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IEWS AND OPINIONS

What About "Immortality"?

TO most people the question will come with something of a shock. Ask the ordinary man if he believes the question of "immortality" to be an important one, and he will doubtless answer in the affirmative, ask him does he feel the importance of death, and what may lie beyond, and he will answer in the same manner. In social intercourse people seldom discuss the question and in polite circles it is strict "taboo."

What then is the cause of this superstition? For those who would sooner search for a year for a complex and obscure explanation, even though it were a false one, than seize the truth that lies near to hand, I suppose it would be called superficial to say that religious organisations are very largely responsible for this belief. There is nothing like repetition to secure assent, and when people are constantly told the same thing—provided of course, that it does not directly conflict with their tastes and inclinations—they will end by believing it. I do not wish it to be understood that I believe that had it not been for the Churches, men would not have speculated on a future life, or that it is a question with which they had no concern. There are times in nearly everyone's life, when we ask ourselves whether the ancient belief in a future life has any real basis in fact. But all must admit that this is not a normal phase of individual life. We are not always thinking about death, and therefore we are not always thinking of what may come after it. Preachers of religion would evidently have us believe the contrary to be the case, but it is tolerably plain that it is not so. True, the thought of a future life may be more prominent with people during periods of religious excitement, but this species of dementia is becoming rare. The divines who lay stress upon either heaven or hell are few. The truth is that there exists in the average mind a confusion between the desire for life and the desire for immortality. Two things not by any means identical and the Churches have not failed by the confusion that followed.

All men desire to live, and this desire is a necessary outcome of the struggle for existence. Our eagerness for anything will determine the energy with which we struggle to obtain it, and in the course of animal evolution nature has set a premium upon those with whom the desire to live exists in its strongest form. Were it otherwise, the race would long since have disappeared. But the desire to live has really no connection whatever, either in its origin or subsequently with the belief in immortality. What men long for is to live here on earth, not in some fantastical future state. The most confident believer in a future life is not usually in a hurry to rid himself of terrestrial existence, and there is in this fact the key to a deal that is otherwise perplexing. People are not willing to exchange the "muddy features of mortality for the glorious raiment of immortality" because the latter does not correspond nor

harmonise with their real feelings. If the belief in immortality were really an outcome of the desire to live, sorrow at death would be impossible. Death would come to each as a change for the better.

The desire for life, then, is one thing, the belief in "Immortality" is another. The former has its origin in the struggle for existence, the latter takes its rise from the inevitable misconceptions of the primitive mind, upon which has been grafted the outcome of philosophic speculation, and the Churches have, cleverly enough, to live in terms of their own speculations and their own creeds. Unused to analysing his own feelings, the average person is quite ready to take the account of them presented to him by those in authority. And so we get a lot of mistakes concerning the longing for immortality.

Of course, no man under normal conditions faces death with pleasure, but neither does he under normal conditions face it with fear. The death bed terrors we read of are mostly manufactured for a very definite purpose. But in real life, death comes far more often as a gentle sinking into sleep than a conscious struggle against a dreaded enemy. With all the deaths that occur, day after day, one yet hears but seldom of one that can be said to transpire amid scenes of terror. Ordinary experience will supply most people with proofs that, in the vast majority of cases, when death does take place, body and mind are already so enervated that there is little or no struggle. The look of calm contentment on the face of the dead is anything but a "King of Terrors" to those who are passing under his sway.

The truth of the matter is that death usually occupies but a very small portion of the thoughts of the normal healthy mind. And where it is otherwise, we may fairly attribute to the Christian religion doing all that it could to fix the public mind upon it. The ancient world—certainly so far as Greece and Rome are concerned—knew little of the horror of death and of that morbid dwelling upon death and the after-life which is so characteristic a feature of Christian writings. There was, of course, speculation on such subjects, and the natural repugnance of healthy people to quitting the world, but the general tone was that of accepting the world as a normal fact of existence to be faced without fear or idle lamentation.

Christianity it was, that altered human feeling for the worse. The world was to the Christian essentially evil, the body necessarily vile, and life a burden, with death coming to usher the soul into eternal felicity or eternal torture. For centuries the best intellectual material that the Church could control was devoted to adding horror upon horror to death. And having supplied the poison, the Churches prided themselves on possessing a questionable antidote. The fear of death is historically very largely artificial. It does not exist, to any serious extent among savages, nor is it present in early civilisations. It is largely a product of Christianity, except where it is shared by religions that are closely affiliated to it. For it

is not, after all, death which people fear, but the thought of the load of misery heaped by Christianity on the human mind. In the last resort, the value of life has to be estimated by its existence here—in this world. On that point, history bears eloquent and emphatic evidence that the conception of a future life, whenever it has been allowed to emerge, has been prolific of little but danger and disaster to the best interests of the human race.

I think I may close this essay by quoting from one of my books that was published a long time ago:—

"Birth and death offer the living paradox that while apparently the negation of each other, they are, strictly speaking, complementary facts. Birth is the other side of death, death is the other side of birth, the significance of the cradle is to be found in the grave, the grave finds its justification in the cradle. On these two complementary facts all human affection centres. In a world where death did not occur, affection would wither and love be without meaning. For an absence of death would mean an absence of birth and of all that birth implies. What meaning would such terms as husband and wife, parent and child, or family have in a world where immortality was a fact and death an unknown thing? And if anyone tries, in thought, to take away all that is owing to these relationships, what would there be left worth bothering about? There is a limit to the attractiveness of things becomes stale in time. There is a saturation point in human affection as there is with the chemical elements. And one might well stand appalled at the idea of living with no prospect of any termination. If there is anything that makes existence an unendurable horror it is that."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE ORIGINS OF MORMONISM

I

IN the Underground Stations of London one can to-day sometimes observe a picturesque advertisement which runs: "The Book of Mormon—The History of American Civilisation." This particular advertisement has got nothing to do with the State Department at Washington. Nor, strange as it may seem nowadays, has it got anything to do with the ubiquitous Marshall Plan. It is an advertisement put up at the expense of the "Church of the Latter Day Saints," more commonly known as the "Mormons." Truth is (proverbially) stranger than fiction, and thus, the prosaic administration of "London Transport" is linked up with the strangest hallucination of the American frontier of a century back.

