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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Conversion of London

THE month of May, Anno Domini 1949, will go down to posterity in ecclesiastical annals as the season when London was "converted," or to be more precise, "re-converted" to the Christian Faith. At least, such is the declared intention of the Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. Wand, Bishop of London. For in this Spring season when human fancies usually turn to less lugubrious subjects, the several million citizens of London were vigorously bombarded by an army of Christian missionaries with the melancholy information that they are "miserable sinners" and that they must seek their Saviour without delay.

The present "crusade" for the "conversion" of London is, in form and in its technical machinery, an up-to-date affair, which seems to have no use at all for the evangelical practice of the Apostles, and which dismisses as out of date the precise instructions of Jesus on the subject as handed down to us in the canonical Gospels. Wiser, or at least, more business-like than his Master, Dr. Wand is out to use all the modern methods of big business publicity. There is, to-day, no more talk of going out into the highways and byways, "two by two" as Jesus exactly instructed his disciples in the Holy Gospels. To-day, successors of the Apostles employ sky-writing, modern publicity methods, and as far as the financial resources of the Church run to it, all the latest advertising methods of big business.

And if we ask for Scriptural sanction for these innovations we shall, no doubt, be reminded of the saying of Our Lord, that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of Light." That, at least, seems indisputable.

At any rate, whatever Our Lord might have thought about the contemporary methods of his remote apostolic successor, and presumably he did not think much of them, since otherwise, he would have used them himself. since to God "all things are possible," Dr. Wand and his colleagues have gone to work with a will. Services at St. Paul's, at which the Queen (a Presbyterian, I believe) was present, a fanfare of publicity in the national Press, from the pontifical blessing of *The Times* to the cautious approval of the *The Spectator*, and exhortations in military metaphor, "advance," "attack," "forward," etc., by the Bishop himself to his ecclesiastical legions. It all constitutes a first-class sensation, and as such, will no doubt in due course, occupy space in our vivid contemporary, the *News of the World*, almost, though probably not quite equal to that taken up by a first-class murder case or a particularly sensational bank robbery.

What are the concrete prospects of such a "crusade," and what sort of a man is this would-be ecclesiastical "organiser of victory," John Charles William Wand, D.D., Bishop of London "by Divine Permission"—and Anglo-Catholic influence.

To take the second question first: the present writer may perhaps be allowed to supply some autobiographical details. For it so happens that I have the honour to be one of Dr. Wand's least worthy pupils. For, like many more notable Freethinkers, from Ernest Renan to Joseph McCabe (and for that matter, Joseph Stalin), I was originally a student of theology: so assiduous a student, in fact, that I eventually mastered the "Divine Science" so completely that only *The Freethinker* would publish my contributions to theological science. Accordingly, if Dr. Wand began, a far greater theologian even than the Bishop of London, to wit, Mr. Chapman-Cohen, completed my education in religious learning.

As far as the Bishop himself is concerned, my recollections of him, though now naturally rather hazy, are quite pleasant. Actually, at the (Anglican) theological college where I studied, Mr. Wand, then a more or less obscure South Country vicar, did not cut much ice. We then regarded both the college principal (still a mere canon) and still more, the vice-principal (now relegated to the decent obscurity of a Scottish bishopric) as decidedly more considerable figures in the intellectual sense. No one, as far as I can remember, then ever predicted anything like his present dazzling elevation for our tutor in Church history. He was, personally, quite an able man, a breezy personality, and something of a specialist in Church history, upon which highly-controversial subject his present Lordship has written quite a number of textbooks.

In short, personally, a decent fellow who later, I understand, went down well as a bishop in democratic Australia but whom we regarded as unlikely to set the Thames on fire, or even to become its bishop. However, Providence proverbially "moves in mysterious ways its wonders to perform." Intellectually, I would say that the present Bishop of London definitely compares favourably with his immediate predecessor, Dr. Fisher, a colourless, routine mediocrity, whom a strange preference (we must suppose) of Providence finally promoted to the Primacy.

Whilst, as and when compared with that ecclesiastical hero of light comic-opera, the late Dr. Winnington Ingram (whom I also met in the flesh), his predecessor but one, Dr. Wand, to do him justice, is a veritable intellectual giant. But that is not, after all, very high praise. Incidentally, I understand that Dr. Ingram owed his, at first sight, surprising elevation to that "glittering prize" the Bishopric of London, almost as much to the National Secular Society as to the Holy Spirit.

When we turn from the Bishop to his Mission, it must be conceded that it demonstrates, at least, the courage of a forlorn hope, for its current prospects of achieving anything like its avowed objective, the "conversion" of the Metropolis, are, one must surmise, just about nil. For experience seems to demonstrate that the age of successful "revivals" belongs to the forever vanished

past. The days of Moody and Sankey, Torrey and Gipsy Smith, even of that stalwart worker in the Lord's vineyard, Billy Sunday, are dead and gone. In point of fact, effective revivalist demagoguery seems to have transferred itself from the ecclesiastical to the political sphere: the late unlamented Messrs. Hitler, Goebbels, Mussolini, according to everyone I know who has ever heard them speak, could give points to any religious spell binder in the world.

If there is any likelihood of a religious revival in our time, which fortunately does not seem to be the case, I, for one, would still be inclined to put my money on the "Old Firm," the Church of Rome, rather than upon Dr. Wand's Anglican amateurs. For if people want opium, they prefer it in strong doses.

