

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

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Vol. LXIX.—No. 23

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER.]

Price Threepence

## VIEWES AND OPINIONS

### Personal

I commence this week's "Views and Opinions" with a personal note to all my readers, and especially members of the N.S.S. I have often said that the Presidency of the National Secular Society is not a post for one who loves ease. And although the "The Best of Causes" is still dear to me, the toll of advancing years makes it difficult for me adequately to perform the duties of both the positions of President of the N.S.S. and Editor of the *Freethinker*.

I have valued highly the trust you have placed in me, and it is with real regret that I reach the point where I must withdraw from the honour you have conferred upon me every year since 1916. I feel I can no longer do justice to both positions, and I shall therefore not stand this year for re-election as President.

I do not want to write further about myself but rather about *ourselves*, or more definitely, about the Society to which we belong and the movement we represent. The National Secular Society has been in existence for nearly 83 years, the Secular movement for a longer time, and the movement in favour of Freethought for a still longer period. The National Secular Society was formed by an amalgamation of those separate bodies which owed their existence to the combined influence of the writings of Paine, and the teaching and societies formed by Robert Owen and the Richard Carlile group. These people had to fight vicious laws, the tyranny of strongly entrenched vested interests, and a narrow, unenlightened religious belief such as the present generation would find it very hard to conceive. The times were hard, but they were stimulating. The opposition was bitter, but it was open, and when opposition is open it is less unnerving than when it is concealed under a pretence of liberalism, undermines character by professed concern for the social amenities, and so makes a disguised appeal to self-interest. So it happens that the testing-time for men and women—and women have played a great part in the history of modern Freethought—is not when the air is full of the cries and smoke of battle. That comes when the form of the fight has changed and the enemy seeks conquest by compromise. Each of us is then thrown back upon stark principle, and the response, when it is made, comes from those of a rather finer and more idealistic character than was demanded when the fight was open and no terms were held out by the enemy.

I do not, therefore, agree with those who talk at large about the heroic ages of Freethought, and who speak as though present-day Freethinkers were unworthy of their forbears. Military leaders have often said that it is not difficult to control men in war when the actual fighting is on. The task is to keep them with their nerves steady and their courage undiminished during the time of waiting before the attack. And in the case of the higher Freethought war that is always in being the same generalisation holds good. Direct opposition and persecu-

tion rouses to resistance. It is the recognition of principle when it is no longer fiercely opposed, and no longer openly opposed, that is the real test of character; and if many professed Freethinkers yield to social bribery, it is not that they are of poorer stuff than was their immediate predecessors, but because all are subjected to a much severer test of character than was formerly the case.

Freethought is now being attacked openly as an outworn principle, to use cant expressions as "bourgeois" or "behind the times," or even still, "flogging a dead horse." Nothing could be further from the truth, there has never been a time when Freethought was not more necessary.

Even granting the fact, so far as our Movement is concerned, the *direct* aggression of the Churches is not as strong as the more revolting forms of Christian doctrines are now disowned by many leading Christians, but too many Freethinkers are inclined to take the present position as secure in perpetuity. They do not appreciate freedom that now obtains because they have not known what it is to be without it.

Translated into terms that directly affect ourselves, this means that an attempt is being made to destroy the Freethought tradition, of which the National Secular Society is the hereditary custodian. It is not altogether a question of maintaining our own right to criticise religious teachings—the issue that is raised to-day is of a wider application. It is the general right of free expression, which once lost, the right to criticise religion will speedily follow. And this defence of the larger right of freedom of expression is no mere debating society issue; it is not moved by the desire to turn the world into an arena for mere dialectical display.

Now it seems to me that in this situation the National Secular Society has a clear task before it; and it is *its* task in a sense that it is hardly that of any other organisation in the country. And I must again point out that our task—as an organisation—is really two-fold. First, it is to destroy the belief in supernaturalism in all its form, and so divert the energy given to theology to useful social work. Second, to work for that freedom of thought and speech which can alone ensure the greatest measure of social justice. We have been doing this for 83 years, and it has contributed greatly to reform movements as a whole, but there is much more we can do now, and the need for the doing was never more urgent. As a Freethought organisation the N.S.S. is in a stronger position than it has ever been, certainly stronger than at any time during my own 60 years' connection with it. We should have a much larger membership, and we should have a much greater extensive and intensive propaganda. There should also be a much larger circulation of our literature, particularly of the *Freethinker*.

Above all, if we are to retain our present freedom—setting aside the question of its extension—we must fight for it. We can mark this determination by raising

our questions and stating our views wherever and whenever possible. We can insist on our full legal rights. We can, within whatever party or movement we belong, protest against the introduction of religion—a practice before which so many Freethinkers remain silent. In other words, we must prove that we know what we want and are willing to work to get it. Hitherto we have not gained all we ought to have gained. And we have not gained because we have not insisted on having. If genuine freedom of thought is worth having, it is surely worth doing something to get. I invite every reader of this paper seriously to consider what he or she can do. Otherwise they may wake up one day and find it is too late. We must not be beaten back because one section of the people appear to be losing their courage, and another section increasing in impudence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## CHARLES BRADLAUGH AND INDIAN POLITICS

THE next few weeks will witness the creation of yet another Republic out of what was, until recently, the British Empire "upon which the sun never set." This time, it is India, the former "brightest jewel" in the imperial diadem, which has freely opted for republican independence within the framework of the British Commonwealth. The fact that the political emancipation of the second most populous country in the world has been achieved without violence furnishes indubitably a striking demonstration of the new spirit of internationalism which, despite the atomic bomb and other horrors, constitutes one of the most encouraging features of the present age.

Amongst the forerunners and protagonists of the new Indian Republic members of the National Secular Society may be proud to rank their founder and first President, Charles Bradlaugh. For Bradlaugh never shut himself up in an "ivory tower," aloof and remote from the social and political struggles of his day. Contrarily, the great orator of British Freethought never failed to raise his powerful voice against tyranny and unjustified privilege in whatever walk of his contemporary life he found them. From Republicanism to Land-Reform, many progressive causes benefited from his powerful advocacy. To be sure, his withering description of the peripatetic royal dynasties of his day, "small breast-bestarred wanderers," takes its place amongst the classical political sayings of the nineteenth century. Nor must we forget his active participation in the abortive first Spanish Republic of the 1870's, or his work for Ireland.

Amongst the numerous forlorn hopes—as it must then have seemed—with which Charles Bradlaugh associated himself, was the Nationalist Movement of India, then slowly making its entry into the political scene. For Mr. Bradlaugh was hardly less cosmopolitan in his fearless advocacy of "peoples struggling to be free" than had been his greatest predecessor in the annals both of English Radicalism and of English Freethought, "Tom" Paine. In Britain, Spain and India, Bradlaugh continued the liberating mission of his great predecessor in America, Britain and France.

The precise era which witnessed Mr. Bradlaugh's political career was contemporary with the origins of the modern, mainly middle-class movement of Indian Nationalism, and of its political instrument, the Indian National Congress; which last, now the Government of India, is about to proclaim the Republic of India. But, at the time of Bradlaugh's intervention, my idea of an

independent Indian Republic represented an Utopian ideal of the distant future.

For, when the Indian National Congress first met in 1885, the huge sub-continent lay flat beneath the iron heel of an alien but irresistible British Imperialism. At this date, Indian Nationalism was just beginning to stir faintly after the generation of exhaustion and of political submission which followed the bloody failure of India's national rising in 1857-9—usually described, rather inaccurately, as "The Indian Mutiny."