The North American Continent, and particularly that important section of it now comprised in the U.S.A. has been aptly described both as a "human melting pot" and as "an adolescent civilisation." "The Church of the Latter Day Saints" fully corresponds with both the foregoing descriptions. For, whilst the course of its peculiar vicissitudes since the death of its founder a century ago, and as a result of the persecutions which its strange tenets aroused amongst the non-Mormon "gentiles," Mormonism found both a spiritual and temporal home in the deserts of the Far West, yet originally, it represented an authentic creation of the old American frontier. Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the bizarre "Book of Mormon" were just as much creations of the frontier as their contemporary novels of Fenimore Cooper. "The Last of the Mohicans" and the First of the Mormons were spiritually and geographically close relatives.

Primitive peoples necessarily reflect the culture of their more sophisticated civilised neighbours. In which connection one may aptly compare the primitive "revelation" given to the seventh century Arab frontiersman, Mohammed, which is embodied in the Koran, with the more modern but strikingly similar revelation given to the American frontiersman, Joseph Smith, which is embodied in the "Book of Mormon." Neither was, even in literary form, an original revelation, since primitive peoples are incapable of original revelations, and that held both of the Arabs of the early seventh century and the Americans of the early nineteenth.

Both the Koran and the "Book of Mormon" are imitations, and in the case of the latter, one might almost add, a parody of the Hebrew Old Testament, much of which is superb literature whatever one may say about its theological content. Each is a reflex of an older and more developed civilisation and religion: Mohammed, of Judaism, Joseph Smith, of American Protestantism. And incidentally, the resemblance between the Arab Prophet and his American successor extended to the personal factor, for both were victims of the "divine disease" of epilepsy and, indeed, both probably owe their fame and their "revelations" to that fact. It must be added that this parallel, striking enough in its way, is of course, not exact, since History never repeats itself exactly, and incidentally, the Koran is written in a more lively style than is the Book of Mormon.

Thus we denote both Islam, the creed of Mohammed, and Mormonism, the creed founded by Joseph Smith, as the religions of primitive frontiersmen, springing from a reflex culture which itself derives from another more developed race, respectively Judaism and European Christianity, both were essentially adolescent religions.

It is true that between these religions of fundamentally the same type there has been a wide difference in terrestrial fortune, for Mohammed still counts his followers in hundreds of millions, whilst the more modest following of Joseph Smith is still confined to the hundreds of thousands. Moreover, though the Mormon metropolis of Salt Lake City represents a remarkable enough species of social organisation, it cuts a poor figure as and when compared with the brilliant centres of Mohammedan civilisation in the past: with the Baghdad of "The Arabian Nights," with the "Splendour of Moorish Spain" and the Taj Mahal of the Mogul Emperors of Delhi.

However, Time and Space, rather than individuals, or even Prophets, have the final say. By the time the Mormon Messiah and his "St. Paul," Brigham Young, appeared on the American scene, the age of founding world-religions was over, and their religion of the backwoods had to remain in the backwoods. Nevertheless, the Mormon Founding Fathers were remarkable men. One of Joseph Smith's most critical (non-Mormon) historians explicitly testifies that, in his case, "familiarity is far from having bred contempt." Whilst Brigham Young had a European capital, and not a desert oasis for the scene of his executive exploits it is the considered opinion of critical historians that he would have ranked with the ablest administrators of his century. One could say no more of Mohammed and his Khalifs; could one honestly even say as much of the New Testament Apostles who actually founded Christianity?

The founder of Mormonism was born in 1805, and was lynched by a hostile mob whilst awaiting trial in prison upon June 27, 1844. During the early part of his career Smith led a vagrant and rather gypsy-like existence, that of a typical frontiersman "impatient of the restraints

of law, religion, and morality, contentious, always complaining, and always indebted." As an American writer has described them, no doubt, expressing accurately enough the opinions of the New England Oligarchy, the then rulers of America, whom another typical frontiersman, Andrew Jackson, and his "illiterate mob" were soon to deprive of political power in the historic Presidential Election of 1827-8. The Smith family lived up-country in the State of New York. The reputation which they, and the future Prophet enjoyed was none too good. The young Joseph was regarded as a ne'er-do-well, who tried his hand at many blind-alley occupations of a humble character. But such a prophetic youth is, after all, to run true to religious tradition: for was not Jesus a carpenter, Paul a tent-maker and Mohammed an itinerant camel driver?

From this nomadic existence a startling series of events delivered the youthful Smith, for when "revelations" came, they came thick and fast. In 1820, Joseph, as one of his Mormon biographers rather quaintly puts it, "had an interview with the Deity." Two dazzling personages identifiable as God the Father and God the Son, appeared in person and announced their Divine identity to the astonished lad of 15. And on September 23, 1823, a red-letter date which may be regarded as the historic birthday of Mormonism, the Angel Moroni appeared to Joseph in the first of a series of visions which revealed the "history of American civilisation"—a most peculiar history indeed!—to the Founder of Mormonism.