Meanwhile, however, the Conversion of London is on. According to Dr. Wand, the London "pagans" are indifferent rather than actively hostile. And it is true that, out of the multitude who habitually stay away from church, few are active Freethinkers. However, to ignore the Supernatural is, at least, better than falling for it, and there is a sense in which the old tag is true that, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." However, as Christianity to-day has absolutely no answer beyond mutually contradictory platitudes for any of the multifarious social and intellectual problems which herald the coming of the Atomic Age—a fact amply demonstrated by the recent Lambeth Conference—it is altogether unlikely that any significant revival will interrupt its present steady decline.

Consequently, when the present "nine days' wonder" caused by the Bishop of London's Mission has subsided, the citizens of the Metropolis will, I think, cheerfully relapse into "Paganism" again, at least, until some optimistic successor of Dr. Wand launches another "crusade" to convert them, with, no doubt, the same negative result as before. F. A. RIDLEY.

THE SOVIET AND SCIENCE

VERY early in the existence of the Soviet Union it was stated that that State did not favour freedom of speech in scientific matters. The allegation concerned economics, and it is obvious that a community espousing Marxism, and with ideas that profit was robbery and capitalism slavery, would experience considerable difficulty in showing tolerance towards those students of economics who, as a result of their analysis, were unable to accept the Socialist theory.

A similar situation has, as most "Freethinker" readers are aware, now arisen in respect of biology, and in association with the name of Lysenko.

The form of the dispute is that the majority of Western geneticists consider that the transmission of hereditary characteristics is independent of the direct effects of use and disuse. The contention of Lysenko is that "the evolution of living nature involves recognition of the necessity of hereditary transmission of individual characteristics acquired by the organism under the conditions of its life." He calls this the materialist theory of evolution, and states that this is unthinkable without recognition of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

The views of Lysenko may be gathered from "Soviet Biology," published by Birch Books Ltd., London, price 2s. 6d., which contains his report to the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Moscow, 1948.

The lecture includes technical argument which has been commented on by competent critics, e.g., Professor Haldane, which I do not intend to deal with. The matter which concerns Freethinkers, as such, is whether the

views of Lysenko are so loaded with bias as seriously to affect their scientific value, and whether the Soviet State is illegitimately interfering in scientific questions. I therefore give a few quotations from the lecture. Readers' attention is called to the repetition of the term "reactionary" and the antagonism to Malthus's population theory.

"A major fault" in Darwin is that he "introduced into his theory of evolution reactionary Malthusian ideas. In our days this major fault is being aggravated by reactionary biologists."

"Many are still apt to slur over Darwin's error in transferring into his teaching Malthus's preposterous reactionary ideas on population."

"For the propaganda of his reactionary ideas Malthus invented an allegedly natural law. 'The cause to which I allude is the constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.'"

"To-day there is absolutely no justification for accepting the erroneous aspects of the Darwinian theory, those based on Malthus's theory of overpopulation with the inference of a struggle presumably going on within species."

"Progressively thinking biologists, both in our country and abroad . . . took it upon themselves to defend Darwinism against the attacks of the reactionaries, with the Church at their head, and of obscurantists in science, such as Bateson."

"In the post-Darwinian period the overwhelming majority of biologists did all they could to debase Darwinism, to smother its scientific foundation. The most glaring manifestation of such debasement is to be found in the teachings of Weismann, Mendel, and Morgan, the founders of modern reactionary genetics."

"Weismann's frankly idealistic, essentially mystical conception, which he disguised as 'Neo-Darwinism,' is that of, 'an immortal hereditary substance, independent of the qualitative features attending the development of the living body, directing the mortal body, but not produced by the latter.'"

"The representatives of reactionary science, Neo-Darwinians, Weismannists, or—which is the same—Mendelist-Morganists, uphold the so-called chromosome theory of heredity."

"The Michurin trend . . . is creative Darwinism . . . free from the defects of the Darwinian theory in so far as it included Malthus's erroneous ideas."

"The Lamarckians were closer to the truth, for they defended the interests of science, whereas the Weismannists were at loggerheads with science and prone to indulge in mysticism."

"The Michurin teaching, which is in essence materialist and dialectical, proves by facts that [qualitative variations of the nature of organisms depend on the conditions of life which act upon the living body]."

"Mendel-Morgan teaching, which is in essence metaphysical and idealist, denies the existence of such dependence, though it can cite no evidence to prove its point."

"The chromosome theory is based on Weismann's absurd proposition regarding the continuity of the germ-plasm and its independence of the soma."

"The foundation principles of Mendelism-Morganism are false . . . and are an example in metaphysics and idealism."

"The Morganists persist in holding on to their anti-scientific positions to this day."

"We, the Michurinists . . . have hitherto proved unable to make the most of the splendid possibilities created in our country by the Party and the Government

for the complete exposure of the Morganist metaphysics, which is in its entirety an importation from foreign reactionary biology hostile to us."

"The Morganists have bent all their efforts to check the development of the Michurin trend which is inherently opposed to their pseudo-science."

"Under the influence of the Michurin criticism of Morganism young scientists with an insight into questions of philosophy have in recent years come to realise that the Morganist views are utterly alien to the world outlook of the Soviet people."