Actually the "Mutiny" represented in reality a struggle by the old feudal ruling classes of a pre-industrial India to regain their lost power by overthrowing their British conquerors. The ruthless suppression of the revolt finally broke the power of the Indian Feudalism and thereby prepared the way for the emergence of new political forces; for the gradual industrialisation of India and the consequent rise of the "middle-class," imbued with nationalist ideals of European origin which has always been the backbone of the Indian national movement, and of its political organ, the Congress.

Such, in the very briefest of outlines, was the Indian political scene when Mr. Bradlaugh, already the champion of down-trodden peoples in Ireland and Spain, not to mention down-trodden classes in Britain itself, turned his attention to the Indian sub-continent, then in the initial phase of its struggle for political emancipation.

His biographer, John M. Robertson, comments upon the Indian activities of Mr. Bradlaugh in these terms:—

"In virtue of the qualities which made him a warm friend of Ireland, Bradlaugh was all his life, and in his later years still more warmly, the friend of India. All his instincts of justice and sympathy were moved by the spectacle of the vast congeries of politically immature races, ruled by a bureaucracy of Englishmen none of whom would for a moment be trusted to exercise similar power over their fellow-countrymen, but all of whom collectively are assumed by their countrymen to need next to no supervision when ruling a 'lower' race. . . . The death of Professor Fawcett, 'the Member for India,' left Indian interests ill-cared for indeed, and immediately on gaining his seat Bradlaugh stepped into the vacant place, although it was by itself work enough for one man, and he had three men's work on hand beside.

"His speech on India to his constituents shows the broad and sympathetic way in which he approached the problem. He studied it with the minute care he bestowed on every subject he handled; and in a few years he acquired by his work an amount of popularity among natives such as had never been earned by an Englishman outside India, and by few Anglo-Indians. . . . He took up the cause of India as he had those of Italy, Poland, Ireland, of Boers, Zulus and Egyptians, with no thought or prospect of personal gain, out of sheer zeal for justice and hatred of oppression." ("Life of Charles Bradlaugh," by Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner and John M. Robertson, vol. 2, p. 198.)

Elsewhere Mr. Robertson informs us:—

"Nothing could be more judicious and restrained than his brief address to the (Indian National—F.A.R.) Congress on his brief visit to India within about a year of his death." And the same biography tells us that "he had increasing satisfaction, too, in his work on India; and on the occasion of a reception at Northampton to the delegates of the Indian Congress, he delivered a speech full of his old fire."

And, upon August 27th, 1888, he delivered in the House of Commons "an important speech (reprinted

under the title: 'The Story of a Famine Insurance Fund and What Was Done With It') by way of protest, in the discussion on the Indian Budget, against the mismanagement of Indian affairs" (above, p. 469).

Charles Bradlaugh's most spectacular intervention in Indian affairs transpired at the very end of his stormy life when, after a dangerous illness, and shortly before his death, he visited India at the end of 1889. From 2,000 delegates, and 3,000 visitors, he received a tumultuous reception when he addressed the Congress in person, and addresses poured in from all parts of India. Bradlaugh appears to have been the first British M.P. or leading English political figure to address India's National Congress, and this political innovation demonstrated not only his courage and eloquence but, equally, his political far-sightedness and his profound appreciation of the social forces that were already stirring in the womb of the future.

The above citations will, I think, suffice to demonstrate how deep was Bradlaugh's concern for India and how accurately he may now be described as one of the pioneer workers for the coming Indian Republic. India is often enough described as the land, par excellence, of mystical religion. But, in the person of its founder, the National Secular Society had also a hand in the making of a great nation out of the former British colony; it is an historical rôle of which we may well be proud!

Charles Bradlaugh, were he with us to-day, would assuredly wish long life and prosperity to the Indian Republic, for which the great British republican had prepared the way when it was still a remote dream. If we may indulge in the pleasing, if ironic, daydream that, somewhere in the universe, the great contemner of human immortality still inhabits some Elysian Fields, where sight of Earth and its ways is granted, we feel assured that Bradlaugh would be proud of his handiwork, and would regard the world's newest republic as a triumph for that principle of universal freedom to which his entire life was devoted.

F. A. RIDLEY.

**MORMONS? — INQUIRE WITHIN**

WHO are these people and from whence came they? You would like to know of them? Then pray tarry a moment, and I shall tell of strange folk from the land of "Never, Never," who have a strange tale to tell, which came to them in a dream.

Years ago, God gave to the world a testament and a guidance for life on this earth, but man chose to discard it, neglect it, and otherwise ignore it, so God decided to remove his pets that he had so imperfectly created, and thereby drowned all the world, barring one family which survived the waters. But still things were pretty bad and went on in much the same way as they had before, so God decided that he would do something else this time.

Now, dear friend, we are not too sure what happened at this juncture. Some say that he popped inside a human body, and came down from on high to correct the sins and digressions of the world, show the right way, and then to die in atonement for the sins of the world. Others say that is all boloney, and that it was a half-God that came on earth, born of an earthly mother. This half-God did the same as the God, so you can work it out who really came for I gave it up some years ago, after leaving Sunday School and Brother Grimm's Fairy Tales.

Well, for the next one thousand, eight hundred, and twenty-seven years things didn't look up; in fact, sometimes they looked even worse than at any other time in the history of the animal known as Man. Men still went

on bumping each other off, only by now things were reaching the mass production stage, what with one thing and another. We had managed to wipe out whole sections of Russia, during the German Knightly invasions and colonisations of East Prussia, the Caribs had ceased to be in the West Indies, thanks to those Christian adventurers; the Incas and Aztecs were taking quite a beating, incidentally, they don't seem to have been the same since; in fact, things didn't look too good.

Well, it would seem that the time had come to rectify and change some of these things, so the Chief decided to have another crack at re-organisation and re-deployment. So he sends for one of his boys, by name Moroni, and tells him that the hour is now.

Moroni then decides to look out some sincere stooge and give him the lowdown on how to straighten things up. Of course this bloke must have the necessary qualifications. . . . He must believe Moroni, do as told, have faith, not reason too hard (that's always dangerous) and, in fact, be an honest and upright citizen. Well, he gets out his celestial crystal ball and takes a dekho at some folk down below, to see whom he will give the works. Finally, he lights on a geezer, by name Joseph Smith, junior. This was the year 1823.

Old Mo then dons his wings and takes off for Earth, to tell Joe what to do. Joe, incidentally, was a steady, good living boy, not leading a complicated life, on his family's farm, so it must have been somewhat of a jolt for him when suddenly there came a light within his room, a light stronger than that of the brightest day, from out of which stepped our heavenly messenger.

After recovering from the shock, Joe asked him what the idea was, coming down and giving him a surprise like that. The heavenly Western Union boy then told him that he came with a message from the big boss who had a job for Joe. He told him that he would reveal to him the whereabouts of some plates of gold, upon which was inscribed the history of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas and also containing the fullness of the gospel as given to these people.

To abbreviate a long story, Joe picks up the plates, is endowed with the power to translate them, does so, has various witnesses sign to certify having seen the plates, and then he returns them to the messenger, who takes them up above, where they remain, as far as we know, to this day.

