alleged everywhere to attend the ministrations of the pulpit genius. What they saw and assisted by their presence was the beginning of one of the most tremendous religious revivals of modern times.

Several speakers occupied the pulpit in turns, the first of whom was John, the Methodist, who, in his own account, had never spoken with such light and liberty. Then his brother and the Rev. Mr. Hodge spoke. While the latter was discoursing, a woman in the east end of the house gave vent to her violent emotions by long shoutings.

At the close of the sermons, the two McGees and the audience seemed loath to leave. William felt, according to John, such a power come over him that he quit his seat and sat on the floor of the pulpit, apparently "not knowing what he did." "A power which caused me to tremble," continued John, "was upon me. There was a solemn weeping all over the house. At length I rose up and exhorted them to let the Lord God Omnipotent reign in their hearts, and submit to Him, and their souls should live. Many broke silence. The woman in the east end of the house shouted tremendously. I left the pulpit and went through the audience shouting and exhorting with all possible ecstasy and energy, and the floor was soon covered with the slain."

This was a small beginning, but from that Red River sacramental service the people, returning home, "rushed into the arms of their friends, shouting and telling what wonderful things God had done for their souls."

Elder B. W. Stone, of Bourbon County, not long after, visited this centre of revivalist excitement, and carried the flame to the Cane Ridge country, where it blazed with a greater fury. It spread to Ohio, and into Washington County, Pennsylvania, where derangement of the nervous system and loss of physical strength were common. Foote's history of North Carolina and of Virginia contains many accounts of revival fires lighted by people returning from McGready's meetings. In the region from the Green River to the Cumberland River the settlements seethed with religious fervour. Many came with their families, provided with food and bedding, even hundred miles, to listen to the evangelists who had so stirred the congregation at the Red River.

This originated what is known to fame as the first camp-meeting in America at the Gasper River Church, in the summer of 1800. McGready had advertised this meeting as widely as possible, and a great concourse assembled.

The little church proved far too small, and the adjacent forest was occupied as a temple. The woodsmen worshippers, fertile of resource, cleared away the brushwood, and felled the pine trees for pews and platform. The plan was to disperse in the evening, but night brought no termination to their zeal. The women sewed together sheets, and the men stretched the sheets on poles to form tents. Some brought straw from nearby farms, others foraged for food.

The meeting lasted from Friday until Tuesday. The preaching, praying and singing were almost continuous. On Saturday evening overwrought nature rebelled, two women, becoming greatly excited, communicated their hysteria to the multitudes. The camp became a haunt of sobs and cries, the ministers spending nearly the whole night passing from group to group of the "slain."

Then, on the dispersal of the meeting and the return of the worshippers to their homes, the contagion gathered impetus, and ten revivalist meetings were held one after another. It is said that the crops were left neglected in the fields, the huts deserted, and that in large settlements no one was left.

The Elder, B. W. Stone, describing what he saw in Logan County, states that many, very many, fell and continued for hours in an apparently breathless and motionless state, sometimes reviving for a few moments and exhibiting signs of life by a prayer for mercy, fervently uttered. After lying there for hours they would rise shouting of their deliverance. Then others would fall.

This minister, returning to his own communities in Concord and Cane Ridge, told of what he had seen in the south-west. Two little girls were struck down during his preaching, and "exercised" as others had been in the south of Kentucky. The people were greatly moved, and a vast host, estimated to be 20,000, came to the Cane Ridge camp.

A Rev. Mr. Lyle, who kept a diary and journal, and is credited with having kept his judgment calm amid the excitement, has described the crowd as rushing from preacher to preacher whenever it was whispered that things were more lively elsewhere, and as swarming round a "fallen" brother, laughing, leaping, sobbing, shouting and swooning. Children were allowed to preach, and a little girl of seven, propped up on a man's shoulders, exhorted the multitude, until she sank exhausted on her bearer's head.