"The basis of contemporary Soviet agro-biology is Darwinism transformed in the light of the teaching of Michurin and Williams and thereby converted into Soviet creative Darwinism."

"I have come to the conclusion that there exists no intra-specific struggle but mutual assistance among individuals within a species."

"V. I. Lenin and J. V. Stalin discovered I. V. Michurin and made his teaching the possession of the Soviet people. By their great paternal attention to his work they saved for biology the remarkable Michurin teaching. The Party, the Government, and J. V. Stalin personally, have taken an unflagging interest in the further development of the Michurin teaching."

"What is the attitude of the Central Committee of the Party to my report? I answer: The Central Committee of the Party examined my report and approved it."

"Long live the Michurin teaching, which shows how to transform living nature for the benefit of the Soviet people!"

Long live the Party of Lenin and Stalin, which discovered Michurin for the world and created all the conditions for the progress of advanced materialist biology in our country.

Glory to the great friend and protagonist of science, our leader and teacher, Comrade Stalin!"

In view of the contemptuous references in the lecture to Mendel, Morgan and Bateson, and to the position of Professor Haldane in the controversy, it is interesting to refer to the latter's opinion in his book "Possible Worlds" (Chatto and Windus), that Mendel's and Bateson's discovery was as fundamental as that of Copernicus, and of much greater practical importance. He went on to say:

"For eight years Bateson attacked [the theory that the Mendelian factors are carried in or by the chromosomes], not because he considered it inherently improbable, but because he believed that it went beyond the evidence, and because the bent of his mind and his profound knowledge of the history of science led him to doubt the validity of long chains of reasoning. . . . When, however, the possibility of ocular demonstration arose, he went over to America, and returned a convert, though with certain reservations which I believe the future will largely justify."

Professor Haldane then stated that a man becomes the slave of the ideas he has discovered, "or preserves a certain independence only by continuing to hold views incompatible [with them] at the expense of dividing his mind into watertight compartments. William Bateson escaped these fates because he was greater than any of his ideas."

J. G. LUPTON.

PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, AND SOCIOLOGY

ONE of the faults of most people who have tried to write popular books on philosophy is that they tend to portray all the philosophers from Socrates to Bergson as writing in a vacuum. In other words, they seem to regard the whole long story of philosophical controversy

as being a kind of brains trust, in which opposing views are calmly discussed and argued over, until agreement (at least the agreement to disagree) is reached.

Now this completely ignores the fact that the various philosophers lived in different ages, in different political and religious climates, and that Plato and Hume, or Berkeley and Bertrand Russell, really can have little in common save their high degree of intelligence. It is because he makes this so clear that Mr. Hector Hawton, author of "Philosophy for Pleasure" (Watts; 10s. 6d.), deserves the best thanks of all interested in the development of philosophical ideas. Mr. Hawton himself, if one may make any deductions from the way in which his book is written, is a sympathiser with the Dialectical Materialism of Marx and the Soviet Union; but he has little trace of the dogmatism which has sometimes made that philosophy repellent to many of us. He states his own point of view quietly and without any kind of dogmatic certainty; indeed, he would appear to hold the attitude that certainty is something very difficult to arrive at in this controversial ground.

For instance, in discussing the work of Locke, Mr. Hawton says: "Philosophy has been made to speak the language of everyday life; and the great systems of the metaphysicians seem like elaborate earthworks of wasted ingenuity." Few of the more traditional writers on philosophical subjects would be found to agree with that comment. Yet to the outside student and spectator it seems to be in every way justified. Again, in discussing the philosophical basis which Newton built up in order to settle his scientific attitude, Mr. Hawton comments: "How lucid all this seems in contrast to the misty profundities of Hegel—and how much more fruitful it proved to be!"

That quotation, in fact, leads me to consider yet another of the author's many excellences. He is acutely aware of the way in which science stands head and shoulders above formal philosophy as a means for enabling man to get things done. Not for nothing does the man in the street think of the philosopher as an absent-minded old fellow, getting his beard entangled in the dusty pages of forgotten tomes. That the picture is superficially absurd does not matter. It has an inner truth, in that the professional philosopher, constructing a logical system in the privacy of his own study, can (and often does) ignore the practical issues which face the scientist in his laboratory every day of his life. And one of the important aspects of the philosophy of Free-thought is that it lays extra emphasis on these practical issues, tending to regard the old arguments between, say, idealists and materialists as matters which have little practical influence on life. When I say that I do not mean to imply that Freethinkers will not be, for the most part, in general agreement with the materialist position. What I mean to suggest is that the arguments which went on between the classical believers in the two lines of thought were unreal and had little, if any, influence on the way in which they carried on their everyday life. The fact of the matter is that one who is philosophically an idealist really finds that his belief has not more influence on his ordinary way of life than the man who is a trinitarian finds that the belief in the Holy Ghost influences his way of doing a business deal.

Mr. Hawton, then, in his survey of what the philosophers have had to say through the ages, is really considering more than one point. He is trying to work out a way in which three lines of thought converge. Those three, as I have tried to show in my title, are philosophy, science, and sociology. They have all played

(Concluded on page 236)

ACID DROPS

Mr. Shaw Desmond, in a letter to the *News Chronicle*, states that "fifty per cent of his clergyman friends do not believe, and some of them even confess it." This statement may shock many of Mr. Desmond's Christian friends, but to Freethinkers generally it will be no surprise that, with modern discoveries and research, clergy can no longer believe the very much hackneyed stories of Jehovah and his Son. In any other walk of life such an attitude is condemned, but in Religion, hypocrisy is raised to a virtue. In fact, one of the greatest crimes of Religion is that it encourages hypocrisy.

