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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Jesus in the Light of History

THE question as to how the Christian Religion actually originated represents, as and when considered merely as an historical question, one of the most complicated problems which the historian and literary critic have ever been called upon to unravel. To be sure, the practical urgency of the problem can be over-estimated. For modern Freethought has to deal, not with a doubtfully historical Christ, but with a certainly historical Christianity.

It is a matter of common knowledge to those who interest themselves in such problems, that innumerable theories have been propounded which purport to throw light upon the dense obscurity that surrounds the origins of Christianity. According to orthodox Christianity, Jesus Christ was Divine, Human and Historical. Whilst according to the "Mythicist" school, "Jesus Christ" was a collective myth, and was neither Divine, Human nor Historical.

Between these two extremes there are a veritable host of theories available, from, for example, that of Albert Schweitzer, who explained the Gospel as originally a Jewish reaction to the approaching end of the world, then believed on theological grounds to be imminent, in much the same way as if an American revivalist were to-day to call mankind to a final repentance before the atomic bomb finished it off, to the intriguing theory recently advanced by a pundit of the Mohammedan persuasion, that Jesus, having somehow managed to escape from the Romans, had finally migrated to India, where his tomb can still be seen near the picturesque City of Srinagar in the beautiful Vale of Kashmir. (We hope that the recent fighting in that area has not disturbed the last resting place of "Jesus.")

And there are countless other theories by the way which we must regretfully pass over for lack of space. Some of them are plausible, and some are—let us be polite and say, less plausible. Nearly all of them are mutually inconsistent. In fact, the origin of Christianity is one of those subjects upon which, after a century and a-half of intensive research, the greatest authorities still contradict each other flatly on the most elementary presuppositions of their subject matter.

The subject of Christian origins is, in fact, as intriguing as a crossword puzzle and as exciting as a detective story. We have often thought that had the great Sherlock Holmes taken a course in the study of the New Testament, the wits of that famous detective would have been even sharper than millions of his admirers not to mention the devoted Dr. Watson, have, in fact (or fiction) found them to be.

The most recent investigator of the perennial problem of (in his own words), "Jesus in the Light of History," is without doubt one of the most definite and plausible. He knows "all the answers" and most of the dates

in the life of "The Jesus of History." It is with much pleasure that we introduce to the readers of "The Freethinker" Prof. Albert Ten Eyck Olmstead, Professor of Oriental History, of the University of Chicago, an Orientalist of standing and a recognised authority on the secular history of the Ancient East, upon which recondite subject Dr. Olmstead has written many learned works, culminating in a gigantic "History of the Persian Empire" a magnum opus of truly monumental proportions.

The learned professor's reconstruction of "Jesus in the Light of History" is to be found in a smaller work of that title published by Charles Scribner's Sons (New York) in 1942—that is, before Bishop Barnes' "The Rise of Christianity" to which, incidentally, its general viewpoint is rather similar, but which the American professor's book contradicts (in advance) flatly on many questions of New Testament chronology.

Without ourselves "rushing in where," in this case—angels are alleged already to have trodden, we feel compelled to add that this learned Orientalist puts, and with what sublime self-assurance, as good a case for an historical Jesus as we have yet seen, and his work is based throughout upon an evidently profound knowledge of ancient Eastern chronologies and literatures that are unknown to the general reader, and even probably to all but a minute section of New Testament scholars.

The professor's book originally formed part of a history of the Ancient East, from Cyrus to Mohammed, and we hope that it will soon be published here, for, whether right or wrong in his construction of Christian origins, he at least puts a case which deserves the serious study of all Freethinkers whose thought is really "free" to consider fresh evidence upon a complex historical problem.

We fear that the Church will regard its new champion with mixed feelings since Prof. Olmstead, like the Bishop of Birmingham, is a Modernist, who explicitly rejects the Virgin Birth, whose Jesus, though historical, is purely human, and who declares in set terms "far enough was the Christ of Orthodoxy from the Carpenter of Nazareth."

Our author himself is evidently convinced by his own researches for he ends his preface with the certainly not bashful declaration: "Who, then, was Jesus of Nazareth? The answer is presented in the following pages. At long last, Jesus makes his own appearance in the full light of history." Self-confidence has long been regarded as a characteristic of which Americans are not usually devoid.

We append the erudite professor's main conclusions: the interested reader who may desire to pursue the evidence further for these not exactly timid conclusions, is referred to the author's book.

Jesus, our author holds, was a Galilean born in the village of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary (Miriam) and was a fully historical character. He was

born about 20 B.C., and was crucified when about the age of fifty: in relation to which age, the Gospel of John, as also regarding the date of his crucifixion, alone preserves the original tradition. And in opposition to almost every previous critic, Orthodox, Liberal, or Rationalist, Prof. Olmstead holds "John" to be the oldest and most reliable of the Gospels, and to have been written within a few years of the Crucifixion.

Our author argues that not only was Jesus of Nazareth an historical character, but the main dates in his life can be calculated with absolute or, at least, approximate accuracy. By a critical examination of Babylonian and Hebrew chronology he arrives at the following dates.

Jesus preached his first sermon at Nazareth on December 18, A.D. 28—the Hebrew 62nd Seder. He had already been baptised by John the Baptist "within a few days of December 1, A.D. 28." "We can even give the exact length of Jesus' Ministry—475 days." Finally, Jesus was crucified upon April 7, A.D. 30. In Prof. Olmstead's opinion, there is absolutely no doubt about it, for on this point he is explicit.