This is really a preface to tell how the "Book of Mormon" came into existence and what is stated to be in it (i.e., the fullness of the Gospel, as given to the inhabitants of the American Continent). From such claims, we can examine the word of God, in its entirety and completeness. We may presume that, as such work comes from God and was translated through his agency, that it shall be perfect, so let us go forth towards a new light with hope, expecting from the Almighty that lucidity that can only come from the Perfect, Omnipotent, Omnipresent (and numerous other lush superlatives) Being. Now to the book itself, this history and Gospel.

The book of Mormon as presented to us, comprises of fifteen separate books, amongst which are two containing the name Mormon, one "The Words of Mormon" and another, "The Book of Mormon," which gave its name to the entire work as offered to us.

Early in the work, we find a pearl such as this: "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; They shall bow down to thee with their face towards the Earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Following this, two verses later, comes: "And I will feed them that oppress

thee with their own flesh; they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I, the Lord, am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

From such godly statements, it would appear that this God takes sides with his favourites and helps them all he can, and only manages to try and get them out of messes he couldn't prevent them getting into. Such perfection. Then there is the barbarous statement that seems to imply cannibalism, but perhaps eating and drinking one's flesh and blood is really quite good, in certain instances. Of course, we are told that such things don't mean what they say, and that it is a matter for interpretation and sorting out. For a God to use obtuse analogies is rather bad form, especially when there is a danger that folk such as myself may come along and read it as stated and not as "possibly implied." Well, let us leave this section and have a look over the page and see what further great news awaits our inquiring eyes.

"For the time soon cometh that the fullness of the wrath of God shall be poured out upon all the children of men; for he will not suffer that the wicked shall destroy the righteous."

This is a very enlightening passage, for it has a multiplicity of implications. Of course, there is this ever pending day of justice, which is, and always has been just around the corner. I gather that the fullness of the wrath of God will be mighty powerful. Will it mean the Christian justice of an eternity of punishment and suffering for the transgressions of a mere lifetime? What a justice!

Of course, there is the theory that man can do no *conscious* evil. How come? Well, it goes like this. All people act for a reason and according to their own precepts of justice. By this I mean that no matter what a man may do wrong, at the time he does it he doesn't believe that what he is doing is bad, and from the standpoint he views it from, he automatically rejects the accepted ideas of society. From a standpoint of immunity from the world (i.e., with God), it would be possible to rightfully say that the law breaker has not done evil. On this basis one could assess the number of evildoers in the world, and find that evil is not really a product of an evil nature, but is merely a lack of understanding, a lack of appreciation of the import of actions committed and other factors that relate the act to society and justice, and in turn to the doer.

Now we find ourselves confronted by a passionate perfect being, who threatens all manner of dire consequences to the wicked of men and their children—a very few, if any. If there are not only truly evil men, then the phrase is redundant and God has slipped up again, if otherwise, why give them such major importance, when they are but such an infinitesimal quantity?

A pearl of infinite price, comes after some superb reasoning, which ends this . . . And if there is no God we are not, neither is the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away."

Reasoning *à la* limits of human conception. Why must things have begun, any more than they might always have been? To state that we and the world in which we live, and the universe, of which we are but a fragment, all stand as a certification that God exists is utter madness, coming especially from the "mouth" of God (always assuming he has a mouth, is a *he*, and generally resembles the man who created him). This reasoning is a super form that should be universally adopted, you could then

soon prove black white . . . hist! . . . "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy." Thus is the reasoning of these fantastic folk.

Or, should we accept this statement: "For he gave commandment that all men must repent; for he showed unto all men that they were lost, because of the transgression of their parents"? In this instance we may safely say that we come from the children of *all men*, here mentioned, who suffered the penalty for the transgressions of their parents, therefore, we may as well throw in the sponge, for are we not lost also?

Tells you that an angel fell from heaven, which makes one wonder, did he fall, or was he pushed. I wonder. If there is an answer, these are the boys to tell you.

Well, that is as far as I have fought with this tome of these Salt Lake City kings; I hope you don't blame me for not finishing it, perhaps I shall make it someday, but at present my wife says it is tiring her, for I sit up at nights, screaming, pulling out my hair and biting my nails to the quick—is it any wonder? Oh, well, here comes that man dressed in white again, this time he has a strait-jacket. Take some advice before it's too late:—*"Stay clear of Mormon Rational Theology."*

PETER CROSS.

## NAKED AND UNASHAMED

"Mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs" so Browning reports the Bishop of Saint Praxad's promising to his presumed nephews if they bury him well.

Renaissance artists agreed with this taste in feminine beauty. They painted hundreds of nude and lightly-clad women, round-limbed, plump-bodied, full-breasted, using classical stories and mythical legends as subjects, excuse for displaying their prowess in depicting women at their most voluptuous.

In many parts of the world there is little or no admiration for nudity, neither does it exert excessive attraction or presume sexual incontinence. Simply the human body is seen so much and so often it is regarded as casually as any other animal, whether furred, feathered, woolly, scaly or bare, not to be noticed as unusual.

Climate is largely the cause of this, though not entirely, but long-established custom completes the explanation.

Over greater part of Africa native peoples go nearly naked, children entirely so. The amount of clothing worn conceals little and enwraps less, being often only belt and tails or apron. Blackfellows of Australia, Maoris, denizens of innumerable Pacific Islands, Indians, Malaysians, Caribs, Southern Chinese, all these wear the least possible attire, merely variations of loincloth, often going naked, especially when working or sporting in or about sun-warmed water.

For the two same reasons, sun and warm sea, inhabitants of the Mediterranean littoral, also Japanese and others may be seen wearing much less than the English regard as needful amount of clothing. White men in hot countries find it necessary to reduce this quantity, suffering discomfort by not making it less.

Nor is semi-nudity always practised because of heat. American Indians north and south went nearly bare, their children entirely so, facing rigours and variations of American climate. In the frozen north Eskimos strip to waist in huts, igloos or tents, though this is caused by heat of blubber lamps warming the air.

What matters is that millions of people can look each upon others bodies naked or nearly so and not find it immoral, indecent, wrong, improper, objectionable or provocative. Merely it is commonplace, not to be viewed

in any way differently from seeing animals, trees, or aught else in its natural state.

The ancient world showed similar sense. Throughout the Roman Empire, as in Asia Minor and Egypt, near nakedness to mere wisps or vestiges of clothing was habitual, never regarded as aught but appropriate, amount worn being left to taste of wearer. Latter was conditioned by circumstances. Workers, the mass of poor people and slaves wore little clothing for ease, cheapness and freedom to toil unencumbered. No objection to their state of all but nudity was raised by authorities, wealthy persons, priests, moralists, women or philosophers. Greek athletes competed naked, as represented in the magnificent statuary of the period.

Inhabitants of medieval Europe swathed themselves in abundant clothing, both wool and leather. That was mainly for warmth, protection from rough and dirty contacts at work and hunting in cold, wet and windy weather; also for defence against claws and teeth of animals, and the too readily employed arrows and knives, swords and axes of themselves in violent quarrels and fights.

Nowhere in medieval literature or records is there protest against nudity or objection to it on grounds of indecency or immorality. These latter attitudes are mainly nineteenth century concepts confined chiefly to Britain and Britons who founded colonies, as the New England States. For convenience we call it Puritanism, though its characteristic narrowness of outlook and petty ideas are not peculiar to one religion or society of last century. It is more racial, Anglo-Saxon, the British mongrelism of peoples and its derivatives overseas showing it most strongly.