Methodists are moving heaven and earth in the Rhondda Valley campaign for God which started off with a flying start when they combined with other Christian sects; but as soon as the campaign was over, the various brands returned to their former exclusiveness. *The Methodist Recorder's* report of the campaign has an air of amazement about the outcome, and deplores the sudden break-up of the various Churches' co-operation. It seems fairly obvious that each sect was scared of the poaching on each other's preserves, for converts gained by one sect only means a loss to another, and the position after these revivals is usually "as you were" so far as Christianity generally is concerned.

This year marks the fourth centenary of the English Prayer Book, and the Archdeacon of Stoke-on-Trent considers this a cause for congratulation. We really are at a loss to understand the Archdeacon, as far as we know, there are very few of the 39 articles—usually a part of the Prayer Book—that any modern clergyman would support. In fact, we can't help thinking of the old gibe, that a parson would rather give up the whole of the 39 articles than one thirty-ninth of his income, is true to-day.

The Atheist is so seldom complimented that we cannot let the bouquet handed out by the Rev. K. Waights, of Nottingham, go by without mentioning it. He debated with our well-known Nottingham speaker in the Nottingham Market and used the "wicked Atheist" as an awful example to his Christian flock. He had to admit that at least the Atheist has thought about the problems of the existence of God, etc., and urged his flock should also think on these things. Our clergyman is on dangerous ground; who knows, his flock may take him at his word and may reach the same conclusions as the Atheist. At a guess, we should say that the Rev. Mr. Waights was not serious, and that his suggestion is the usual parsonic prattle.

The Roman Catholic Church may yet change its famous age-old motto *Semper Eadem* ("Forever the Same"). Not that the Church has acted up to its motto, that would have meant a speedy collapse, and the Catholic Church is too old a hand at adapting itself to changing conditions to believe in its own motto. We are nevertheless surprised that the Pope so openly stated to some hundreds of priests that the "Church must always be adapting itself to changing world conditions."

We publish the following quotation from a letter to the *News Chronicle* with the hope that others will copy: "How dare the Church reprimand parents for the low standards to-day when it has acquiesced in all the barbarism of war and called it a crusade. To-day is not only an Age of Anxiety but an Age of Hypocrisy, too." Truth will out.

In his book, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, the author, Dr. D. F. Torrance, shows (claims a pious reviewer) that "the Apostolic Fathers totally misunderstood the Gospel as set forth in the New Testament and that consequently Christianity was corrupted immediately after the disappearance of the Apostles." This rather takes our breath away—though it is not for Freethinkers a moment of much matter. We think that the Christianity of the Gospels, whatever it is, and we are never sure, is "corrupted" so badly that the world would be better for its disappearance.

The aforesaid reviewer does not like the "insufferably patronising" way Dr. Torrance treats the dear Fathers—though, as far as we are concerned, it should not be forgotten that a bigger set of idiots could hardly be found. They believed anything—myths, miracles, flaming Hell, a diamond studied Heaven, gods, ghosts, goblins, gibberish, devils and demons. In fact, there was nothing silly enough for these fools not to believe in with all their hearts and all their souls. In an age of science and culture it is incredible that anyone can mention the Apostolic Fathers without laughing.

Another distinguished convert has been made by the Roman Church. It is Wee Georgie Wood whose excellent comedy has often brightened a B.B.C. programme, and who therefore deserves all credit for that. Yet we find it difficult to imagine anybody with a spark of humour falling for the dreary, boring religion to which he has succumbed. We can only hope that for heaven's sake he will leave it out of his public performances.

The Bishop of Chichester led the villagers of Wisborough Green in prayers for rain. They prayed in church, but God did not repond soon enough, so they went to a farm building and repeated the prayers, and still God did not hear, so the chief Medicine Man led the faithful to a meadow, and then to a field of corn. No doubt by this time, things were getting desperate, and the Bishop's voice must have got hoarse, he therefore emulated his spiritual ancestors and led his flock to the banks of the River Arun and invoked the rain god, and lo, the rain fell in buckets and the Bishop and all his flock had to dash for shelter. Doubting Thomases please refer to the *Daily Mirror*, 23rd May.

The Rev. Hugh Ross Williamson has easily solved the difficulty of "Three Persons in one substance" as he describes the Trinity. You must remember, he argues, that this is a "technical theological term," and unless it is understood in this way it is no use talking to "non-church-going friends" about it. Mr. Williamson evidently believes that by calling unmitigated nonsense by some other unmitigated nonsense, he has solved the difficulty. Why does he not stick to the homely explanation often given by simple parsons?—A cup of tea is composed of tea, milk and sugar, surely a striking example of "three equals one."