"By these laborious, roundabout, but rigidly scientific methods, we have determined the exact date of the Crucifixion."

With the death of the Prophet of Nazareth this precise reckoning ends. For we have not forgotten that our American professor is a modernist, and like his distinguished predecessors in that field, Alfred Loisy and Dr. Barnes, he regards the Resurrection "appearances" of Jesus as psychological and subjective only. With which view all Rationalists who are not "Mythicists" will, we think, agree.

However, "Jesus" founded a sect, which is undoubtedly historical, and in the leadership of which "Jesus" was succeeded by his brother James "the Just" whose subsequent martyrdom in A.D. 62 by the Jewish Sanhedrin is recorded by Josephus in a passage which appears to be genuine (at least, it hardly seems likely that a Christian forger would have referred to James as "the brother of the so-called Christ"). This sect of "Nazoreans," or "Nazarenes," lingered on as an heretical Jewish sect on the fringe of Judaism until the fourth century, and as our historian records, its existence and scriptures set the Jewish rabbis some strange and diverting theological problems.

"The Christ of Orthodoxy" did not spring from the "Nazarenes," who were later declared heretical by the fully-fledged Catholic Church. "Orthodox" Trinitarian Christianity sprang originally from the speculations of Gnostic theologians, who knew little and cared less about the "Jesus of History," but followed the cult of a Divine Christ (that is, the authors of the so-called "Pauline" literature) who is unknown to history. Though Dr. Olmstead does not deal with the later Christian evolution in detail, we would gather that he would agree with what we have just written.

Well, there is his case. We lack the technical oriental learning to investigate the sources of his so confident statements. No doubt it will eventually be done by competent hands. Meanwhile, we live in what has already been described as "The American Century." Has the United States taken over not only present-day Christianity, but also its nominal, or alleged Founder?

F. A. RIDLEY.

THERE WAS ONCE—

A SINNER. He gambled heavily, lost his employment, and brought his family to poverty and want.

But he gave his own life to save a little kitten from drowning.

RELIGION AND POLITICS

It is often said that religion should not meddle in politics; should keep to its proper sphere. We often hear, also, that the Church takes no side in politics; from priests, that they are not politicians. But what is the proper sphere of religion? And we also hear from prominent military commanders, that they are not politicians. But surely militarism is the very spearhead of politics; certainly of power politics. Which only raises another question, what is the proper sphere of politics?

Why should one imagine that there are such separate spheres? This is the old metaphysical trick of separating in fancy what cannot be separated in fact. The Church has survived through militaristic feudal times and seems also to have adapted herself to modern bureaucracy. But her adaptation to power or pelf does not alter the fact that she is basically religious. In this adaptation-like St. Paul, the Church is all things to all men, and politics concerns all things and all men.

We have to face St. Paul's argument that if laws are man-made then might is right. Without law there is no crime, the law makes the crime. Laws are made to be broken and we have a paradox. Both political restriction and religious restraint curtails freedom, yet there can be no liberty without legislation. So, political sanctions involve the sanctity of law, and the sanctity of property involves both the religious power of possession and the political possession of power. Both the force of argument and the argument of force involves justification in emotional appeal.

If religion is based upon ignorance and fear, it is clear that here we have ignorance concerning law. So the same applies in politics, and we are reminded of the famous Four Freedoms. Wants and fears may be expressed in speech, but there are other ways of expressing ideas and feelings; in religious proselyting zeal, in political propaganda, even in commercial publicity. The sanctity of law, expressed in custom, is enforced by both religious and political ceremonial and pageantry, and the use of the magic of the Arts has always been a feature of autocracy.

The sanctity of law goes back to the taboo. It involves emotion in fetishistic and totemic symbolism with theological implications in personal appeal, both verbally and in the Arts. Word magic and personification involves the cultivation of prejudices, sentiments, passions. Intensity of feeling is expressed in the curse, in the sanctity of the blood feud, in theological anathemas, in the wholesale declamation in the name of righteousness that calls on the wrath of God. The curse is crude prophecy just as vengeance is rough justice, with feelings expressed in casuistical condemnation and vindication.

The separation of religion and politics is a matter of history. The apparent absence, in the Ancient World, of a powerful priesthood, lay in the combination of sacred and social functions. The Church is the ghost of the Empire, sanctifying feudal animosities in Manichean conflict. The continuity of function and custom in the separation of Church and State, is shown in many direct parallels between the militaristic political pageantry and religious ritual and ceremonial; between the public executions and torture, and the idea of Eternal Torment in Hell Fire. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Christianity is the psychological aspect of Machiavellian power-politics.

The pomp and circumstance of civic and political ceremonial still retains an essentially religious character. It retains its mystical technique, retains its personal

approach, its mass appeal. Religion is practical psychology, enshrined in folklore, age-old usage and custom; an actual technique, conditioning, training, discipline, actual cultivation of passion. The doctrinal idea of propaganda comes from the Roman Catholic College of Propaganda, for missionary training, with a heritage that is sanctified by theological implications in ideological appeal in both precedent and tradition.