And, stupendous climax! At midnight September 21, 1827, upon the Hill of Cumorah, by the banks of the Susquehanna River, the seeker, directly guided by the Angel Moroni, found the "golden tablets" of the Book of Mormon, written in "Reformed Egyptian" which described the exodus of the ancient Jews from Palestine to America, their subsequent apostasy and persecution of the Prophets of the Lord, of whom Moroni was the last, and their translation (in the Shakespearian sense of the word) into Red Indians as a visible proof of Divine anger.

"The History of American Civilisation" indeed! Incidentally, at the time of his supreme discovery, Joseph Smith was prospecting for gold. Upon the Hill of Cumorah he found it literally and figuratively.

In 1830 the visions took on a permanent literary form, for in that year there appeared the definitive translation of the divine-revealed volume from "Reformed Egyptian" into English. Rather injudiciously, the title page carried in large type "The Book of Mormon—by Joseph Smith, Author and Proprietor." An apparent confession of human authorship which the enemies of the new religion were not slow to use against it.

All the ingredients of a new religion were now in being, a live prophet, an authentic vision, a sacred Book, whether Moses, Jesus nor Mohammed had ever had more than this: indeed, only the last-named had had as much in his own lifetime. Hitherto, all the historic world-religions had arisen in the Old World; was it now the turn of the New?

F. A. RIDLEY.

WHAT HAPPENS IN ITALY

After the marriage of film star Tyrone Power to Linda Christian, an editorial in the Milanese paper *Unita* asked the Pope why in Italy he opposed divorce when he had blessed, congratulated and married Tyrone and Linda. Our readers may not know, but will not be surprised to learn, that Tyrone had been recently divorced. The papal reply to the question came in the form of arrest and trial of the journalist, Davide Lajolo, who was condemned to eight months' imprisonment for offending the head of a foreign government. It is true that Lajolo is a Communist, but that does not alter the facts of the case.

"IS REASON ENOUGH?"

ALTHOUGH what are sometimes frantic appeals for super-pamphlets in reply to Freethought ones are constantly being made in the religious press, it is quite a mistake to imagine that nothing is being done in this way. As a matter of fact, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge has nearly 200 "Little Books on Religion" dealing with it in many aspects, and quite a number of these pamphlets are meant to be crushing replies to Rationalism.

One of them is before me now—*Rationalism: Is Reason Enough?* written by the Rev. Clement F. Rogers. I remember this gentleman some years before the war trying his best—very querulously—to answer John M. Robertson from a Christian Evidence platform. He was without a spark of humour and appeared to have very little knowledge of the Freethought case. I should like to add that after this exhibition of himself, I have ever since avoided this particular platform. Later, Mr. Rogers wrote a book entitled, I think, *Verify Your References*—conspicuous for his utter inability to verify some of his own references.

He appears to have learnt nothing by his mistakes then, for on the very first page of his *Rationalism* is one of those silly errors which made me recognise his thorough incompetence years ago. He quotes one of the little books published in 1912 by Messrs. Constable in the series "Philosophies Ancient and Modern"—*Rationalism*, by John M. Robertson—but makes its author to be the famous Brighton preacher, F. W. Robertson, who died in 1853!

Now obviously anybody is liable to make mistakes, but there are some in the very nature of the case which cannot be made. What would Mr. Rogers have said of me or any Freethinker if we had confused Augustine, the author of *Confessions*, with Augustine who is supposed to have converted England nearly two centuries later?

It is obvious that Mr. Rogers did not even know who F. W. Robertson was, and to put his name down as the author of *Rationalism* proves an incompetence difficult to describe. He cannot even transcribe a quotation correctly, for J. M. Robertson wrote "freethinker," not "free-thinker." These are not little points, for Mr. Rogers is out to discredit reason—if not entirely with religion.

John M. Robertson, for Mr. Rogers, is the enemy, and we need not be surprised when Mr. Rogers refers to his *History of Freethought* in this wise—"Where I have been able to test it, it does not seem to be very comprehending." The idea of anybody of Mr. Rogers' intellectual capacity "comprehending" a standard historical work on Freethought like Robertson's is surely ludicrous—or even that he was capable of *testing* it. Mr. Rogers actually writes: ". . . it is not difficult to write a history of Free Thought—indeed it has been done . . ." Indeed it has, and it certainly has provided "an imposing array of names of persons distinguished in various ways" who were never Christians. What drivels these Christian opponents of Rationalism can write can be seen in this quotation—"Many a Free-thinker (to use the word in the popular sense) is honestly convinced that he has weighed the arguments for Christianity and found them wanting, whereas all the time the real reason for his antagonism is that he has been injured by some professing Christian, or bored by some Church observance, and that has proved far stronger than any argument." These Christians seem incapable of understanding that the principal reason we have for rejecting Christianity is that

it is not true. The Fall of Man, the necessity of a Saviour, the Son of God, God himself, the miracles, the devils, hell and heaven—all these, and many of the other things which surround Christianity, are absolutely untrue. Our reason rebels against such teaching, and we are compelled to give them up. The idea that we have only given up Christianity because some Christian has done us harm is sheer unmitigated rubbish, and it is time that the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge knew it once for all.

So long as you believe in Christianity, that is, so long as you believe in devils and miracles and the rest, Mr. Rogers will grant you that "Reason is of enormous value in life." And he is even inclined to say that we are right "in making a protest against its neglect." But he forgets that we have only protested when we are asked to believe lots of things in connection with Christianity against which reason must protest. Actually, the great Christian writers have used reason as one of their great supports. Granting some of their premises, theologians like Aquinas can reason almost with the persuasion of Socrates (or Plato), and it is quite a mistake to imagine that the great Christians throw overboard such a powerful instrument, and rely utterly on "Faith."