Let us be honest about this matter. The naked human body is not necessarily beautiful or artistic or pleasant to look upon. Often the reverse.

Consider the adult female grown stout and heavy. Stripped of clothing she is seen to have tree-trunk thighs and grand piano legs, most likely knock-kneed and splay-footed. A behind like a round table, buttocks having the contours of two beer barrels balance a semi-globular belly, with two breasts like bladders of lard. Thin she is scraggy and withered, repulsive; her male partner equally so and little better when fat.

Children are pretty naked, their silkiness of skin enhancing their delicate contours. Boys and girls in their teens are often handsome, though the girls may quickly develop too much flesh, excessive plumpness in prominent areas. As the Greeks knew older youths and young men at their shapeliest are for a few years among the most beautiful objects on earth.

Regarded in quite a different aspect naked exposure to sunlight, fresh air and water is one of the healthiest practices. When swimming or sunbathing clothing is absurd, even the smallest quantity.

The too prevalent amount of prudery, pruriency, prying, sniggering, pointless and tasteless humour would vanish if nudity, full or partial, was recognised for what it is, a personal choice to be adopted when suitable to surrounding conditions, unheeded by others, accepted as normal.

Fortunately through the influences of games, dancing and enthusiasm for fresh air, sunshine and clean water we are approaching that ideal stage when lessening of clothes or absence of them will arouse no emotions nor disturb anyone's conscience.

Consequently, in art, ballet and photography exposure of the human form is becoming preferred to display of drapery. Our enjoyment is not thereby lessened.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

## ODE TO SAMUEL SMILES

God is but One, all else is Two, or more;  
One, an hypothesis, Two reality;  
Let metaphysicists the One adore,  
Reality is best for you and me;  
Theology I always found a bore,  
The Two, or more, combined can make a spree.  
One must be loveless, or Himself must love,  
But Two—theirs is the world: lovers it can move!

"For God so loved the world"—a foolish text,  
His botched creation love, that is to say;  
Unhappy men and women, sore perplexed,  
Their clumsy Creator must wish away;  
Troubles there always are, they Man have vexed,  
But mankind strives to bring a better day.  
"So loved the world!"—I wonder, what's His game;  
He ought to keep away for very shame.

God cannot love, but we, the Two, or more,  
Can shift the very axis of the earth  
Had we the mind, though I should much deplore  
Such useless labour; there are things more worth  
Our doing, such as growing crops to store  
Against the coming time of world-wide dearth;  
Let God then stand aside, and Man not gape,  
But roll his sleeves up, work, and so escape.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

## MURDER OF A PROFESSED SORCERER

### STRANGE APPEAL TO THE POPE

An extraordinary story of credulity and superstition took place some years ago in connection with the murder of Frozza Fovilla, a rag merchant, who was found dead in front of a little house in the Rue Granoux. The victim, a young man of twenty-six, had lodged six months with a couple, named Salvator, in the Rue Roussel-Doria. Fovilla had not been long with the Salvators before he found that they had a great belief in sorcery of every kind, and he at once set about turning their credulity to his advantage. He himself professed to be a sorcerer, and, assuring them that he had been sent by God, began to terrorise them in every possible way. The husband submitted to him becoming the lover of his wife. Fovilla next made his host, who is a cobbler by trade, pay over all his earnings to his wife, from whom he thus succeeded in borrowing 165 francs. He even controlled Salvator's work, deciding what he must undertake and when it must be finished. The cobbler and his wife now feared Fovilla's power so much that they attributed to it any evil or mischance that happened to befall them. In particular, a complication of ailments that seized the husband was laid to his charge. They would have turned their lodger out, but were restrained by his prophecy that Salvator would die within twenty-four hours after Fovilla crossed the threshold.

The Salvators, at length, became exasperated to such an extent that they seriously thought of making the unpaid loan a pretext for getting rid of Fovilla. Here the strangest part of the story begins. They did not eject him on account of the loan. Their position had now become so unbearable that they meditated his death instead. They were, however seized with scruples in case the rag merchant should really prove to be a Divine messenger. They, therefore, agreed to write to the Pope, giving full particulars of the case, and asking his Holiness to inform them whether or not Fovilla's actions had the authority of heaven. The letter was written for them by a public letter writer, near the Marseilles General Post Office. It was registered and sent off to Rome. No reply was received, the Secretary of the Vatican doubtless thinking that the letter had been written by some madman. Apparently, the situation grew still more desperate, for on January 3 and 4, two telegrams, reply paid, were dispatched to the Pope, asking for an immediate reply to the letter. Then, as there was still no answer, the Salvators took the matter into their own hands. One night, after supper, they taxed Fovilla with being the cause of their ruin; a scuffle ensued, and then the husband cut the rag merchant's throat. The Salvators, whose story is confirmed by the public letter writer and by the duplicates of the telegrams, confess their crime with the utmost satisfaction, and declare that since Fovilla's death all their ailments and other misfortunes have disappeared.

### ACID DROPS

All those who think that the work of Freethought is no longer necessary should read the accounts of Dr. Wand's "mission" to Londoners. How much the people who flocked to the churches really believed it is impossible to say, but the fact remains that they did go in even bigger numbers than the organisers expected. It is of course true that all, or almost all, of these people were already Christians, and only wanted a little gingering up; converts have *not* been made as far as one can read. But the point is that you can still get people to believe—to believe in Gods, Saviours, Miracles, Devils and Hell. It is a dismal thought.

Dr. Wand's Mission to London has spent £20,000 up to date, reports the *News of the World*, and more than one person in ten will go to church as a result; at least that is what the Bishop of London hopes. £20,000 is a lot of money to spend in an endeavour to get 10 per cent. of good Christians on their knees, and we are not surprised that the new "seven commandments" stresses the personal and financial service to the Church as the most important commandment. Dr. Wand has been described as "London's brisk and beaming bishop," but who wouldn't be with £20,000 of other people's money to spend on such stunts as sky-writing, etc.

It appears that when compulsory Church parades in the Forces were abandoned the result was not particularly successful from the padre's point of view, and there is no doubt that the Church of Scotland Committee on this subject would much rather have a Church full of unwilling soldiers than a handful of willing worshippers as has been the position since the dropping of Church parades. A very poor justification was put forward by the committee for its re-introduction; it seems that "the life of the regiment loses some of the fine spirit which was associated with Church parades." That was indeed a "fine spirit" that forced men to listen to parsonic drivel or the alternative of "spud basking" fatigue for those bold enough to refuse to go to Church. Fine indeed—for the padre.

The treasurer of St. John's, Torquay, complains that there are too many sixpences in the collection. Mr. Millner says that sixpence "is something one may leave as a tip for a waitress, but is not very much to offer Almighty God." And to think that the Good Book has it that even the "widow's mite" (whatever that is) is acceptable to the Lord. It would be interesting to know why Mr. Millner is so worried that Almighty God would spurn the humble tanners; in any case, what does an Almighty want with money? Mr. Millner ought to be thankful for small mercies and should console himself with the saying that the labourer is worthy of his hire. After all, there are many people who would like to know what God does for the sixpences he is offered.