There is a clear evolutionary connection between politics and religion, and this raises the question as to the degree of separation; to what extent politics remains religious and to what extent religion is political. "Politics is a scientific method of proving the other fellow to be wrong," says one of Sartre's characters. But can one scientifically prove a negative? Surely this is an inversion of the old religious condemnation in the name of righteousness. Stated in this way it becomes a matter of self-justification and would apply to any and all forms of social institution, with final appeal to force in politics, and even that needs emotional justification.

Government of the people by the people for the people is quite mystical. The ecclesia was the original democratic mystery. There is a form of election in ecclesiastical organisation and *Vox Populi Vox Dei* is traditional. But in any case the voice of the people turns out to be a babble of tongues. And the Church is alive to the logical inconsistencies of professed democracies, and of the different modes of it, from U.S.A. on the one hand to Moscow on the other. With politics becoming more ideological and doctrinaire, the religious character in dogmatism is more evident.

With dialectic, the theological features of the declamation of the mammon of unrighteousness and the condemnation of the Christian seven deadly sins is seen in the motives of Marx's personifications of economic categories. And we also have the personification of national groups in patriotic appeal. Here, behaviour is emotional and not rational; expressed in slogans and catch-phrases. Political creeds and doctrines are as much articles of belief as are those of religion. They are as much excuses in justification as God, Church or Bible. But, in self-justification we lose sight of self-interest.

With religious institutions and vested interests concerned in political intrigue and politicians flirting with religious ideology, where is the line of demarcation? Legal justification and moral justification shade into self-justification, and the self is the soul of religion.

H. H. PREECE.

ALF LAYLAH WA LAYLAH

THE above title translated into English is, *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, a monumental work by Captain Sir Richard F. Burton, K.C.M.G., and British Consul at Damascus. He was born 1821; studied at Oxford University, intending to take Holy Orders, but freethinking made him decide otherwise, and he took service with Sir Charles Napier's staff in India. Sir Richard was a learned Arabist and the original edition of his translation comprises seventeen large volumes, with the "Terminal Essay," which always commands high prices in book-auction sales, as much as eighty guineas!

This plain and literal translation gives to scholars a full account of Moslem manners and customs, secular and religious, including explanations of obscure passages in the Koran.

Burton's motto in the first volume is, "To the Pure all is Pure," and by this motto the author anticipated bigotry with threats of prosecution, to which he replied,

in order to justify himself and his literary labours; he would publish a complete "Literal Naturalism" from the Holy Bible termed "Obscenities." It is from "Alf Laylah Wa Laylah" that the popular "Arabian Nights Entertainments" as one of the hundred best books is composed.

The Minister of Instruction at Cairo, writing to Burton at the Wanderers' Club, London, August 15, 1885, states: "It requires a good mind to appreciate the laws, customs and the religion, as set forth in 'The Arabian Nights'; which begins with 'In the name of Allah and all praise be due to Him,' as the dedication of the first set of stories, beginning with Shah Zaman, King of Kings, who caught his Queen in the act of adultery, cut off her head and used the same scimitar, for three years, to behead a maiden every day, as a 'Bloody Vow.'" This Bluebeard, and the Wonderful Lamp stories, are popular; but the serious concern with Burton's explanations is the religious teaching and beliefs of Mohammedanism; as, man has his fate written on his skull, by the formation of the sutures, to be read by the faithful, as taught by the two fallen angels, Hariet and Marut, who were the first magicians (Koran II); and the same chapter says, "Yours wives are for your tillage," in the cause of true religion, i.e., to be fruitful and multiply the population. There are several mysteries explained from the ancient secret Order of Kadiri, into which Burton was initiated, at Baghdad, where he learned during his "Pilgrimage," in a droll manner, the Pythagorean doctrine against eating beans, politely named, "eructation!"

The "Songs of Solomon" are shown to be ancient erotic poetry, and are used in all religions, often as litany; and, The Bat is the bird of Jesus; not the Dove, as is stated in the Book of "Infancy"; Apoc. N.T.

The Moslem rites of circumcision are vigorously applied to both sexes, for cleanliness; and all persons "unpurified" are damned in the sight of Allah. Sir Richard says plainly that all religions are humbug. The "Terminal Essay" tells that the original "Alf Laylah Wa Laylah" ranks in history equal to that of "Herodotus."

Burton shows by analysis of comparative religions that Fables of the Koran and stories from the "Nights" are similar to parts of the Bible as: 2 Samuel, ix, 1, and Judges, Chapter 61, verse 8; besides which Burton declares: "There is no more immoral book than the Old Testament!" Its deity is an ancient Hebrew of the worst type, who condones, permits and commands every sin in the Decalogue. He orders Abraham to kill his son and allows Jacob to swindle his brother; Moses to murder the Egyptian, and the Jews to plunder a whole Nation. The Plagues inflicted at his fiat are the worst of atrocities. King David's adultery and homicide are done by this creature, a man after God's own heart. There is bestiality plainly expressed as in Exodus, 22, 19; Leviticus, 20, 13; Deut., 22, 5; and these examples, as in 1 Corinthians, 6, 8 are akin to the Catapygon practices in the orgies of ancient Greece and Rome.

Sir Richard's examination and comparison of the ancient Eastern religious systems with Christianity, as expressed in his translation of *Alf Laylah Wa Laylah*, is a prototype of the Freethinker's "Bible Handbook."