Books on Fatima are now perhaps earning more money than books on Jesus. Five new ones have just been published ranging from 10s. 6d. to the humble twopenny. The fact that the Vatican has not yet officially recognised the miracles of course makes no difference to those who have the will to believe, and they are bravely encouraged to do so by priests and bishops. Even the Pope is now recommending *The Voice of Fatima*, the sanctuary organ—so in all probability Fatima will soon be as authentic as Lourdes.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

Mrs. E. M. G.—Many thanks for booklet. *Graves' King Jesus is not the only book which explains the supernatural as natural.*

A. W. COLEMAN.—Bishop Barnes has destroyed Christian Evidence—hence he has made the Christian Evidence Society useless. No wonder the C.E.S. hates the Bishop.

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 FREI DENKER (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

The Merseyside Branch N.S.S. will commence their outdoor meetings on June 12 on the same pitch as last year: the bombed site in Ranelagh Street, Liverpool, at 7.30 p.m. The first speaker of the season will be Mr. W. Parry, the Chairman, Mr. W. C. Parry. It is hoped that a good muster of freethinkers will be present to give the branch a good send off, and all willing to help are asked to communicate with the Secretary, Mr. W. C. Parry, 476, Mill Street, Liverpool.

The National Secular Society Annual Conference at Nottingham during the Whit week-end was very well attended and the Saturday evening reception at the Victoria Station Hotel went all too quickly in introductions and conversation. The business sessions on Sunday began with a full house and it was soon evident that the self-styled "reformist group" were bent on using obstruction as their chief weapon. Mr. Chapman Cohen's decision not to stand for re-election as President drew an eloquent tribute from Mr. J. T. Brighton to Mr. Cohen's work for the Society and influence upon the movement, and many other tributes followed. Mr. R. H. Rosetti was elected as Acting-President until the next Annual Conference. Motions not dealt with, owing to shortage of time were remitted to the Executive for consideration and a move was made to the Co-operative Hall for the evening Public Demonstration where all the speakers previously announced in the *Freethinker* gave excellent speeches from different angles to the appreciation of a large audience. A more detailed account of the proceedings will be available.

Will Manchester Freethinkers note that the local Branch commences a season of Outdoor Meetings at Platt Fields on Sunday, June 12, at 3 o'clock. Mr. Billing, the Secretary, will be pleased to meet all Freethinkers in the area and will appreciate all offers of help.

THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION

III.

FREETHINKERS contend that all religions are based on myths, legends, or the supernatural. In them will be found ridiculous stories of gods, devils, miracles, and magical incantations, and we are amazed that anybody can take these things seriously. But what is a myth in the first instance? We know it is "an invented story," or an attempted explanation of some natural happening, or maybe an allegory or a legend—but do we know how much more about it? Why was it written down? Who invented it, or where was it invented?

Investigation into mythology has been the life work of many great scholars. Indeed, so important is it that John M. Robertson devoted over 130 pages to it in his *Christianity and Mythology* before he went into the question of the myth of Krishna and the Gospel Myths. These chapters are very important, for unless one understands the subject to some degree it is useless trying to find the origin of religion.

It is, of course, a fact that some scholars refuse to identify mythology with "true" religion, but Robertson makes short shrift with their arguments and insists that "scientifically speaking . . . religion in the mass has always been mythological, always ritualistic, always theological, always ethical, always connected with what cosmic emotion or apperception there was." For Lord Raglan, myth is based on religious ritual, and Robertson points out that "it is very easy to show . . . that stories about the God in hundreds of cases efforts to explain the early ritual, while in other cases peculiarities of ritual originate in ideas about God." As he rightly says, "how could a ritual of prayer for wind or rain ever originate save in an idea about a God's character or function? Is not the very idea of a God as a protective Father a matter of telling a story about a God?"

We shall probably never know who it was that first set down some story to account for a particular ritual, but it could never have been, as Lord Raglan insists in *The Hero*, some "illiterate." Moreover, as was recognised long ago by Robert Taylor, and later with much more force and knowledge by J. M. Robertson, most, if not all, religious myths have as their bases astonishing similarity. Taylor noted it in the myths of the goddesses and took immense pains to show how similar were the stories of the mothers of God—Isis and the Virgin Mary, for example. The immaculately born maiden, who retains her virginity after being embraced by God Almighty (or his deputy), with her child, is a commonplace in mythology, although not in the same terms. It cannot be expected that a story fashioned in Egypt should, centuries later, appear in exactly the same form in Palestine.

In *The Hero*, Lord Raglan claims that "all traditional narratives are myths, that is to say, that they are connected with ritual," he adds that "there is no other satisfactory way in which they can be explained." The stories "are concerned primarily and chiefly with supernatural beings, kings, and heroes." Miracles "play a large part in them," and "the same scenes and incidents appear in many parts of the world." You can only explain them in terms of "known rituals."

If the reader thinks over a good many myths, he will certainly find that the hero's mother is either a royal virgin, or attempts will be made to prove she is descended from royalty. Although it does not actually say so in the Gospels, quite a number of Christian apologists in despair trying to prove that Jesus is descended from David (which cannot be the case if God is his father) do their utmost to show it really was Mary who came

from the royal line of David. The hero's father may well be a king, a near relative of his mother, there is always something unusual about his conception, he is reputed to be a son of a god, somebody tries to kill him at birth but he manages to get away, we learn little about his childhood, he often has a fight with a dragon or a devil, he meets an unusual death, and he is buried in a sepulchre.