How these Catholics hate any quotation from non-religious writings! "Pasquin" of *The Universe*, for example, is furious that side by side with a scripture text in *The Daily Graphic* is one from Chamfort—"The most completely lost of all days is that on which one has not laughed." Don't we know that Chamfort's laughter "was a snarl," that he committed suicide, and that he was an Atheist? So what? Is it not better to commit suicide than to commit wholesale murders like some of the Popes—for example, Alexander VI? In any case why should not Chamfort be quoted if he has something to say? What a barren world this would be if Catholics like Pasquin had their way!

We're always having a Swiss theologian, Dr. Karl Barth, rammed down our throats as if what he says can affect Freethought in any way; but we notice that he is a thorough believer in "the fall of man" like all good Catholics. The theologian who believes in the fall of man believes in the Adam and Eve and a Serpent who could talk first-class Hebrew. If Barth does, then he is quite out of the pale. In any case, it is interesting to note that it is cheery news, that "there is increasing recognition" for this fundamental Christian truth in the world to-day. Cheery for whom? *The Universe* and the primitive mentality of its readers?

Any scepticism on the exorcising of demons by priests must now be dispelled from the minds of all right-thinking people. Fr. Leonardo has just exorcised a demoniacal spirit which possessed a 22-year-old girl near Rome. The girl used to get violently excited and spoke with the wicked spirit, and as the magic of the parish priest failed to do the trick, Fr. Leonardo was appealed to, and three hours of constant prayer so disgusted the demon—as it was bound to do—that out of the girl he went and fled back to Hell. She is now quite calm. If this does not convince Freethinkers of the reality of demons and the spirit world, no free and unbiased investigation will—we are sorry to say.

That all is not quite so well in the Church can be seen in the address given by Dr. B. Heywood for the Diocesan Youth Fellowship of St. Albans. He showed how difficult it was to carry the message to young people. The *Church Times* reports that "he blamed not only the language of the prayers which at times was equivocal, obscure or misleading, but also the conduct of the services." That seems pretty bad, but he added, "Many priests were inaudible; others gabbled the prayers so that it was almost impossible to follow them reverently. We have an idea, that even if audible, or not gabbled, it is difficult to follow most prayer with reverence."

Dr. Heywood gave examples. "What do you feel like if . . . you are given to sing, 'Or ever your pots be made hot with thorns, so let indignation vex him, as a thing that is raw'?" Or if given this from Amos, "And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the Lord," what is an anxious all-believing young convert to do? We admit that the Bishop of London knows exactly what this drivel means, but does anybody else? Dr. Heywood thinks that "a more reverent conduct of services"—whatever that means, we don't know or care—will be better for young converts. No doubt!

Who says that Fatima is a huge religious swindle? Freethinkers all over the world have had a divine proof that it is blessed beyond all doubt. Just recently a drought threatened Portugal's crops, so the pilgrims to Fatima all knelt down and earnestly prayed for rain. Naturally, with violent suddenness, a thunderstorm broke, and heavy rain came down in torrents, and the grateful pilgrims, with suitable groveling, thanked God vociferously for granting them such a boon. We are told that 400,000 pilgrims from all Europe and America were there—though who did the counting is not revealed. And can 400,000 people so easily find the money for the pilgrimage? By the way, how do the more advanced Protestants explain this wonderful answer to Catholic prayer?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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London, W.C.1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. ASTBURY.—Thanks for cuttings.

N.F.—G. W. Foote's *Bible Romances* is out of print.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

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.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

## SUGAR PLUMS

To-day (June 5) the Annual Conference business sessions will be held in the Victoria Station Hotel, Nottingham, beginning at 10-30 a.m. All members of the N.S.S. can attend, speak, and vote. The current card of membership will be the means for admission. In the evening at 7 p.m., a Public Demonstration will take place in the Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street, Nottingham. Admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each.

Mr. S. E. Craig, Secretary of the Rationalist Association of New Zealand, informs us that for the first time in radio history the Association has been on the air. Twice they have taken part in debates in the "Citizens' Forum" programme, and the Freethought part in the debates has been favourably commented on. The subjects discussed to date were, "Are we becoming Materialistic?" and "Is Religion Losing its Hold?" Our congratulations to our New Zealand colleagues.

A happy evening was spent in the Clarion Rooms, Glasgow, on May 27, when Mrs. M. Whitefield, Secretary of the Glasgow Secular Society, was presented with a diamond brooch and a poetic acrostic scroll composed for the occasion by Johnny McCrorie in appreciation of her services to the cause. Mrs. Whitefield thanked the donors for their generous gift, and hoped that the Freethinkers in the Glasgow area would do all they could to support the Sunday evening meetings at Scott Street, opposite the Cosmo Cinema.

Reports reach us from the North London, Kingston, and Glasgow Branches of good audiences and increasing interest in their respective open-air meetings. All those Branches have some capable speakers and naturally that is essential for the holding of meetings. In due course, we hope to receive similar reports from other Branches of the N.S.S.

## ARABIA'S GOLDEN DAYS

A BRIEF but brilliant survey of the rise and zenith of Arabian culture has appeared from the pen of Dr. P. K. Hitti, Professor of Semitic Literature at Princeton University. This volume entitled *The Arabs* (Macmillan, 1948, 10s. 6d.), surveys the advent of Islam in the Middle Ages of our era, with its sweeping conquests, achievements in science and letters, and decline. But, to-day, Arabian Asia appears resurgent and, as our author indicates: "Now Iraq after a period of tutelage as a British mandate, is an independent State under an Arab king in Baghdad. The republic of Syria and the republic of Lebanon have now been freed from the French mandatory. Most of the Arab peninsula is to-day under native potentates." Egypt has also broken free and, since Hitti's book was written, a separate Moslem State has emerged in India.

The early successes of the Arabs after their acceptance of Mohammed's message, are among the most astounding in human annals. For, only a century after the Prophet's death, his adherents had occupied dominions exceeding those under ancient Rome at the height of her power. Moslem rule extended from Spain to the Indus, the Chinese frontiers and the land of the Nile. Within this period of expansion, the Moslems' conquests embraced "more aliens than any stock before or since, not excepting the Hellenic, the Roman, the Anglo-Saxon or the Russian." Even now, Mohammed's cult claims no fewer than 275 million adherents, so that every eighth person on our planet is a real or nominal worshipper of Allah, the Arab deity.

Apart from their empire, the Arabians were also distinguished by their culture, mostly derived from the early civilisations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and classical Greece and Rome. Thus endowed, the Moslems later served as the messengers of Pagan civilisation to benighted Christian Europe. As Prof. Hitti observes: "Arab scholars were studying Aristotle when Charlemagne and his lords were learning to write their names. Scientists in Cordova, with their seventeen great libraries, one alone of which included more than 400,000 volumes, enjoyed luxurious baths at a time when washing the body was considered a dangerous custom in the University of Oxford."

Originally dwellers in the deserts of Arabia, the Bedouins, when they invaded alien lands, proved singularly susceptible to their new surroundings. Thus they easily assimilated the culture of their foreign subjects whose native creeds were more and more tolerated as time went on. As our historian attests: "The religion of the Koran comes nearer the Old Testament than does the Christianity of the New Testament. It has such close affinities with both, however, that in its early stages it must have appeared more like a heretic Christian sect than a distinct religion. In his *Divine Comedy* Dante consigns Muhammad to one of the lower hells with 'sowers of scandals and schism'."