The Rev. James Crawford, who claims that he tried to keep an accurate account, computed the number of those who fell helpless to the ground as 3,000, about one in six.

Another phenomenon at the meetings was the "jerks." It is stated that many a scoffer bit the dust in the midst of his derision and contempt. One account is much too good, I think, to be true. It is of a large man with a pocket in which was a bottle of whisky. The man reviled both the jerking and the religion. In a flash he was pursued and caught by the contagion, and though he attempted to flee, the attempt was useless. "He halted," states Peter Cartwright, the source of the tale, "among some saplings, took out his bottle of whisky, and swore he would drink the damned jerks to death. But he could not get the bottle to his lips. At this he became enraged, fetched a very violent jerk, snapped his neck, fell, and soon expired, with his mouth full of cursing and bitterness."

F. M. Davenport tells of this and other religious herd hysterias in his "Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals" (The Macmillan Co., New York; and London, 1905), and he observed that no State in the Union was more subject, when he wrote, to waves of impulsive action in politics, the administration of justice, and the practice of religion, than Kentucky, and he suggested that there might be a correlation between the religious fury of that population and its judicial and political fury. Well, looking at a map of the counties of Kentucky whereon the number of lynchings in each, during 1882-1903 is marked, one finds Logan County, with one-eighth of the population of the State, credited with one-eleventh of the

lynchings. A statistical record, over so short a period, of a few hundred events in all, does not, of course, prove the correlation between judicial and religious fury.

The correlation can, however, hardly be doubted, and, in fact, follows from Davenport's thesis that revivals are manifestations of impulsive social action dominating great numbers of primitive men, for lynchings and political fury are likewise examples of the influence of such action.

Under such influence men are like the Gadarene swine, when the devils went into them, ready to rush to their own destruction. Unfortunately, when men are so affected, others are involved in the general ruin.

Only the spread of the habit of self-control can save man from the periodical misfortunes due to impulsive social action; and the influence of impulsive social action has been manifested very much of late—in the political sphere.

J. G. LUPTON.

RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY ?

I UNDERSTAND that your readers are interested and learned in religious anthropology. You may, therefore, like to have the benefit of some observations I recently made, and to enlighten me as to their import.

I recently had to spend a couple of days in a foreign country, with a good deal of time on my hands, and no money to spend on amusements. So I took the opportunity to visit a prominent building in the town which, from its general appearance, I took to be a steeple-house, in that it was fitted with two spires and its windows and ornamentation were evidently intended to be in imitation of the Gothic style. It was, however, wholly lacking in artistic merit. I assumed from the outward appearance of the building that it was a steeple-house of those who claim to be Christians, but on entering it I was put in doubt as to this, and it may be that you can tell me what religion or sect it may be that uses this place, in the light of what I am about to tell you.

The interior of the building was lavishly furnished with statues, all painted in gaudy, indeed gay, colours. Several of these statues, of life size or larger, depicted various male persons hanging from gibbets, in each case the figure being represented as being nailed to the gibbet through the hands and feet, the gibbet being composed, in each case, of a wooden structure composed of two parts, a tall vertical member, and a shorter cross-piece near but not at the top, to the ends of which the figure's hands were fixed. It was evident that these statues did not all represent the same person, for the faces of the statues were all different in their features, and the expressions and demeanours were different. For instance, some depicted frenzied agony, while others bore expressions of pious complacency. No inscription served to identify the party portrayed—and even if there had been, it would, likely enough, have been unhelpful to me, for I am not acquainted with the local language in those parts. Thus I was left in doubt as to whether these effigies represented criminals who were lawfully executed, albeit in a somewhat barbarous manner, and who were the object of admiration by the perverted adherents of the sect who worshipped here; or whether they were martyrs to the beliefs recommended; or whether they represented the fate in store for those who might venture to disagree with the tenets of the worshippers.