In his *Bible Myths*, T. W. Doane gave some entertaining parallels between the Christian hero and the heroes of other religions, and it is a fact that most of the other gods went through the cycle more or less outlined above. Lord Raglan—probably with express purpose—prefers to leave Jesus out of the picture, but he shows how similar are the stories surrounding Romulus, Heracles, Perseus, Jason, Dionysos, Apollo, Zeus, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Siegfried, Arthur, Robin Hood, and many others. If a quarter of his parallels can be justified we can see how the story of Jesus was got together by the myth and story makers.

Lord Raglan rightly pours scorn on those writers who, so to speak, choose those parts of the story of a hero or a god which seem to them probable, and from these deduce that he must therefore have lived. He takes as an example the way in which scholars have treated the *Iliad*:

The scholar soaks himself in Homeric literature, and in nothing else, until all the incidents which seem to him realistic assume prominence, while those which seem to him improbable fade into the background; and eventually there arises in his mind a tale of Troy which is for him real and true, although it is entirely subjective. He then goes again through the literature and divides all the statements which he finds into two classes; those which fit in with his version become the genuine, original tradition, while those which do not are dismissed as embellishments or interpolations.

If we substitute for the Homeric literature, the Jesus literature, we can see how this quotation from *The Hero* fits those writings of Messrs. McCabe, Archibald Robertson, and A. D. Howell Smith, which defend the historicity of the Christian Deity as a mere man. These eminent-Rationalists throw overboard with contempt such stories as Jesus flying about with a Devil, or walking on water, or expelling demons from sick people; by thus carefully eliminating "myths" and "legends" and other "accretions," they produce with an air of triumph the "real" Jesus, a Man who undoubtedly lived and who, if he did anything at all, went about "doing good." Any reader who feels the same way should carefully study the detailed analysis Lord Raglan gives to the Homeric story. There is not much left of Helen and Hector and the other heroes after this.

The real facts are that in all these stories, these myths and legends of great heroes like Arthur, Robin Hood, Siegfried, and many others, we have an early religious ritual put down by somebody who could write either poetry, prose, or drama. Most of these rituals are in the main quite similar, and if we apply this fact to the Christian religion, we can see at once why the story of Jesus can be paralleled in its main features by the stories of other gods and heroes.

When John M. Robertson first broached his theory that some parts of the Jesus saga were based on drama, there was a howl of protest from Christian writers. Even Rationalists like Mr. McCabe claimed that there was no evidence of such a drama whatever. Well, it would be good now to see how he would answer Lord Raglan who, in *The Hero*, devotes nearly 200 pages to a dis-

cussion of the Ritual Drama—confirming every thing that Robertson said. I submit that nobody is qualified to discuss the myth of Jesus until he can answer Raglan and the case he puts in his provocative work.

H. CUTNER.

SHELLEY'S MASTERPIECE

"Prometheus is my favourite poem. I charge you, therefore, specially to pet him and feed him with fine ink and good paper. For *Prometheus* I desire no great sale; *Prometheus* was never intended for more than five or six persons. It is, in my judgment, of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted, and is, perhaps, less an imitation of anything that has gone before it; it is original, and cost me severe mental labor."—SHELLEY, *Letter to Ollier*.

NO apology is necessary for an examination of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, that profoundest and most perfect of his more elaborate compositions. In this splendid lyrical drama the poet depicts the sufferings and endurance of the unconquerable spirit of liberty through its night of tribulation and suppression, the ultimate overthrow and annihilation of the omnipotent tyrant, and the joy of all at their liberation from the "secur'd curse."

In the English language there is nothing of the kind sublimer than the cry with which the drama opens. As dawn slowly breaks over the Caucasus, the chained Titan lifts up his heart and voice against the tyrant. Coleridge's Hymn to Mont Blanc, Satan's Address to the Sun, are both inferior to this magnificent poem. The sustained elevation of thought, the organ-like roll of mighty verse, the gorgeous imagery, combine to make the glorious music with which we are conducted into the fairy palace of the *Prometheus Unbound*. After the opening speech the wings of the poem flag and falter. Shelley invents a second world, corresponding to the world which we inhabit, out of which earth summons the phantasm of Jupiter, who, in this poem, is the spirit of evil, slavery, ignorance, and vice.

The phantasm repeats the curse which Prometheus long ago pronounced upon the tyrant. Then follow some of those ideal pictures which Shelley was so felicitous in drawing.

Later, a swarm of furies come to prey upon the Titan. With their departure the music, which, after the magnificent opening, has dropped, grows more rapid and clear. Adding strength to strength and beauty to beauty, Shelley, towards the conclusion, reaches the heights of passionate song, of inspired lyric frenzy.

As the furies sweep away, there come floating up from beneath, like fleecy clouds in spring, the bright choirs of those subtle spirits whose homes are the dim caves of human thought. In one of these choruses occurs the exquisite complement:—

And the wandering herdsmen know
That the white thorn soon will blow.

The second act opens with the most perfect heroic verse Shelley ever wrote. As the speech of Prometheus is the height of the sublime, so is the speech of Asia the beautiful. It is the morning on which fate is to release Prometheus and overthrow Jupiter.

Asia, the love of Prometheus, is awakened from sleep by a presentiment of approaching good. Soon she sees the point of one white star quivering in the orange light of widening morn. It wanes and gleams again. This beautiful description is as perfect as a landscape by Turner. It is a dream of loveliness, such as only the greatest artists can command.