Burton's books, with large size illustrations (a separate volume), were bequeathed to the London Kensington Borough Public Library, where these remarkable volumes can be obtained on application to the Borough's Chief Librarian. These particulars were written by me, from the First Edition in the British Museum.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

ACID DROPS

Recently the Rev. J. B. Phillips put in a plea for divorce in many cases of unhappy marriage, directing his argument in particular against a Church body known as the Mothers' Union. Needless to add, this reactionary body has replied affirming its belief in no divorce under any circumstances—it is the teaching of "our Lord," and that settles the matter. However, we are pleased to note that other parsons are siding with Mr. Phillips—one of them, indeed, charges this very religious body called the Mothers' Union with rigorously excluding the unmarried mother, and adding that many of its religious "mothers" never even go to church. It is all very intriguing, but as divorce is part of the law of the land, there is nothing whatever the Church or the Mothers' Union can do about it. Which is very good to know.

The old Jewish version of the Ten Commandments is now impracticable, declared the Rev. T. Mellows, and the fourth commandment has definitely gone west in this modern age. Where is this all going to end? Some parsons no longer believe in Miracles, or Virgin Births, and now the Commandments: the bedrock of all morality and religion. There will be little left of Christianity if every parson objects to this dogma or that doctrine. No wonder the conservative wing of the Church Assembly is trying to push the "Bishops' (Retirement) Measure."

Dr. Barnes, that stormy petrel of the Church of England, who has openly stated that he does not believe in the Virgin Birth, or Miracles, sounds worried. He terms the "Bishops' (Retirement) Measure" a measure to liquidate Liberal Bishops, and it could, if the Measure is passed, be the means of his losing his job; for Dr. Barnes has been the leading Liberal in the Anglican Church for many years. We would be the last to decry any progressive move by Churchmen, but it would be advisable to keep a sense of balance.

We thought that a belief in a personal Devil was confined to Blood and Fire Salvationists and Roman Catholics, but we note that the Vicar of St. Mary's, Kilburn (C. of E.), also believes. No doubt with all the trimmings, too: a material fire that burneth, cloven hoof, a smell of sulphur and a trade in souls à la Faust.

We have always been struck by the true humility of Christian leaders. They are so eager to agree that they may be wrong. For instance, the Rev. A. Naylor, D.S.O., O.B.E., said to the boys of Steyning Grammar School that there was "only one true religion: the Christian, all other isms mean nothing." It may not have struck the Rev. A. Naylor that Mohammedans, Hindus, and Jews also claim the same thing. Of course all cannot be true, but all could be false.

Twenty thousand prayer books have been sent to Germany by the British and Foreign Bible Society for the German Protestant Churches and the Salvation Army. Another great boost for one of the "World's Best Sellers," although how the Germans are going to pay for them, God knows, unless as a part of Marshall Aid, but we would imagine that the Germans would prefer something more substantial.

So at last the dismal truth about that monument of lying superstition and credulity, Fatima, is out. The Roman Catholic "Universe" now says, "The reality of the apparitions at Fatima has been affirmed by the local ecclesiastical authority, but not officially, as yet, by the Holy See, which, nevertheless, is obviously favourably disposed towards them. But even so, Catholics are not bound to believe in the apparitions and still more is it true that they are not bound to believe every detail of what is affirmed into the accounts." Here indeed is a climb down—and we venture to assert a similar climb down would have taken place if the story of Lourdes had appeared first in recent years.

The fact is that lies can be checked these days, while those that were uttered about 100 years ago are almost impossible to check; and once started, very difficult to catch up with. The "miraculous" cures of incurable diseases were reported in plenty when Lourdes first came on the map—just as they are even now taking place at Fatima. Only Catholics are not swallowing "cures" as easily as they did in a more credulous age. Not that Fatima will die yet, even slowly. But the leaven of scepticism is already beginning to show itself in Catholic literature, and that is something the Pope, with all his power, cannot wipe out.

Viscountess Furness, who is a convert to Roman Catholicism, has been profoundly shocked at "the extremely shallow 'bob' which passes for a genuflection in some churches to-day." No doubt, she would like all Catholics to emulate her in the most abject grovelling which passes for the same thing in many other churches. She actually says she would like to see "a curtsy to the ground" to "Our Lord's Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament"—a piece of stupid servility of the silliest kind, and surely one entirely against any decent human dignity. Fortunately, by her own witness, Catholics are at last showing they prefer human dignity to her type of human stupidity.

Not being able to produce any worth-while religious broadcasts itself, the Episcopal Church in America has been giving "Great Scenes from Great Plays" programme which almost eliminated the religious side altogether, thus causing great dissatisfaction among the pious. It actually reached 6,000,000 listeners, cost huge sums, and did not appear to bring in a single convert. Why the Lord has so thoroughly failed on the radio, not only to do any broadcasts himself, but to inspire his beloved sheep, is a religious mystery we cannot hope to solve. Still, there it is, and we can only suggest that God Almighty should prepare another revelation this time in radio script form, preferably in Hebrew, as that is a Holy Language. If this fails, perhaps a Holy Week of Reverent Prayer may do the trick.

The Rev. A. B. Blake Cobb's experiment was a flop. When he came to Woodside Chapel, Croydon, last December, he decided that he would not take his usual stipend but would rely on the voluntary gifts of the congregation. He has now resigned. We would be bold enough to prophesy that if every clergyman was to rely on the voluntary offerings of the faithful, they would eventually form a long queue at our Labour Exchanges.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

G. B. SINGH.—We agree that there ought to be a branch of the N.S.S. in Norwich. Freethinkers in that area can contact you through "The Freethinker" office.