Mr. Rogers, for example, quotes Berkeley (as well as Aquinas) where these great writers—they are great, though Freethinkers can disagree with them—insist that the existence of God can be proved by reason. Aquinas appears to prefer the Design argument—"The existence of God, in so far as it is not self evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us." Berkeley, however, says, "Though I perceive Him not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflection and reasoning . . ." It need hardly be pointed out that it is one thing to quote giants like Aquinas and Berkeley and quite another thing for somebody like Mr. Rogers to write "on his own." He finds, for example, the Roman Church "too rationalistic." That may be so when it has to defend itself with reason and logic, but surely not when it appeals to the "people" with Lourdes and Fatima.

Rationalists, contends Mr. Rogers, "get very angry when the argument, 'Where are your hospitals?' is used against them." Really, it tries one's patience to hear such undiluted rubbish. The idea here is that hospitals are the product of Christianity when even the most elementary knowledge of history will show that hospitals were known centuries before the supposed date of Jesus—that the God of healing among the Greeks was, for example, Aesculapius, to whose temple came the sick, that doctors still subscribe to the famous oath of Hippocrates who lived 460-377 B.C., that hospitals were known in the time of the Pharaohs, and among the early Buddhists. Looking after the sick has always been a problem, but it is only in comparatively recent times that Christians came to it with some pretension to a scientific approach utterly divorced from "miracles." Freethinkers have contributed to hospitals equally with other sections of the community, and have helped in their organisation. The only contribution made by Jesus to healing the sick was through "miracles," and if we now had to depend on this method, hospitals would no longer be needed at all, as all the patients would die.

"It is not enough, except by way of protest, to be rationalist. We must also be rational." are Mr. Rogers' concluding words, though I haven't a ghost of an idea as to what he means. One thing, however, is clear from his pamphlet and that is, no matter how much he agrees or does not agree with "reason," he nowhere takes a dozen of the beliefs of Christians—like the Virgin Birth,

the Resurrection, the Ascension, Jesus walking on water, etc.—and proves that they are all in accord with the strictest reason. He could not, of course. Yet it is of such that constitute Christianity, the true Christianity, the perfect religion of Jesus Christ. Certainly for this, reason is not enough.

H. CUTNER.

THE SCOURGE

THE ancient Greek statesman, Pericles, had recently delivered a funeral oration over the Athenians who had fallen in the first year of the Peloponnesian war.

"Comfort, therefore, not condolence," he had said, "is what I have to offer to the parents of the dead who may be here. Numberless are the chances to which, as they know, the life of man is subject; but fortunate indeed are they who draw for their lot a death so glorious as that which has caused your mourning, and to whom life has been so exactly measured as to terminate in the happiness in which it has been passed."

As if to emphasise his remarks about the numberless chances to which human life is subject, in the second year of the war there burst upon the citizens of Athens one of those great natural scourges, which, from time to time, have devastated great areas of the world. The one that fell upon Athens was, according to the Reverend Augustus Jessopp, author of "The Coming of the Friars, scarlatina maligna.

An account of the disease and its circumstances is contained in the "History of the Peloponnesian War," by Thucydides. The bulk of his account was put into Latin verse by Lucretius.

Thucydides, who himself had the disease, reports that even the physicians were, at first, of no service, as they were ignorant of the proper way to treat it. They themselves died the most thickly, as they visited the sick the most often.

Supplication in the temples, divinations, and so forth were found equally futile, till the overwhelming nature of the disaster at last terminated them altogether.

An aggravation of the calamity was the influx from the country into the city, and this was especially felt by the new arrivals. As there were no houses to receive them, they had to be lodged, at the hot season of the year, in stifling cabins, where the mortality waged without restraint. The bodies of dying men lay one upon another, and half-dead creatures reeled about the streets and gathered round all the fountains in their longing for water.

The sacred places also in which they had quartered themselves were full of corpses of persons that had died there, just as they were, for as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became regardless of everything, sacred or profane. All the burial rights before in use were upset, and men buried the bodies as best they could. Many, from want of the proper appliances, through so many of their friends having died already, had recourse to the most shameless sepultures, sometimes, getting the start of those who had raised a pile, they threw the body of their own dead upon the stranger's pyre, and ignited it; sometimes they tossed the corpse which they were carrying on the top of another that was burning, and quickly made off.

Then there happened, as happens in time of war, a general slackening of morality and prudence, for men now openly ventured on what they had previously done only in a corner, and not just as they pleased, and seeing the rapid transitions produced by prosperous persons

suddenly dying, and those who before had nothing succeeding to their property, they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and their riches as alike things of a day. Perseverance in what men called honour was popular with none; it was so uncertain whether men would be spared to attain their objects. So it was settled that present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was both honourable and expedient.

There was no fear of gods or law of man to restrain. As for the former, men judged it to be the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all similarly perishing; and for the latter, no one expected to live long enough to be brought to trial for his offences, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all, and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it seemed only reasonable to enjoy life a little.

In their distress men naturally remembered the verse which the old men said had long ago been uttered:—
“A Dorian war shall come and with it death.”

So a dispute arose as to whether “dearth” or “death” had been the word in the verse. At the present juncture, it was of course decided in favour of the latter; for the people made their recollection fit in with their sufferings.