It is the morning when eternity, here named Demogorgion, declares at last for the enchained spirit of freedom. Then follow some lovely lyrics. It is only the greatest poets who can ring these delicate chimes. Like Shakespeare, Shelley saw sylphs and fairies, and heard the ding-dong bell of the water nymphs. In these scenes we obtain some insight into the extraordinary complexity and depth of Shelley's mind, which could, on occasion, turn from elf-land to the powerful and exciting realism of *The Cenci*.

Asia and Panthea arrive at the home of eternity. Here they have that vision of the "immortal hours":—

The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow-winged steeds,
Which trample the dim winds; in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer urging their flight.
Some look behind, as friends pursued them there,
And yet I see no shape but the keen stars;
Others with burning eyes lean forth and drink
With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
As if the thing they loved fled on before,
And now, even now, they clasped it. Their bright locks
Stream like a comet's flashing hair. They all
Sweep onward.

Further on we meet that splendid ode which we see so often in Anthologies under the title of "Hymn to the Spirit of Nature."

Throughout this drama Asia is Shelley's substitute for the Greek Aphrodite. She is, therefore, incarnate Love. He even introduces the conception of her marine birth in lines of exquisite imagery. Then follows that glorious hymn, "Life of life, thy lips enkindle"—one of the most perfect of Shelley's lyrics.

Out of the central caverns of Existence Eternity rises to overthrow the Omnipotent Tyrant. Jupiter is overwhelmed and swept out of heaven. He falls dizzily down, forever down—

Ruin tracks his lagging fall through boundless space and time.

Thence to the close of the poem is depicted the joy of all living things at the return of Love and Liberty. The splendour of the strains of Earth and Moon, the piercing cry of the liberated Earth, the delicate responses of the Moon, render the poem at this place amongst the wonders of literature. As the passion of triumph abates in the heart of Earth, he grows aware of the faint, sweet voice of the crystal paramour who pursues and accompanies him through space:—

MOON—As a grey and watery mist
Glow like solid amethyst
Athwart the western mountains it enfolds
When the sunset sleeps
Upon its snow.

EARTH—And the weak day weeps
That it should be so,
O gentle moon, the voice of thy delight, etc.

What exquisite word-music! The delicate alliteration, the response when the dying fall and close of the moon's song is met and prolonged by Earth, like the nightingale in that weird forest through which Asia pursued the singing voices:—

Waiting to catch the languid close
Of the last strain, then lifts on high
The wings of the weak melody.

The poem closes with the low, solemn words of Eternity, like the muttering of far-heard thunder, and the meek, small voices of created things respond:—

I hear: I am as a leaf shaken by thee.

So divinely ends this masterpiece. It is noble and inspiring in its scope and significance, and grandly conceived. It is thronged with shapes of the utmost majesty and loveliness, and is full of swift and thrilling melody. It is the final triumphs of Shelley's lyrical poetry.

What Shelley might have been we cannot conceive. At the age of 30 he was drowned in the sea he so loved. His ashes lie beneath the walls of Rome, and "Cor Cordium" ("Heart of Hearts"), chiselled on his tomb, well says what all who love Liberty feel when they think of this "poet of poets and purest of men."

MIMNERMUS.

CORRESPONDENCE

RATIONALISM AND SPIRITUALISM

SIR,—If Mr. Wood is not a Rationalist, then I have been labouring under a delusion for the past 20 odd years.

I feel, however, that his statements concerning his views are those held by all thoughtful Rationalists.

As Wood says, what Rationalist would have thought that science would produce so many wonders from radio to supersonic flying.

Recent experiments have shown that the brain does in fact give off impulses which can be detected by very sensitive instruments, as was shown in a recent B.B.C. broadcast, and because mental phenomena have not yet been explained or proved, does not provide us with an excuse for not pursuing the investigation with a completely open mind.

One does not have to believe in the supernatural or God to consider the possibility that the brain may be capable of many functions at present outside our understanding, and which moreover, may be explained in the comparatively near future.

Finally, it has not been proved that there is no form of after-life, and as Free Thinkers or Rationalists, we surely only accept as fact anything which has been proved beyond reasonable doubt.—Yours, etc.,

N. J. DENNIS,

"WHOM GOD HATH JOINED"

SIR.—Apropos of the above caption: A choice example of the stranglehold of religious superstitions on our antiquated legal system has just been reported in a London paper under the heading "So Mrs. Cooper stays tied to a lunatic murderer."

The husband is now in Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum for murdering his own child, but his wife cannot get a divorce, on account of some fooling technicality! Can you beat it?—Yours, etc., M. C. BROTHERTON, Comdr., R.N.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m. Messrs. E. BRYANT, F. WOOD and E. PAGE.

LONDON—INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Legal Fictions and Political Reality," Professor G. W. KERON, M.A., LL.D.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m. Mr. H. DAY.

Glasgow Secular Society (Scott Street, opposite Cosmo Cinema).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m. A Lecture.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: MESSRS. WINTER, WHITAKER and BARKER.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. KAY, BROADY, BILLING.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street (bombed site) Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Market Square).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.

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

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 30, Parliament Hill, N.W.3.

THE LYING SPIRIT

"WHAT is truth?" said Pilate, washing his hands. "Truth lives at the bottom of a well," is the age-old answer. This is a very old game; putting a conundrum and answering with a riddle. But the question is one that has puzzled humanity throughout the ages.