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Conway Hall was well filled on March 17 when Prof. V. Gordon Childe delivered his lecture on "The Evolution of Culture in the Light of Archaeology" for the N.S.S. The interest of the audience grew as he developed his theme from the primitive to the modern along purely Scientific and Freethought lines, giving a presentation of the Evolution of Culture without any necessity to call in religion. The flow of questions from the audience revealed the interest taken in the lecture and the meeting closed with a hearty round of applause to the lecturer. The Executive of the N.S.S. have every reason to be satisfied with the evening, and feel encouraged to develop similar arrangements for the future. The General Secretary N.S.S. was in the chair.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. has a visit from Mr. E. T. Bryant, a member of the London Executive, to-day (March 27), who will lecture on "Is Evolution True?" The lecture hall is at 38, John Bright Street, and the proceedings begin at 7 p.m. The local branch and its hard working secretary, Mr. C. H. Smith, deserve all the support Birmingham saints can give, and there should be a full house to welcome Mr. Bryant.

Nottingham readers can hear Mr. J. T. Brighton twice to-day (March 27). In the afternoon at 2-30 he will speak for the Cosmopolitan Debating Society in the Technical College, Shakespeare Street, on "Eve or Evolution?" and at 7 p.m. he will speak for the local N.S.S. branch in the Co-op. Hall, Parliament Street, on "Mistakes and Mediums." Mr. Brighton combines humour, instruction, and enthusiasm, and the combination makes him an attractive speaker.

To-day (March 27), Mr. H. Cutner visits the Leicester Secular Society. He will speak at 6-30 p.m. on "A Century of Secularism"—though he will deal with the subject on unusual lines. We hope Leicester secularists will attend in good numbers.

There is just time to remind Glasgow readers of the Annual Dinner of the Glasgow Secular Society in the Grand Hotel, Charing Cross, Glasgow, on Saturday, March 26, Reception at 6-30 p.m.; and on Sunday evening, March 27, Mr. R. H. Rosetti will lecture in the McLellan Galleries at 7 p.m. on "An Evening with the Gods." Admission is free to the lecture, with some donation tickets.

We have been asked by a reader of our pamphlet, "Did Jesus Christ exist?" to explain the passage in Josephus about Christ as well as the fact that Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles all believed in a living Jesus. As readers of this journal know, we have dealt with particular aspects of the Myth theory dozens of times in these columns, and we cannot repeat ourselves for every new reader. All the points raised by our correspondent are fully dealt with by Prof. Arthur Drews in his "Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus" (Watts), or in "The Christ," by John E. Remsburg, published by the "Truth Seeker" of New York; as well as by Robert Taylor in the "Diegesis"—though this work is not easily obtained. It is a great pity that a reliable and handy work on the problem of Jesus is not always in print.

GOD IN A FOOTBALL!

"GOD is in everything—in the twinkling legs of a little boy kicking a football in the sunshine of a Sunday. He is in the football that the little boy kicks—if He were not, the ball would burst."

Believe it or not, these amazing words were spoken recently by a Minister of the Church to an audience of fifty at the Pavilion Theatre, Brighton. According to a local news reporter this unusually-informed cleric pranced about the platform in cassock and surplice, emphasising his points with electrifying gestures of arms and hands.

Well, really, there seems to be no limit to the credulity of religious congregations—nor to the pronouncements of Christian parsons. Imagine God living in a football to prevent it from bursting! Surely, if he is in one football then he must be in all footballs, and if he is in a little boy's twinkling legs then he must be in the twinkling legs of Can-Can dancers, too!

Indeed, the possibilities are endless. You might even find him in a tin of sardines or an old hat. Anyway, why was the little boy kicking a football on Sunday when he should have been in Sunday School? Surely he was breaking the Lord's Commandments by playing games on the Sabbath—or perhaps God is only to be found in footballs which are kicked on Sundays.

Unfortunately we are not told how or why God gets into footballs, or what he does when he is inside—unless he just loves to be kicked around!

Isn't it rather pitiful that this sort of clowning by clergymen misleads the ignorant into supposing it is frightfully mystical and clever? We would like to question the reverend gentleman's authority for the statements made. Are we to presume that because he is a cleric he is entitled to make any assertion he chooses, without substantiation, and run it down the throats of his followers as though it were heaven-sent nourishment? If so, it is small wonder that most religionists appear to suffer from acute mental constipation.

Is it by virtue of his calling and his curious habiliments that he is able to get away with this sort of thing or is it because anything he says is regarded as gospel truth and directly inspired by God himself? And is there any verse in the Bible where God claims to live inside a football? If not, why not? Surely we should have been told about this before. Why was such vital information imparted only to a select audience of fifty at Brighton? Does the Pope know about it—or the Archbishop of Canterbury? We very much doubt it, and we also doubt if anyone but a half-wit would ever believe it. We can

only conclude that if religion is only designed for the mentally deficient then it is useless for Christians to bemoan their empty churches.