“I fancy, however,” said Thucydides, “that if another Dorian war should come upon us, and a dearth happen to accompany it, the verse will probably be read accordingly.” The oracle also which was given to the Lacedaemonians was now remembered by those who knew of it. When the god was asked whether they should go to war, he answered that if they put their might into it, victory should be theirs, and that he would himself be with them. With this oracle events were supposed to tally, for the plague broke out as soon as the Peloponnesians invaded Attica, and never entering Peloponnese (at least to an extent worth noticing), committed its worst ravages at Athens, and next to Athens, at the most populous of the other towns.

The fact of the disease being less disastrous to the Peloponnesians than to the Athenians is, of course, not difficult for us to explain, especially as the historian mentions the populousness of Athens and the other Athenian towns. Moreover, the crowded state of Athens had been increased by the policy of Pericles, in pursuance of which the Athenians, living scattered over Attica, had removed themselves to Athens.

When these arrived at Athens, though a few had houses of their own to go to, or could find an asylum with friends, by far the greater number had to take up their abode in the parts of the city that were not built over, and in the temples and chapels of the heroes, except the Acropolis and the temple of the Eleusinian Demeter, and such other places as were always kept closed. Even the ground below the Pelasgian citadel, the occupation of which had been forbidden by a curse, was built over in the necessity of the moment. Many also took up their quarters in the towers of the walls, or wherever else they could, for, when they were all come in, the city proved too small to hold them.

The Peloponnesians, on the other hand, were invading Attica. Some of their army was there, but not their towns with the civil population.

In connection with the Pelasgian territory, by the way, there was an ominous fragment of a Pythian oracle, of the usual oracular ambiguity, which said:—

“Leave the Pelasgian parcel desolate,
Woe worth the day that men inhabit it!”
Obviously the misfortunes of the state did not arise from the unlawful occupation, but the unlawful occupa-

tion from the misfortune of the war. Thucydides is pious enough to state that though the god did not mention it, he foresaw that it would be an evil day for Athens in which the plot came to be inhabited.

J. G. LUPTON.

A BOOK WORTH WHILE

“CHILDREN OF THE POOR,” by John A. Lee, published by Bernard Henry, 74, Chatsworth Road, London, N.W.2. Price, 7s. 6d.

THERE are many books that should never have been published and others that are well worth republishing. John A. Lee's “Children of the Poor” comes under the latter category. When it was first published, Bernard Shaw wrote to the author as follows: “The book is a whopper. Its only rival in intensity is Lionel Britton's ‘Hunger and Love.’ Your book has a peculiar poignancy as a record of a life of poverty in the world of the poor, where normal poverty is not disgraceful.”

Upton Sinclair wrote of it: “One of the most human documents I have ever read.”

Such men do not bestow their favours lightly, and these endorsements assure the reader that he will not waste his time. John Lee's name as a writer and publisher is a household one in his native New Zealand, whilst here in England he has many followers who admire his fearlessness, his honesty and his ceaseless attack on the Vatican menace. “Children of the Poor” is the story of the author's young life. It is written with power and sincerity by a man who, having made writing his trade, is a master of his craft. This book will come as a surprise to many readers in this country, for it shows us that, despite the much better social conditions in a young country like New Zealand, there are to be found many degrading slums and poverty, which are a disgrace to civilisation in its true sense.

Tossed and buffeted about by “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” many men would have succumbed; but John Lee is, like Jack London was, essentially a fighter. In the First World War he fought as a soldier in the New Zealand Forces, losing his left arm in that holocaust. Since then he has fought unceasingly against wrong conditions, against Fascism, against the political activities of the Vatican thereby incurring the wrath of the followers of that totalitarian institution and which incidentally cost Lee his seat in the New Zealand Parliament. He lost his seat but retained his principles. To-day he is probably the most admired and the most hated man in public life in New Zealand. In many respects the lives of John Lee and Jack London are very similar. Both faced and triumphed over poverty and misery. Both learned in the school of hard experience and both men found that they possessed the ability to influence the thoughts of others. This book grips the reader's attention from the opening lines: “This is the story of how I became a thief, and in time very much of an outlaw, running and skulking from the police. And this story may throw light upon the circumstances that made my sister a daughter of the streets, a poorly remunerated and therefore despised member of that oldest profession which is not like any other calling in that its practitioners are honoured or despised according to the quantity rather than the source of their earnings.”

A book to buy and not keep selfishly but to lend to friends. A book to ask for at your library.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

ACID DROPS

When Rita married Aly according to Moslem rites some weeks ago, "Informed circles in the Vatican" said that "she would be regarded as a heretic, and liable to excommunication." Centuries ago this would have really meant something, but what a squib, and a damp one, this proves to be in 1949, for Rita obviously loses no sleep over the threat, that is, if we are to judge from the Press photos of her at Ascot. A millionaire father-in-law makes a lot of difference.

Douglas Warth of the *Sunday Pictorial* gets all hot under the collar because of the fuss in a maternity hospital to get a baby baptised when it was in danger of dying. "What an unholy farce," said Douglas Warth, "rushing through the ceremony. Do the Church authorities really believe that an unbaptised babe does not go to heaven?" We can only add that if they do not believe in it, then they have been liars for a long time, for we can find plenty of Biblical texts in support. Perhaps Mr. Warth does not know about the baptismal syringe which the Roman Catholics use to baptise *unborn* babies, and to make the ceremony more holy, the hole of the syringe nozzle is in the form of a cross, so that there can be no doubt that any taint of "original sin" shall not sully the saints in heaven. Of course, it is a farce, and although many of us can smile over such idiocies, there are many who still fervently believe that a few mumbled words and a sprinkle of salt and water is a passport to heaven.