Persia and the provinces of Byzantium were soon invaded and overcome by the Moslem intruders. Egypt and the great city of Alexandria passed into Moslem possession. Our historian unreservedly dismisses the tale of the Alexandrian Library's destruction by order of the Caliph Umar. The original Ptolemaic collection was destroyed during warfare in 48 B.C. "A later one," avers Prof. Hitti, "referred to as the Daughter Library, was destroyed about A.D. 389, as the result of an edict of the (Christian) Roman Emperor Theodosius. At the time of the Arab conquest, there-

fore, no library of importance existed in Alexandria, and no contemporary writer even brought the charge against Amr or Umar."

After the conquest of Northern Africa, the Arabian army crossed over the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain. In 711 the invaders overthrew the Visigothic forces of King Roderick and this victory was so decisive that they were virtually unimpeded as they strode over Spain. By the close of the summer in 711, Tariq, the Arab leader, was supreme in the southern regions of the peninsula. This rapid conquest was assisted by persecuted Jews who had suffered severely at the hands of the intolerant Christian Goths. Again, the disaffected Spanish Roman population were at variance with their Teutonic masters who had seized their estates, while ill-treated slaves and serfs apparently welcomed the Moslems as liberators.

In 732, the Battle of Poitiers resulted in the defeat of the Arabs by Charles Martel, the Arabian general himself being slain on the field. The triumphant march of the Moslems was now stayed, and peaceful settlement became possible. Damascus, Cordova, Baghdad and other cities became centres of culture. Erected on the west bank of the Tigris river, Baghdad's thoughts, poetry, manners and customs, were markedly Persian in character, but the Arabian language was retained for official use and the Moslem cult replaced Zoroastrianism. By the reign of Harun al-Rashid (786-809), the most celebrated Baghdad Caliph, his capital had developed into a centre of immense wealth and international importance. Its industries and commerce were scientifically conducted. Along its many wharves, warships, mercantile vessels and pleasure-boats abounded. Porcelain and silk from China, jewels from Central Asia, perfumes from Persia, commodities from Scandinavia and Russia, with rice and grain from Egypt, were all available in Baghdad's bazaars. Hitti notes that: "The hoards of Arab coins recently found in places as far north as Russia, Finland, Sweden and Germany, testify to the worldwide commercial activity of the Moslems of this and the later period. The achievements of Sinbad the Sailor, which form one of the best known tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, have long been recognised as based upon actual reports of voyages made by Moslem merchants."

Between 750 and 850, many Arabic translations from classical masterpieces were made. In the later decades of the ninth century A.D., original research in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, history, geography, ethics and philosophy, illumined Moslem's golden age. Galen, Aristotle, Ptolemy and other illustrious Pagans were studied and preserved for posterity, while to the Arabs we are indebted for the first school of pharmacy and pharmacopœia. The earliest Moslem hospital was established by Harun al-Rashid in the ninth century and was soon succeeded by 34 other temples of healing in Moslem realms. Also, there were special wards for women, each furnished with its own dispensary.

Rhazes and Avicenna are perhaps the most eminent physicians of Islamic times whose medical treatises exercised for centuries a benign influence over Christian Europe. Avicenna's *Canon*, for instance, became its text book for medical training.

It appears that: "In the last 30 years of the fifteenth century it passed through 15 Latin editions and one Hebrew. . . . In the words of Dr. William Osler, it has remained 'a medical bible for a longer period than any other book.'"

An outstanding astronomer of Arabian days was the immortal Omar Khayyâm whose *Rubaiyat* reveals him as a lover of wine, women and song, and a supremely

great freethought poet. Other illustrious thinkers of similar versatility adorned the great epoch of Islam. The Arabs were also proficient in the art of alchemy and prepared the path for modern chemistry, for they applied the experimental method in their chemical and physical investigations and thus transcended the speculative conjectures of the pioneer Greek philosophers.

When concluding his survey of Moslem science and literature, Prof. Hitti observes that, were Moslems dependent to-day on their own writings, they would possess much less than their forebears of the eleventh century. "In medicine, philosophy, mathematics, botany and other disciplines, a certain point was reached—and the mind of Islam seemed to stand still. Reverence for the past and its traditions, both religious and scientific, bound the Arab intellect in fetters which it is now only beginning to shake off." This mournful consequence, resulting from uncritical adherence to tradition, has all too frequently prevented the mind's advance in many times and lands.

T. F. PALMER.

## THE LYING SPIRIT

### II

THE so-called spirit of truth is sublime and ethereal; but the lie is capable of scientific examination. Yet the religious interpretation of lying is the one in common currency. Though often attributed to the Devil as the Prince of Lies, the Bible tells us that God sends a "lying spirit." Of course, as Creator of all things, God is responsible even for the Devil, and so also, lying. The same story comes from Africa. The natives, we are told, are incorrigible liars, and if charged with lying, will assert that it was not they, but a lying spirit that spoke. The idea is like that of Daniel's "visions of the bed," and the visions Ezekiel saw in the sky, which spoke through the mouth of the prophet.

The idea is that we feel it to be unwitting or unintentional, and also, that we feel that we are impelled to it by something or someone other than ourselves. That it is unaccountable is shown in the often-heard remark "I don't know what made me say it." So God, the asylum of ignorance, is given as the explanation, and lying is an "Act of God." But this is escapism and by such an explanation we admit ourselves to be irresponsible. Not only this, we have also to reconcile our dislike of the lie, our propensity for lying, and our capacity for being deceived by it. To simply say it is natural is no more explanation than God or Devil.

Reviewing the various types of lie we get our clue in the comedian's wit or the Baron Munchausen type of liar. If we put the question to the funny-man liar "Why do you tell such lies?" he will answer with a chuckle and say, "I don't know, but people seem to like it, and it amuses me." We have seen earlier that truth is unpleasant, we now see that the lie is pleasing. So we can see the explanation. The lie appeals to our fancy, it has a fascination that gets us in spite of ourselves; hence our dislike of it. It has the dream character of wish-fulfilment; for it appeals to our wants; and the more so, our own, than those of others.

We have seen a connection between the lying spirit and the dream vision that spoke through the mouth of the prophet. We now see the wish-fulfilment feature of the dream in the lie. We can see how we are less aware of our own lies than those of others, and how even these deceive by appeal to our fancy. The appeal is emotional and not rational. We may be duped even though aware of deception, just as we may be fully aware of the



fantasies in our dreams. The connection with dreams is clear. Nor is it simply a parallel or coincidence, for in its outstanding feature of fantastic impossibility the dream is the lie *par excellence*.

We noted the pleasing feature of the lie in the comedian's wit or that of the Munchausen funny man. We can now better appreciate the erotic craving in the teasing lies of courtship. We can now see in the unwitting lie, that unawareness is of no consequence, and that it is one of Freud's "accidents." We can go further and see in the perjury or the slanderous lie a wish-fulfillment satisfaction of the feeling of enmity; irrespective of how that is engendered, or of what degree of real justification there may be for it. So we might travel through the whole gamut. Mere awareness does not alter the facts. The conditioning factors are still operative; especially our wants; the call for emotional satisfaction.

We see then, that the function of the lie is that of the dream. The purpose of the lie is self-satisfaction in self-justification. The lie is excuse for inhibition and fixation; an expression of emotion. But such self-deception is dangerous. For, as with the Anglers' Fish, there is a gradual build-up, with more and more exaggeration, leading to sheer impossibility. For another example we might go back again to Ezekiel's visions of the New Jerusalem, and see the historic expansion of religious myth and analogy, exaggerated into the wildest fantastic, allegory of the Apocalypse; leading on to the absurdities of Christian hagiology in the impossibilities of the Lives of the Saints.