We are aware that God has sometimes been credited with dwelling in flowers, because the flowers are beautiful—yet we do not recall hearing that he ever took up residence in the weeds. As he is said to be responsible for both we fail to appreciate the distinction. It is very unfortunate that the Church cannot make up its mind just what God is and where he is. If it doesn't know, then why doesn't it say so? Why does it find it necessary to indulge in childish flights of fancy and foolishness describing God as a Man one minute and as a Ghost the next? And why doesn't the Church explain once and for all exactly how God manages to reside simultaneously somewhere in the stratosphere and inside a child's football?

This sort of belief is only fit for the undeveloped minds of simple savages. No one possessing an ounce of reason could believe anything so utterly fantastic. It is an insult to Man's intelligence.

What the Church fails to realise is that God was a conception of the primitive and superstitious mind. Man has since progressed but God has not. He must ever remain what he always was—the invention of an ignorant Age—and he can have no place in any enlightened and civilised community.

Time marches on—even though Popes and Prelates are still groping blindly in the Dark Ages.

W. H. WOOD.

BIOGRAPHY FOR BEGINNERS

THERE have been many attempts made, from time to time, to present the lives of great men in literary form, so that they have an appeal for the ordinary reader—especially for the young reader. Many of these attempts have been unsuccessful, especially such ones as have taken soldiers and politicians for their heroes. This is presumably because soldiers and politicians are not really such admirable examples for young folk to follow as one is usually led to think. And the suspicion that the wrong heroes have been chosen and held up for the admiration of the young becomes almost a certainty when one reads a recent book, "They Enriched Humanity," by David Wren (Charles Skilton: 6s.).

This is a book intended for those whom we now have, apparently, to call "teen-agers": it tells the life-stories of Shelley, Elizabeth Fry, William Morris, Florence Nightingale, and William Lloyd Garrison. It is difficult to think of a better set of nineteenth century worthies to reveal to young people the real benefits to humanity which have sprung from the activities of a few forward-looking individuals.

Mr. Wren's five chosen examples of those whose work has meant an advance of the whole human race present, indeed, a very varied assortment of people, whose work has tended in very different directions. It is, too, probably unnecessary to point out to Freethinkers that the general attitude towards life taken up by these five people is very different. Shelley was, at any rate in some degree, a Freethinker, and the book shows the explosive impact of his ideas on the conventional minds of his time, at Oxford and elsewhere. Elizabeth Fry, on the other hand, found the more severe type of Christianity as expressed by the Society of Friends a real inspiration in her work for penal reform. And the

"Christian Socialism" advocated by William Morris is another, completely different school of thought which duly played its part in the development of the ideas of Socialism into the twentieth century.

But where I feel that this book is of special value is that it provides the young man or woman, trying to work out his or her ideas of the world, with a satisfactory way of realising that many people, of varying aims and views, have done their bit towards improvement. And, even though the modern world of atom bombs and power politics may be something very different from that which any of the five figures dealt with by Mr. Wren would have anticipated, there is discernible a trend in most countries towards a greater humanitarianism and a wiser use of the powers of science. This is something which requires a little penetration beneath the surface to see, and that penetration is what gives Mr. Wren's unpretentious book its real distinction.

Too few writers for the young (as Mr. Geoffrey Trease has lately pointed out) have bothered to give readers anything like the view of the world which they would be so careful to inculcate if they were writing for adults. For that reason it is good to note a book which does not "write down" to youth, but which assumes a general level of intelligence not unworthy of the sensible young people of to-day. For, after all, while parsons may fulminate against the follies of the young, there can be little doubt that any sort of impartial investigation of young people at the present time would reveal a rising level of good, sound common sense. A small point which was not reported in many of our newspapers (after all, it was not sensational enough to merit a headline) is the fact that an American professor recently repeated to his 1949 class some examination papers which he had set to a class in 1919. And, whereas the 1919 class presented only 20 per cent. of passes, the 1949 class reached the pass level in 80 per cent. of the students. For that sensible 80 per cent. of present-day youth I am sure "They Enriched Humanity" will be valuable and exciting reading. And Freethinkers who wish to give some thoughtful young relative a present will find the book a very satisfactory solution of what has always been a problem.

JOHN ROWLAND.

DEAD GODS

Once God was in the hurricane and earthquake;
His anger thundered down the tropic sky.
He drowned, He parched, He froze, He oft to earth spake
With flames and lightnings brooking no reply.

Where are the Gods of yester-year? Vain quest,
They never were, and now as myths remain.
The ghosts men worship with such prayerful zest
Will pass in time and ne'er will haunt again.

Cease craven supplications to the sky,
And concentrate on Earth where wisdom waits.
Vain hope to draw assistance from on high,
For God lies dead behind his pearly gates.

Dead is Jehovah, whose creative breath
In Eden's garden stirred a soul from clay.
Do all gods die, though overlords of Death?
"Yes," man explains: "What I create, I slay!"

PIONEER.

CORRESPONDENCE

OUT OF DATE?

Sir,—Mr. Nicholson describes me as "content to stick in the well-worn rut ploughed by Marx a hundred years ago." The simple answer is that Marx ploughed no rut. He did not lay down any dogma. When someone quoted "Marxism" against him, he replied: "I am not a Marxist." What he taught was a method; and the success of Marxism depends on the adaptation of the method to new situations which have arisen since his death—e.g., the era of imperialist wars and mass destruction produced by the capitalist struggle for raw materials and markets; and the job of building a new civilisation out of the resultant ruin. If any Marxist fails to adapt his thinking and action to that situation, he is false to Marxism.