The Rector of Berre Ferrers will refuse to conduct baptism in water "the colour of coffee, and which smells like the seven deadly sins." In his Parish Magazine, he complains that "small pieces of snail shell, animalculae, amphibia and arthropoda, were found in the water supply." We have assiduously searched the Bible, the Prayer Book, the Catechism and the *Bible Handbook*, and can report that we can find no precedence for the Rev. R. Crookshank to refuse to baptise in dirty water. After all, what was good enough for Christ ought to be good enough for Crookshank, and as far as we know the River Jordan was not filtered when John doused Jesus.

According to the *Church Times*, one of the most popular replies to the questionnaire sent out recently by the Bishop of London is, "Send us more clergy!" Fewer and fewer young men are receiving the Divine Call—especially on the salary given to the average curate. Then, in addition, a youngster in clerical dress is generally an object of fun, and most of them know it. Gone are the days when a parson was looked upon as God's representative on earth, and in consequence reverently honoured. The pie in the sky he used so profusely to promise is jeered at and altogether a young clergyman's lot is not particularly a happy one. No, recruits to the Church are as difficult to persuade as are young men for the mines, and pious difficulties are steadily growing worse.

In one of our religious papers, a Mr. Roger Lloyd puts in a plea for "a marriage" between theology and poetry. The author of such must be "a poet who is also an orthodox theologian," just as if it is quite easy to mix the two. Some of the most boring poetry in the language comes from orthodox theologians, while the really great poetry comes from poets who were, if not complete unbelievers, very nearly. Critics have long since seen in the plays of Shakespeare a scepticism nearly amounting to Atheism, while Burns, Byron, Swinburne, James

Thomson, and a host of others in the first rank, certainly had no belief in Christianity.

Even Mr. Lloyd has to concede this. He notes the silence of English poetry on the Church and that "there is extremely little great poetry about the Eucharist," and, as for these days, "the silence of poetry about the Church is extremely unfortunate." It may be unfortunate for such people as Mr. Lloyd, but we can breathe a sigh of relief that modern poetry is not being encumbered by the drivel of theology.

The life of "our Lord" is about to be filmed—and we are sure that it will be "reverently" treated. The script will not be based on Leo Taxil's "Vie de Jésus." One thing is, however, certain, there are plenty of stirring incidents, and the children will not be disappointed when the Devil is introduced "tempting" Jesus and taking him for a ride through the air. Then there are the "Visitation" and "Annunciation" scenes, and, no doubt following Miss Sayers' *Man Born to be King*, there will be plenty of scope showing the villainous Jews thirsting for the blood of Jesus. The director will also have plenty of scope depicting the Resurrection, not only of the Saviour, but also of the large number of Jewish "saints" who also were allowed a wholesale Resurrection. It will be a great film.

Dr. Wand addressed the London Diocesan Conference the other day about his Mission, and we carefully scoured a long report to see how many converts it had made. Needless to add—not one! Not a solitary Freethinker has come into the fold as the result of thousands of pounds of advertising, and the impassioned pleas of thousands of voluntary workers for Christ. In fact, there are even more pathetic pleas—that those Christians who have been "drawn into the net," as the Rev. C. B. Mortlock writes, should not "wriggle out to sea again." We could not write a better commentary on the futility of the Mission ourselves.

The *Universe* just rants when it is on the subject of Roman Catholic schools and the Education Act, and appears to try to frighten its readers with headlines such as "£50 million is your bill for your schools" or deliberately tries to mislead them by such phrases as "Atheists and Communists get their education free." Every citizen is entitled to "free" education, and if the R.C.s want their children to be educated in a different way, or want them segregated from the children of "heretics and infidels," they should pay for it and not expect their pernicious doctrines to be financially supported by its opponents. It is time that Rome came off the rates.

It is a pity that the Noah's Ark expedition was not allowed to go on, for a triumphant return with the veritable Ark would have added lustre to that other forgotten expedition 100 years ago when some Americans managed to bring back the actual pillar of salt Lot's wife was turned into. The facts were related in the *Jewish Chronicle* of that day. The pillar was 40 feet high, and found exactly in the place designated in the Bible; there could be, therefore, no doubt whatever about it. Unfortunately, the records since have vanished, and no one knows what eventually became of the pillar. Perhaps it was slowly eaten away; or perhaps we ought to take the whole story with the proverbial pinch of—well, salt.

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SUGAR PLUMS

Debating Societies are busy preparing fixtures for the indoor season and we take the opportunity of repeating that the Executive of the N.S.S. is prepared to send speakers to put the Freethought point of view to outside organisations without any expense to those organisations. Application for the service of speakers should be sent to the Secretary, N.S.S., 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

A large and eager crowd filled the Bigg Market, Newcastle, recently, to hear a debate between Mr. J. T. Brighton and Mr. W. Rowe for the Newcastle Branch N.S.S., and the Canon of St. Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle, and a medical man. The subject for debate was Christianity v. Atheism, and was the outcome of some opposition from students from King's College at a previous meeting in the Bigg Market. Debates are always interesting, and we hope that the students will ask for more.

The Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. draws the attention of readers to the visit of Mr. F. A. Ridley, who will speak to-day (July 10) at their Castle Street stand at 7 p.m. We understand that arrangements have been made to hold the meeting indoors should the weather be inclement, so that wet or fine Mr. Ridley's lecture can be heard. The Branch has a batch of enthusiastic workers who deserve all the support local saints can give; such support should be considered a duty, not a favour.