"Prove all things, hold fast that which is true," said St. Paul. Questioning what constitutes proof, and suggesting demonstration, Descartes asserted that he could give twelve arguments against any accepted truth and a dozen in proof of any accepted falsity. Concerning the difference between truth and the Truth, one might fill a volume; and definitions and considerations would lead to no more than opinions. With an untruth considered as a negation, the ancients conceived all things in positive terms. Desire was actual, and objects of desire were equally positive; hence the eternal verities. Truth was unchanging and life was a search for truth, beauty, happiness.

But we find ourselves faced with fine distinctions and varying degrees of truth, from absolute truth, through speculative truth, on to pragmatic truth; in another sense, degrees of probability ranging from possibility up to certainty. The futility of the question is seen in the negative results. The philosopher, like the Christian, finds himself faced with indefinable incomprehensibles. No positive definition is acceptable and these positive terms turn out to be negative; for contrast with untruth is comparison with a negation.

The absurdity became apparent with the development of science and its challenge to religion. Since Descartes, came the notion that an idea could be true in theology and untrue in science, and vice versa. That is, there were two different criteria of truth; the religious and the scientific. But really, the position is more complete than that. For, plainly, the truths of physics do not cover, or are insufficient for a science of biology, hence the need for a separate branch of science for that subject. So again, the truths of biology are insufficient for a science of anthropology; with further complication in sociology; and so also, again, psychology.

The notion of abstract truth becomes complete absurdity in consideration of the wide differences between physics, and sociology, or psychology; with obvious implications also concerning morality. For here the differences are such as to imply incompatibility; for as impossible in psychology and what is possible in psychology is impossible in physics. It is not simply the difference between a religious and a scientific criterion, for in science we see that we need different criteria for different kinds of facts and our concepts of truth must be related to facts, and our abstraction regarded as hypothetical.

Nor is it simply that the more complex scientific concepts replace those of religion and metaphysical abstraction, for these still confuse, even in science. These continue as a heritage in psychological and social consideration. Question as to whether truth is intuitive or derived from experience; or what constitutes proof or demonstration; or if a proposition can be true at one time and untrue at another; may appear to be matters of cold logic. But the relation of certitude or belief in knowledge, or of inspiration in the realisation of truth, involves feeling. This is further confused by the consideration of form and content, or intention; of an assertion; in the casual condemnation of hypocritical insincerity and deception.

But how do we distinguish hypocrisy and sincerity? If

we are aware of the lie, why should we be deceived? To assume the hypocrite's intention to deceive admits our own liability to be deceived. If we are not aware of the lie, how are we aware of hypocrisy? On the other hand it has been said that hypocrisy is the lip-service paid by virtue to vice. Is, then, sincerity vice? If it condones such vice, is hypocrisy virtue? An attempted justification of hypocrisy is just as absurd. So, either way round, the distinction seems gratuitous. But to assume the hypocrite as cold and calculating admits ourselves as emotional. A cool conscious hypocrite would change his tune to suit the circumstances. It is the sincere man who, in his passion, is dangerous, in virtue of his sincerity.

So we find ourselves enmeshed in a web of emotion. We leave the world of abstraction to find more vital concern. Leaving hypothetical speculation, we discover a realm of observable fact. The lie is not a negative—not merely an untruth; the lie is a positive fact. Despite the legend of George Washington, it is still confidently urged that all men are liars. Lies can be collected and classified. It has been said, there are lies, damned lies, and statistics; and that history is lies. The lie is at once both a fact and fiction. It has both purpose and character. A lie is the only defence of a child against an irate parent; and universal condonation of the "white lie" virtually proclaims truth as unpleasant, painful, even brutal.

Truth is identified with cold hard fact, and in place of the negative feature of abstract truth we have a positive field open to observation. There is the lie direct, and the lie by suggestion or innuendo. There is the clumsy lie and the clever, even artistic lie. We have the malicious slanderous lie and treacherous perjury. There are customary and habitual lies. A lie may be unwitting or ignorant. There are the "little white lies" of courtship, tinged with teasing playfulness. Then there is the "leg-pull" lie of the funny man, a kind of joke, having a humorous aspect; often seen also in the wit of the comedian on the stage.

Lies are found in all the various aspects of social life. Lies fall into patterns appropriate to circumstances. During a "national emergency" the age-old war lies appear. And "truth in advertising" is an old smirk at the lies of trade and commerce. These also show the group feature "my country right or wrong" and "honour among thieves" which is also seen in the political lie in justification of State or Party; and last but not least, the religious lie to the greater Glory of God.

H. H. PREECE.

Philosophy, Science, and Sociology

(Concluded from page 231)

their part in the past; they will all, no doubt, play their parts in the future. And Mr. Hawton's conclusion is that the empiricist is the philosopher who is most likely to hold out a hope for the future development of the human race. "If philosophers ever become kings, it is to be hoped that they will be empiricists." That, again, is a quotation from Mr. Hawton's stimulating book. I hope that what I have written will lead some philosophically-minded readers to get it. There are passages that are difficult going; no book dealing with philosophical technicalities can ever be as easy to read as a novel. But the persistent reader, who takes trouble to study the volume, will be well rewarded. The Freethinker, especially, will find that it provides abundant confirmation for the attitude of mind which he regards as most satisfactory.

JOHN ROWLAND.