On the other hand, I have never met such a lot of fossilised stick-in-the-muds as what (meaning no disrespect to Bradlaugh) I may describe as the old Bradlaugh gang in the Freethought Movement. They talk and write for all the world as if they were still living in the 'eighties, still struggling for Bradlaugh's seat in Parliament, and still fighting a homogeneous army of "Christian" reactionaries for the right to be an atheist! To hear them, no one would think we had been through two world wars and were threatened with a third, and that the best of causes now was to expose, sabotage and smash the warmongers (Catholic, Protestant or pseudo-Rationalist) before they smash us. I have been patient too long. I have given the do-nothings every chance; and now I have done with them. That alone would not matter much, perhaps. But the young have done with them too, or rather, have never taken up with them. If the old gang retain their grip on the Freethought Movement (N.S.S., R.P.A. or Ethical—it makes no difference), it will die of inanition.

Besides, I joined the Movement for a definite purpose—to kill and bury the pestilent humbug called Christian civilisation. So far as that goes, we have not moved a foot since I joined thirty-four years ago. The Communists are doing the job for us and doing it better. If you don't believe it, watch the Churches. Who is it makes them squeal? The old Bradlaugh gang? Not on your life! It is Communism they are afraid of all the time. And that's enough for me.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

We question whether Mr. Robertson will find in his new friends any step towards real Freethought.—EDITOR.

CHRISTIAN RATIONALIST.

Sir,—Life is too short to spend one's time quibbling over the precise meaning of much disputed terms, which is, actually, all that your contributor, Mr. Yates, wishes me to do.

He apparently still objects to my use of the term "Christian Rationalist" on the ground, if I understand him correctly, that (in his own words) "as a believer in the scientific theory of evolution, Dr. Inge cannot be a Christian."

Obviously to reach such a conclusion, we must know precisely what a "Christian" is, and also what "the scientific theory of evolution" is. Now, no two Christian sects can agree on the definition of what precisely Christianity is—in the seventeenth century there were 246 kinds of Christianity in England alone, who, to quote a contemporary Catholic observer, "agree in nothing except their hostility to the Pope." And in present-day America, the number of such sects is probably even larger. What, then, is the precise definition of a "Christian"?

Whilst as for "the scientific theory of evolution," there are also quite a number, I believe, of rival scientific interpretations to be found.

We are, accordingly, reduced to quibbling over precise definitions and, I repeat, life is too short for such futile pastimes.

I call Dr. Inge a "Christian" in the conventional sense of the word as a dignitary of a professedly Christian Church. Just as, for instance, I call Mr. Stalin a "Communist" in the conventional sense which the world has agreed to attach to this term, though I may add that I, personally, think that present-day Russia is still a long way from real Communism.

In the case under discussion, it would be almost libel to deny Dr. Inge this conventional term "Christian" after all the amount of money he has drawn from the "Christian" Church.)

As for the term "Rationalist" in relation to Dr. Inge, as I have already explained, I used this term in the technical sense, which, whether Mr. Yates likes it or not, New Testament scholarship has agreed to attach to it.—Yours, etc.,

F. A. RIDLEY.

OBITUARY

JOHN MARSH

News has been received of the death of John Marsh, of Cardiff, which took place on March 9. Taken ill a day before he died, the end came quickly. John Marsh was a sturdy type of Freethinker. Kindly and generous in character, he was, nevertheless, most tenacious with regard to his Free-thought opinions. He was one of the chief workers in the formation of the Cardiff Branch of the N.S.S. and for some years he acted as its secretary. Many may recall his cheerful countenance and warm fraternity at Annual Conferences of the N.S.S. of some years back. He was 71 years old at the time of his death. The cremation took place on March 12 at the Glynstaff Crematorium, Pontypridd, where before an assembly of relatives and friends a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. J. S. Wilde, secretary of the Cardiff Branch N.S.S. R. H. R.

JOHN REEVES

Another of the few surviving links with the early Free-thought movement has been severed by the death of John Reeves, of Croydon, which took place on February 27 at the age of 94 years. He saw much service in the turmoil of the Bradlaugh days, knowing all the stalwarts of that time, and being known to them for his keen enthusiasm and loyal help. He also contributed many articles to "The Freethinker." He had a rich store of reminiscences which he loved to relate. His kindly nature and genial character won for him many friends. His last days were spent in comfort in the Old Folk Home at Croydon. The cremation took place at Thornton Heath on March 3. The Secular Service was read by Mr. Hine, a friend of many years standing. R. H. R.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 29, 7 p.m.: "Devolution and Federation," Mr. DAVID SHILLAN.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W.1).—Monday, March 28, 7 p.m.: "Psychology and the Problems of Peace." 2nd Lecture by Prof. J. C. FLUGEL, B.A., D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat," Mr. H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A.

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loxo Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford).—Tuesday, March 29, 8 p.m. Members' Meeting.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "The Best Way to Fight Religion," Mr. L. EBURY.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (38, John Bright Street, Room 13).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Is Evolution True?" Mr. E. T. BRYANT (London).

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-15 p.m.: "Is it War?" Mr. A. C. DUTTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust. Bring your questions.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: "A Century of Secularism," Mr. H. CUTNER (London).