Forty-five out of 73 passengers in an air liner preferred to go down with the plane into the sea when it crashed rather than face with lifebelts the fierce barracuda fish which infest the waters off Puerto Rico. The survivors say that the women among them prayed for God's help and the Lord managed to bring into his bosom the greater proportion including 18 children—a supreme proof that God does answer prayer. Ask Dr. Joad.

The Norwegian novelist, the late Mme. Sigrid Undset, was a convert to Roman Catholicism, but it does not appear to have given her much hope—in this world, at least. When Germany invaded Norway, she was in America, and she said, "No matter who wins the war there will be no more gladness on earth in our time. Even if Britain won, there may be a hundred years of darkness." Her only hope was the Catholic hope of the usual pie in the sky. However, her dismal prognostications look like being falsified, though one wonders what good being converted did to her intelligence.

The "Universe," no doubt gladly, reports that we shall soon know whether St. Peter's tomb has been found. Lots of people know, it declares, and even the "Holy Father" has given us a hint. For us, the probable site is just as authentic as the three tombs of Jesus in Jerusalem and we are sure it will be backed up by similar authoritative evidence. Whether there really was a Peter at all is now quite uncertain, for the various traditions round him are just fictions invented by pious writers. Still, something must be done to revive the fall in the fortunes of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Mayor of Bridlington has hit the headlines by referring to the "world shortage" of the Bible, and that there is now a "black market" for buying and selling it. We suspect that the gallant Mayor would not have come into the limelight of publicity if he had never referred to the World's Best Seller in this way, though what he really should do is to explain why people never read the Bible. Has he himself read Zephaniah, and could he tell us off-hand who he was and what he was writing about? Could many of the billions of people who have bought the Bible and are now buying it in the black market? Would the Mayor of Bridlington be prepared to say that Zephaniah, translated into one of the obscure dialects of mid-Africa, is completely intelligible to a pygmy?

Actually, if a copy of the Bible can be had at cost price or under by natives, they are going to buy it. Its pages often make excellent paper for cigarettes, and in the scarcity of wrapping paper, they make very good substitutes, especially for wrapping up food. But if there is a shortage of Bibles, we know a good reason for it. A comparatively large proportion of the books sent for salvage during the war must have been Bibles in every stage of wear, and it will probably take two or three generations before they can be replaced. But the real question will still remain—does anybody really read the Bible?

The Abbé Boulier, who spoke recently on Communism in favour of Mr. Zilliacus, M.P., is a sort of counter-part of the Red Dean and the two clerics really ought to come together. As they both believe in Communism, they ought now to convert each other to true Christianity, whatever that is. It is interesting to note that the Archbishop of Canterbury can do nothing to restrict the Red Dean's activities not even his religious ones, but Bishop McCormack has severely warned the Red Abbé to stop it. Both priest and parson appear to do what they like, all the same. It is gratifying to note that neither can be "unfroeked," that is, they can both take Mass and perform all the usual church services. A priest remains a priest once he is touched by a Bishop.

A correspondent sends us a clerical begging letter and an advertisement of a Garden Fete, to include the inevitable Baby Show and Jumble Sale stalls, and to be held at the local Church Hall. The proceeds will be for the installation of a lightning conductor on the Church. "Public safety" runs the clergyman's letter, "requires that this omission from the past shall be rectified." In other words, if the parishioners do not support the Fete and the profits fall short of the £80, God will still have to keep an eye on his church. Our parson evidently does not trust God when he descends to such blatant materialism in the form of a lightning conductor. O ye of little faith!

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY*

ANY work dealing with some aspect of the history of Christianity by the author of *The Jesuits* and *Julian the Apostate* is sure to attract many readers. Mr. F. A. Ridley is a close student of social and religious problems, and has made the journey from Anglicanism to Freethought.

The booklet now under review surveys briefly the evolution of one of the most amazing institutions of mankind. The Bishop of Rome, who has several other titles and spheres of authority, claims to be the supreme ruler and guide of the Church of Christ—the only Church its adherents admit to be so without qualification.

Mr. Ridley examines the traditional account of the origin of the Papacy. The supremacy of the See of Rome is deduced by Catholics from a highly debatable text, which tells how Jesus at Caesarea Philippi made Peter the foundation of his Church, which had not yet come into being. If Peter ever was in Rome, the theory that he founded the earliest community of Roman Christians, and functioned as their bishop for twenty-five years, seems to be disproved by the admittedly scanty data we possess. Rome was bound to become the centre of religious unity with the growth of the Church's organisation, owing to its status as the capital of the empire of the Cæsars, whose fallen sceptre the Popes of a later day virtually assumed. A vast complex of historical events created the medieval Papacy, which demands no supernaturalist explanation of its development.

The Pope emerges, in the second century, from a board of presbyters of co-ordinated authority, and even after the episcopate had been fully formed was for long no more than a great bishop enjoying a primacy of honour. Thereafter by clever opportunism, and favoured by imperial decrees, he gained supremacy in the western provinces of the empire, but not in the eastern provinces. It was chiefly on the question of the Papal claims that the Christians of the Orient were gradually estranged from their brethren of the West. The Papacy became a rallying-point for the factors of culture in the Dark Ages, and did promote civilisation, in some measure, in lands where the Græco-Roman tradition had collapsed or had never penetrated. The medieval Popes caused kings to tremble before them, and as the Middle Ages drew to a close, built up a huge structure of wealth and power, which made their influence felt far outside the bounds of Christendom. Through fraud, and cruelty, and fears of the hereafter their pretensions instilled, they established their ghostly realm.