This build-up in the habit of lying is such that those most addicted to it are the easiest victims. In everyday life we see how the "hard-headed business man" becomes a victim of a confidence trickster; in extreme form, in the extravagant haggling in an Oriental bazaar where, it has been said, so far from being aware of, or of understanding their own lies, the reverse is the case. They believe, and are caught by, ridiculously absurd assertions. The habit of lying is such as to obscure all idea of truth. But, being an expression of emotion, the self-justification of inhibition involves sublimation as well as the excitement of emotion.

Sublimation is not re-orientation on a "higher" plane; it may be otherwise, and we see the exaggeration of emotion in the development of enmity in religious and political propaganda. It is often said that we live in a crazy world. The group feature of the lie involves commercial and national as well as political and religious interests. Man is a social animal and this involves group psychology. And here we see mass organisation, mass production, mass deception, mass movements and mass hysteria. The question of truth and lie, in the social aspect, involves notions of good and evil; metaphysical and religious distinctions; and of ill-feeling and hatred in man's inhumanity to man.

But the study of children, of primitive peoples, and of the insane, has shown there is no difference in kind, but only of degree, between the normal and the abnormal; and the normal is potentially abnormal. In this exaggeration we see the well-known symptoms of developing insanity; which begins with personal idiosyncrasies becoming exaggerated in delusion, then obsession, leading on to hallucination. It is a process of gradual development; emotional and irrational. Our considerations of truth and untruth are not questions of cold logic, but involve feelings, passions.

We are involved in another kind of reason, the rationalisation of our alogical dream world. Persistence in the alogical search for excuse may lead to renunciation of logic, and doubt of the validity of truth. One may

truly believe an untruth, and the question of truth involves truth about the lie. We can not only see the absurdity of the search for abstract truth, but also that of the moral and religious casuistical condemnation of the lie. For the lie is a dream as the dream is a lie.

H. H. PREECE.

## FLAME OR LIFE-FORCE

It seems dilatory to have left till now a comment on Mr. Wood's article which appeared in a February issue of "The Freethinker" referring to the Life-Force. My delay is, however, excusable by the fact that, no sooner had I read Mr. Wood's remarks, than my own Life-Force began to wobble, and, in subsequent weak moments, I thought it might have been about to quit this ancient ruin, my body, and go rooting about in a maternity hospital, seeking a new, prospectively more valid, abode.

When reason intermittently asserted itself, I realised that my imagination was possibly over-expanding Mr. Wood's idea, and that perhaps he did not intend to attribute the power of intelligent search to the Life-Force. Moreover, my own more prosaic idea of the Life-Force began to establish itself amid my confusions, so that a debate went on below the vapours of aspirin and other mixtures, as to whether it was correct to regard the Life-Force as quitting the body.

Then I thought of the theory of the earth's gradual cooling, and of life's emergence, as a function of matter, at a certain stage of the cooling, and I wondered whether this theory was acceptable to Mr. Wood, or whether he envisaged the Life-Force as a kind of hovering mystery, existent prior to life. Now if the theory of life's emergence as a function of matter is accepted, the idea of the Life-Force reduces to something relatively unimportant, to that of boiling and exploding gases. Then, of course, we would speak merely of the life-force, without using capitals in its symbolisation, but if the Life-Force is a hovering ghost, and to be designated by capitals, the position is that there is no more evidence for it than for the resurrection of Christ.

Mr. Wood was in no way responsible for the wobbling of my life-force. The wobble was, as the light comedians say, "just one of those things." God, who loves even his recalcitrant children, had provided me with a severe trial, which I am surmounting very well, thanks to bitter mixtures, plenty of rest, the regular receipt of a salary for work I am at present incapable of doing, and the attention, often humorously bestowed, of those civil servants, the doctors and nurses. These, between them, have taken a graph of my heart-beats, photographed my interior, drawn blood from finger, ear and veins, and extracted a piece of bicep, and made a microscopic photograph of it.

I have not been on my knees to thank God for the test to which he has subjected me. He did not consult me about it, so I feel under no obligation. I find, however, that all my companions-in-beds have labelled themselves respective subjects of God, as C.E., P.B., R.C., and Heb., but, in spite of their labels, they appear to pay no more attention to God for his kindness than I do. I have seen none go on his knees, and, as far as my observation extends, they cough, groan, snore, complain, eat, drink, and even laugh, as if God were non-existent. They should, if it were possible, know more about God than I, for they get occasional visits from "men-of-God." Sadder to relate is the fact that none of the Christians volunteered to attend Communion on Easter morning; sadder, for they should have been

taught that a confirmed Christian should partake of the Eucharist at least three times a year, of which Easter should be one.

Their religion is plainly a thin veneer covering their generally secular outlook, but what a pity it is that they are so sheeplike as to describe themselves as members of religious bodies, when they urgently aspire to avoid all religious practice. No doubt they do not think about the matter, their opinions in this respect being unexamined, and therefore useless.

I was glad to find my papers marked, "Creed: Nil." My wife informed me that except for a slight hesitation, possibly merely of surprise, the official received the declaration of unbelief quite smoothly. On a previous occasion, in a Non-State hospital, I had suffered, along with my abnormal condition, some unasked-for comments on Atheism. I had been registered as an Atheist, although I had not so described myself. I did not object, but my sense of the English language was offended, for I felt it unfitting to describe Atheism as a creed.

Many years ago in a fit, perhaps of conceit, I thought I could better Sir Arthur Keith's comparison of life with a candle-flame. Life, he said, ceased, as a candle-flame ceases, or is destroyed, on snuffing. I likened life to the movement of a wheel which ceased when the motive-force applied to the wheel was withdrawn. The body of an animal is, however, supplied with food, i.e., fuel, and its tissues are burnt up by bodily activity. Sir Arthur's illustration seemed the better.

Mr. Wood objected to Sir Arthur's simile. He told readers, not that a candle-flame is not destroyed, but that it is not "completely" destroyed. I felt shaken when I noted the distinction, although I may sometime have perpetrated a worse sophistry.

Why did Mr. Wood have to drag in the adverb "completely?" I love Rhetoric: it is the scarlet woman of the arts, but its place is not with its meagre and austere sister, Logic. What is the difference between doing and "completely" doing? Can one eat porridge without completely eating it? If a man loves a maid does he in his love do less than love?

Mr. Wood was wrong also in his physics. When a candle-flame is extinguished, the flame is destroyed. It is true that the matter which was in combustion is not destroyed, but only changes its form. That is a different affair. At one moment the flame existed, then it ceased to exist. Is that not destruction?

Life is a function of organic matter. When the organisation is broken down, the organic being ceases, or is destroyed. When, e.g., the heart of a man is crushed by a bus, the man ceases to be. He has been destroyed. His functions, also, have ceased. They, too, have been destroyed. Life was one of them, or all of them. It then has been destroyed, for, by definition, man is a living creature.

Man goes nowhere when he dies, similarly a flame goes nowhere when it dies. Since life is a function of man, also human life goes nowhere when it dies. As for the human Life-Force, I think I have sufficiently indicated that we have no evidence for its postulation as a thing other than human life itself.