These difficulties were not lessened by the presence of a number of female figures. To one of these was given

pride of place. It was contained in a large glass case, standing some eight feet high, the figure being about four feet high and mounted on an ornate pedestal. The figure, gaudily painted, with jet-black hair and crimson lips, was a little reminiscent of the style of a ship's figurehead, but was quite lacking in the simple artistry of the latter. It was gorgeously clad in a heavily embroidered and brocaded gown, reaching to the ground; on its head was a very elaborate golden crown. On its left hand, which was held in a horizontal position, sat the figure of an infant, which judging by its size, though not from the precocity of its expression, would be about a month old. It, too, was expensively draped in an embroidered gown and wore a crown, but the latter was of silver. It was evident enough, in spite of the drapery, that the infant was not equipped with nappies, which offers a possible explanation of the odd way in which the female figure was holding it out away from her. A tablet on the outside of the glass case bore the inscription "HH VROUW", which was, presumably, the name of the larger of the two effigies within.

There were other statues of female personnel holding or in close proximity to infant figures, but it appeared that they did not represent the same person as that represented by the principal statue, for the faces were all different. The clothing of both the female figure and the infant in each example also differed from all the others. Before one of these statues there was a considerable mess of candle grease, the origin or purpose of which was not clear to me.

The confusion introduced into my mind by these observations was not lessened by various pictures and carvings on the walls of the building, in which the gibbet theme recurred, but which introduced also a new theme—a sheep being slaughtered and bleeding copiously, and various people standing round drinking the blood. A careful study of all these pictures led me to the conclusion that the underlying theme of them was that it was desirable to eat corpses and drink blood, or, perhaps stranger, to pretend to do so without actually doing it.

I am not an anthropologist, save for a very modest knowledge of some of the beliefs and practices prevailing among some sects in such places as Africa and New Guinea. I was therefore interested to see this evidence of what may be some more primitive cult which must have lingered on in a society which, to judge by the general appearance of the town in question, had achieved considerable advances in scientific and architectural technique. Indeed, from other observations I made in that town, with which I need not trouble you in detail, I gathered that these people had achieved considerable efficiency in killing each other in great numbers, and had far outgrown the crude and inefficient practice of impaling each other on cruciform gibbets.

S. M.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

But the age was itself cruel. It was the age of Catherine de Medici and the massacre of St. Bartholomew; the age of the Duke of Alva and his barbarities in the Low Countries; the age at first of Henry VIII and later of Queen Mary's reign when hundreds were burned at the stake for their religion belong to that time. One reads of seventy-three Protestants of Colchester dragged through the streets of London tied to a single rope. In Sweden, France, and Spain, not to mention other countries, deeds of fantastic cruelty were done, though in truth, the narration of them would pale beside the life of Ivan the Terrible.

OMNIPOTENCE

THE THEIST:—

“Man read the secrets held by Mother Earth
Through untold ages ere she gave him birth.
Think you such miracle of mind but Chance?
Surely Divine this intellectual lance
That, piercing to the shrouded yesterdays,
Unveils the past before our wond'ring gaze.
Whence but of God these faculties sublime
Yielding no frontiers to Space or Time,
Weighing the sums, interpreting aright
The muted echo of an aeon's flight?”

THE ATHEIST:—

“Yet, though this sentient eye and godlike mind
May read the bloodied dust that lies behind;
From the far reaches of eternity
Knows not one moment that is yet to be.
Man sees the past. Say not that God sees hence!
The agony of Life refutes omnipotence;
Unless omnipotent the gods are dead—
And dark, inscrutable the paths ahead.”

W. T. MORGAN.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE MATERIALISTIC CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

Sir,—I do not wish to intervene in any discussion between Mr. Roy and Mr. Brown. They are quite capable of looking after themselves. However, in the general Press as well as in your columns I see frequent references to the “Marxist Materialistic Conception of History,” by which I suppose is meant looking at history as did Marx in his “Das Kapital.” I have never looked into this, but have always assumed, apparently quite wrongly by the bother there seems to be about it, as identical with the “Economic Interpretation of History,” as expounded by the late Prof. J. E. Thorold-Rogers in a series of lectures given by him in Worcester College Hall, Oxford, in 1887 and 1888. Are there any of your readers able to explain to me the difference between the two conceptions? In the titles, “Economic” and “Materialistic” they appear synonymous.