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday 7 p.m.: "Thou Shalt be Gloomy," Mr. C. MCKELVIE (Blackpool).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Eye or Evolution?" Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Co-op. Hall, Parliament St.).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Mistakes and Mediums," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC STRUGGLE FOR WORLD EMPIRE

IT is difficult in the space of a few pages to review a book which seems to be of special value. To do the author justice, as well as to give the prospective reader and adequate pre-view of the work, the reviewer is tempted to deal with it chapter by chapter, thereby risking both the wrath and the blue pencil of an indignant editor.

The best method perhaps is to review in some detail one or two chapters which, as well as being characteristic of the work as a whole, are in themselves of absorbing interest. This method, however, leaves much to be desired, and if we try applying it to the newest book by Avro Manhattan, *The Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century*, we do so reluctantly.

The commonly-held conception that Spain is the most Catholic of the Catholic countries is true only in the sense that Spain has for a longer period than any other nation remained in the grip of the Romish Church. Ex-President Azana's declaration in the Cortes after the Republican-Socialist triumph at the general elections in 1931 that Spain had "ceased to be a Catholic country" could be supplemented by innumerable similar statements made by other responsible Spanish leaders in corroboration of the fact that religion has long been moribund throughout widespread sections of the population. As Manhattan shows, it was the Catholic Church's relentless battle against Liberalism during the last hundred years or so that has succeeded in reducing Spain to her present condition, in which the people are still at the mercy of laws made directly to fit within the framework of the social conditions sponsored by the Church; and in which everywhere, in the schools, in the Press, in the courts, in Government Departments and in the Army, the Catholic Church, as the co-partner of Fascism and sustained by a militant and obdurate Hierarchy, still reigns supreme.

External circumstances have not helped the Spanish people. But there is one fact which in this book emerges clearly from the dark background of Spanish history. It is the fact that the struggle against the Catholic Church in Spain has never once abated, and it is to-day, both inside and outside that country, more intense than ever. This intensification of the struggle, as the author shows, follows inevitably from the failure of the Spanish Liberals under the Monarchy, and of the Republicans after 1931, to consolidate their constitutional gains. It is unlikely that Spain's final liberation from her present thralldom can be much longer delayed, for no institutions so outworn and obsolete as those which at present dominate her life can nowadays possibly so isolate themselves as to withstand the onward rush of modern ideas.

Turning to Italy, with Rome as centre of the Catholic Empire, Manhattan presents his subject in a particularly interesting light. The Roman Catholic Religion, by reason of its claim to be the "Universal Church," must necessarily be expansionist and imperialistic. In the first decade of the present century it might be described as a sort of *spiritual imperialism* within the other imperialisms—the British, French, German Russian, etc., although, of course, its economic, social and political manoeuvres necessarily commingled with its spiritual pretensions. In the present day, having under the late reactionary Fascist regime in Italy, recovered something of its temporal sovereignty, the Roman Catholic State becomes increasingly militant, thereby gaining support from the reactionary groups even in those countries

against which it formerly took sides with the Nazis and Fascists. The fundamental cause of this set-back is the external menace from Stalinist Communism, which serves as an excuse for all the conservative forces to unite and to use the Catholic Church as their major weapon of defence against any extreme form of socialism. The struggle in Italy against the Church of Rome will undoubtedly go on, but as long as what Mr. F. A. Ridley aptly calls the "Church of Moscow" continues a menace the result is likely to be stalemated; and that stage when, as one Muscovite high-priest has expressed it, "the Vatican will be a Museum of stuffed Popes" is not likely soon to be reached.

In the part of his book dealing with Germany, the author gives a very fair and full account of the Vatican's activities in that country since the days of Bismarck. That Protestant Prussia should dominate the Catholic States of Germany at once aroused the hostility of Rome, and the conflict that ensued therefrom only terminated when the "Iron Chancellor" and the Pope found common ground in an alliance against Liberal and democratic principles. Most interesting in this section of the book is the detailed account given of the extraordinary intrigues and interplay of political and religious forces between the different parties and their leading personalities during the inter-war years. The background of von Papen, his rôle as a chamberlain of the Pope, as owner of *Germania*—main Press organ of the German Catholic Party, as leader of political Catholicism in Germany, and finally as Chancellor, all between them throw an illuminating light on the extent of Vatican interference in the domestic affairs and life of the German people.

There is a great deal more in this book on which a reviewer might usefully comment, particularly in the section which deals with Soviet Russia and the Orthodox Church. Limits of space, however, prevent further comment, and it only remains for the present reviewer to recommend Manhattan's book, *The Catholic Church Against the Twentieth Century*, to the attention of all who want to have a clear and easily-digested account of Roman Catholic activities during the last fifty years throughout most parts of the world.

JACQUES YESPMEDO.

A TOLERANT RECTOR

"The landlord had built a hall, where many a hall had been held, to which the young folks of all the country round had resorted. It was especially notable as being the place of meeting of the famous Pansophian Society.

This association, the name of which might be invidiously interpreted as signifying that its members knew everything, had no such pretensions, but as its Constitution said very plainly and modestly, held itself open to accept knowledge on any and all subjects from such as had knowledge to impart. Its President was the rector of the little chapel, a man who, in spite of the Thirty-Nine Articles, could stand fire from the widest-mouthed heretical blunderbuss without flinching or losing his temper."—"A Mortal Antipathy," by Oliver Wendell Holmes.

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