J. G. LUPTON.

## NO SKY AND NO HOPE

WHEN, many years ago I discovered that the religion as taught in the State Church was not true, it is interesting to note that I did not go either to the earlier Roman Church, or to any of the many nonconformist chapels which in this country seem to be symptomatic of individualism in religion.

What brought me out of the Church and kept me out of the other rival buildings was the fact that I realised that the Three-fold Divinity of the Christian religion was non-existent, was an impossibility. An examination of all the other religions of the world, generally based upon a fear of the supernatural and the necessity of a moral code, showed the same absence of the Godhead. After all, despite all that has been said and written, the Gods are only exaggerated conceptions of the human being. As a contradiction to our own brief existence, they are conceived as being eternal. Whilst we are tied to one place, they can be everywhere at once. Whereas our actions are conditioned by natural laws (which man has discovered) the Gods can do everything. From the crudest specimens of mankind up to the latest type of 1949, one thing is common to all and that is the belief that some Eternal Power, some Omnipotent Being, is responsible for the universe and all that therein is.

To the savage the lightning, thunder, storm, birth, death, disease, ill-luck, good-luck and every happening is due to some freak of this Eternal and we, being but the descendants of these poor frightened peoples, staggering through life with its incidents and accidents are just as prone, instead of thinking for ourselves, to accept the traditions of the race as being true and carry on the worship of Anything rather than face the obvious.

After all, the cathedrals and every religious building wherever erected, the bishops, priests and acolytes, all the business of the religious world, including the music, hymn-books, psalms and Bibles are founded on a myth. It is just as well that we should ponder over this statement and realise that beyond these mundane things there is absolutely nothing. All the fictions of so-called Biblical History are of no more value and very much greater harm than "Comic Cuts." And these remarks apply not only to the Christian religion but to those other Eastern religions such as the Buddhist, which are much older than the one founded in Rome.

Looked at dispassionately the history of every religion is that of suppression, the necessity to stop all independent thinking, to seize children at birth and to cover the whole of human life with a network of fantasy which people are either forced to swallow or suffer the social consequences.

All those varied stories of the creation of the world—piffle. The Fall of Man—a fairy story. The Garden of Eden—a phantasy. The coming of a Redeemer—a hopeless and senseless fable. The conception of Heaven and Hell—pure bunkum. The talk of and worship of the Supernatural—a bogey to frighten children of all ages.

All the mummery and play-acting of the priests of every cult—the worship of animals, cows, cats, etc. The turning of bread into the body of the God and wine into his blood. The mesmerism of the service of the Churches which is supposed to bring peace beyond human understanding—all theatrical. The coloured windows, the dim arches, the incense and the queer costumes of the priests all determined by the necessity to maintain their position and that of their particular God by frightening or impressing people with the idea that they are *en rapport* with the Almighty and that they alone can save humanity from the curse which they in turn tell us of.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d; postage 1d.

Ask for evidence of this supernatural and you are referred to the books the priests have written. There is not and never has been any independent evidence for all their hullabaloo. When anything mysterious happens, to them it is "The Hand of God." Slowly but surely mankind has discovered those laws of nature which raise us above the savages of the forest. The electric motor of Faraday is a modern miracle but it is not mysterious in a religious sense to us, though it would be miraculous to a savage for a time. Mystery is the groundwork of all religions and even have we been told that the "supernatural" is natural when we know how!

Religion is the greatest imposture in the history of the world. The personification of natural forces as Gods is quite natural in the slow growth of man's knowledge but just as the child realises in time the character of Father Christmas and that "Sinbad the Sailor" and the "Arabian Nights" are fiction, so intelligent people have discovered that religions (and I am including all of them as well as the Christian) are primitive guesses, which are to-day unnecessary to explain quite natural events.

And with the religions pass all the superstitions which have been associated with them, including the "spirits" either of the trees and winds, the voice of the thunder, the terror of earthquakes and volcanoes. Mankind has been frightened by words and when he refuses to believe the words and asks for demonstrations he is fobbed off with either excuses or threatened with excommunication and its social effects.

Everyone should realise there is no Divinity and that the rise of civilisation is due to reason alone.

T. D. SMITH.

### FAITH v. KNOWLEDGE

THE sentence on Mindszenty and the Bulgarian pastors has stirred up a new clerical crusade against Communism. It also appears that some Catholics believe that we must thank their Popes for ridding us of witches.

It should by now be quite plain that people of all religions, whether believers in witches or not, may join Communist Parties. Their religion is their own affair.

They will, no doubt, meet those who attack their faith. They have liberty to do so. But some, indeed, remain better Communists if they keep a hold on their religion.

Being used to thinking in those terms, they develop a purely social conscience with difficulty. Unless the vacuum is filled at once, the loss of a religion leaves some dangerously unstable. It is like abandoning crutches.

Professed agnostics are often superstitious. Few people forget their first love. They also remain bound to their first beliefs, which stay dominant.

Is the state of sheltered belief, or of realism, the happiest? The question is fruitless. Advances in knowledge are inevitable. They are fatal to many cherished beliefs, whether for good or ill. On the other hand a proper understanding of religious emotions does help to solve problems in a progressive social way.

The Christian Church's original members were poor, and held common property. They lived Communism. But opportunism, emasculation of the Christian doctrine, and the spread of obscurantism, has blunted that revolutionary edge. A millionaire may now sit in his family pew, and hear that "it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," and never fear a withering look from the pulpit. His religion reflects his bourgeois mind.

In no age has a religion been more advanced than the most advanced people of the age. The Israelites' God

reflected their tribal mind—a God of vengeance, and destroyer of their enemies! He is stone-dead, although some witnesses still strive to resuscitate him.

The Grecian deities reflected a more stable, cultured civilisation—yet an insular one, with the Hellenes the hub of the universe.

The priests of Moses forbade the people to approach Mount Sinai, saying that the Lord would slay trespassers. Why? Moses was faced with the job of consolidating his rule over lawless people, brutalised by slavery in Egypt, undisciplined, adulterous. He needed to give his laws more than mortal backing if they were to be effective. If the people had intruded they would have found him alone, scribbling his worthy commandments on stone tablets, and the whole power of the priests would have been undermined.

Most people know of the different gods of the Egyptians, Greeks, Israelites, the "great spirit" of the Indians, the ancient "Valhalla" of warriors and hunters. Few notice, however, that these conceptions are true reflections of the minds projecting them, just as images in a mirror are true representations of physical bodies.

An animal will, in fact, often suppose its reflection, or even its shadow, as a real thing. In a jungle pool hundreds of different creatures drink communally. They each see the reflections cast by the others, and do not, as far as we know, realise that they are all looking at themselves. In the same way, man thinks his idea of God, or his Ego, to be objective reality.

For that matter, have reflections in water real existence? The answer would provide a clue to other mysteries, perhaps. But, at least, such shadows have no separate existence. They do not, for instance, live without their owners.

Communism and Christianity, which have so much in common, are deeply divergent in their approach to the problem of evil. Christians condemn the sinner, yet propound the dismal theory that he is doomed to sin. Marxism is more forgiving, but believes that evil is not necessary, and that it will be eliminated by human advancement.

Communism's unifying doctrine will defeat all efforts by reactionary clerics to divide peoples on religious grounds. Its peace policy, its progressive vision of a more moral society, lends it power among peoples of every religion and colour. It unites the idealism of past dreamers with the knowledge and organisation needed to make such dreams into realities. That is why Hungarian Catholics will not lament Mindszenty.

A. SLATER.

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