To me the conception is a method for delving into the past, and understanding the changes with time. I have used it in an attempt to clothe the “dry bones” of Archeology with “flesh,” and fill the gaps in recorded events (i.e., History in the limited area of North-West Worcestershire; more especially the Stour Valley. Rogers used it to interpret the data of his research into the “History of Prices,” as I assume Marx did for his “Das Kapital.” I believe the idea goes back into the eighteenth century. As to predicting the course of future events, that is another matter. The only attempt I have seen has been to effect that “as the economic basis of society changes so must the social and religious structure, otherwise disharmonies will be set up that will cause that particular civilisation to disintegrate.” Of course, if the inferences drawn from the past are correct, that is a truism, and in that sense the break-up is inevitable; or in terms of statistical analysis the Probability is very high.—Yours, etc.,

ALBERT R. THORNEWELL.

DETERMINISM

Sir,—May I suggest to Mr. Sturge Whiting that perhaps Spinoza has anticipated practically his enigma of Determinism. Men think they are free in this; they are conscious of their actions but ignorant of the causes whereby they are determined.” Spinoza's apparent paradox “free necessity.” The more I ponder the more impossible “free will” is to me in the physical universe or in the mind of man.—Yours, etc.,

M. BARNARD.

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

Sir,—In his excellent article of 5th September, Mr. Percy Roy uses the word socialism twice. On the second occasion he makes it plain that in his opinion there is as yet no socialism in Russia. In view of this, and the fact that he favours Unity “for socialism and peace,” I would ask him, “What is socialism?” And lest he be tempted to inveigle me into a polemic in and

around Marxism (which seems to be his forte) I would add that I am merely anxious to know what Mr. Roy would consider are the basic characteristics of a socialist society which distinguish it from all other social systems.—Yours, etc.,
HELEN MARSHALL.

ATHEISM AND POLITICS

Sir,—I was interested to read the correspondence in your last issue on the subject of the political convictions of Atheists.

I personally am an Atheist and a Conservative. Just as every novel is a book but every book is not a novel, every Communist may be an Atheist but every Atheist is not a Communist.

In short, a man's political and religious (or irreligious) convictions are never of necessity synonymous.—Yours, etc.,
FRANCIS I. GOULD.

OBITUARY

B. F. O'CONNELL

With deep sorrow we announce the death of Brian Fergus O'Connell, retired captain of the Northumberland Fusiliers, which took place on September 3. He was buried in Gunnersbury Cemetery, London, W. We extend our sincere sympathy to his sorrowing widow and other members of the family.
R. H. R.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

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

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 5, 7 p.m.: “Should Ability Receive Higher Pay?” Mr. GEO. E. O'DELL.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, October 4, 7 p.m., six lantern lectures. “Reconstructing the Remote Past.” 1st lecture: “The Origin of Life,” W. E. SWINSON, Ph.D., F.R.S.E. Tickets, 12s., R.P.A. members, 9s.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: “Lambeth and Amsterdam,” Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: “Is Evolution True?” Mr. E. T. BRYANT.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWASI and J. HUMPHREY.

Great Harwood.—Saturday, October 2, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER. (Wimbledon Hill, Wimbledon Common).—Sunday, 3-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.

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

Preston (Market).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—7-30 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: “The Communist Manifesto, 1848-1948,” Mr. G. H. BURDEN.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: “God or Man?” Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (General Secretary N.S.S.).

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (I.L.P. Rooms, St. James Street).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: “Theory and Fact,” Mr. SETCLIFFE.

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