The Reformation shattered the authority of the Popes in many countries. But the Counter-Reformation, principally engineered by the Jesuits, won for the Papacy millions of adherents in Asia and the Americas, and with the aid of the Inquisition and reactionary monarchs the Popes consolidated their power in the countries that did not fall away from the Catholic faith. Not until 1870 was the Pope declared infallible by a majority vote at an Ecumenical Council, though the idea of his infallibility had been defended by many theologians for centuries and seemed implicit in the behaviour of the Popes themselves. Even now we do not know how many or how few Papal pronouncements come under the head of *ex cathedra* definitions and so bear the stamp of infallibility.

The great drama has been told often by erudite pens, but it always bears repetition. Nothing that is essential to its understanding has been omitted by Mr. Ridley in a booklet that is admirable for its succinctness and the clarity of its exposition.

"Rome has faced Dark Ages before," writes the author, and he prophesies that she "may again return to power on the ruins of human culture" (p. 65). Her tenacity is such that "civilisation will have to kill her." But how can this come about? Mr. Ridley surely does not advocate persecution. We should say rather that civilisation will kill Rome—will create a social and cultural atmosphere in which she can no longer breathe. Sounder education and the evolution of a better economic-political system than the one that has now thrust its tentacles into nearly every corner of our planet will gradually reduce the devotees of the Papacy to handfuls of quaint folk. When the Church of Rome becomes a picturesque survival, politically and economically impotent, we shall have no quarrel with her.

Of special importance in Mr. Ridley's work are his chapters, "The Papacy and the Social Encyclicals" and "The Papacy and Fascism." All social reformers and progressive statesmen should ponder on the facts here set forth—by no means for the first time.

There are not many criticisms to make. Mr. Ridley endorses Dr. Inge's extraordinary view (p. 24) that "had the Dark Age not existed, it would have made hardly any difference to the cultural history of the world." Strictly interpreted, this means that nothing happened in the Dark Ages worth recording, and that Europeans—Western Europeans at least, for in Constantinople a debased version of the old civilisation continued—spent their lifetimes as uneventful as those of the Pygmies of the Great Forest in Central Africa. But Mr. Ridley has rebuked (p. 21) those Freethinkers who "have rashly denied the services rendered by the Church to the Europe of the Dark Ages." Surely the work of the great missionary monks, notably the Benedictines, were an essential preamble to the medieval civilisation, admittedly very brilliant in some respects. In the Dark Ages arose Islam, with its rapid conquests of many lands, including the greater part of Spain, Charlemagne built up his vast empire, England was forming a culture of her own after the chaos produced by the Anglo-Saxon invasions, and the foundations of the great Republic of Venice were being laid. These events negate the notion that in the Dark Ages there was only a marking of time, without significance for later centuries.

Mr. Ridley opines (p. 17) that the "Thou art Peter" text was added to the First Gospel early in the third century. But Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, shows himself acquainted with it. Possibly, as Mr. Ridley believes, this text was inserted by a booster of the claims of the Church in Rome not of the Pope at so early a date. But his view (p. 17) that *John XXI*, an obvious addition to the Fourth Gospel, had the same origin is less defensible. The authority of Peter is being urged in this chapter to the apparent belittlement of John. Christian cliques made Paul, Peter, John, and other worthies of the primitive Church the symbols of rival dogmas or policies. There is no reason to suppose that the claims of Peter to special privileges and prestige were only advanced at Rome.

Mr. Ridley's statement (p. 17 n.) that the term "church" only came into use "probably much later than A.D. 70 assumes that the epistles attributed to Paul of Tarsus are all pseudonymous, since the use of this term appears in them too often to be regarded, on critical principles, as due to interpolation.

We are told by Mr. Ridley (p. 58) that "the end justifies the means" is a "famous axiom of the Jesuits." There is no such axiom in Jesuit teaching. The nearest to it is Busenbaum's dictum, "to him to whom the end

* By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s. Pioneer Press.

is lawful the means also are lawful," which can be given a perfectly reasonable and moral interpretation, but can equally lend itself to dubious practices, since the means often qualify the lawfulness of the end.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

"WOOD versus THE HORNETS"

SO now Mr. Cutner has been briefed for the defence of Materialism in the case of "Wood versus The Hornets"!

Well—let them bring up all their "big guns," the more the merrier; but as I intend conducting my own case, *without assistance*, I must insist that my opponents first make out their charge correctly. Throughout this lengthy controversy I have been charged, over and over again, with being a Spiritualist. Because I am *interested* in the subject of good health—does that make me a doctor?

All I have done is to suggest that psychic phenomena should be scientifically investigated and that until the question of survival has been proved or disproved we should preserve an open mind. Why an atheist cannot do this is quite beyond my comprehension.

Yes, even Mr. Cutner refers to *my belief*. He says: "I certainly refuse to believe, as Mr. Wood does, in such a non-physical entity . . ." As I have never stated such a belief I would be interested to know from what source Mr. Cutner obtains his information. I certainly do not dispute the *possibility* of non-physical entities but that is not the same thing as saying I definitely believe in them. I do wish people would be a little more accurate in their statements and accusations.

Regarding the testing of mediums, I suggest that Mr. Cutner visits the National Laboratory of Psychical Research if he really desires to know how such tests are conducted. But if he has read the late Harry Price's books he should already know—the testing of world-famous mediums has been fully described therein. I do not know how many mediums are genuine or how many are frauds, but no doubt the before mentioned Society can enlighten him. Can Mr. Cutner *tell me* how many Freethinkers are genuine Freethinkers and how many are merely so-called Freethinkers who will no more tolerate opposition to their views than will the most bigoted Christian?

And now for the R.101 case. Here I must make a correction. I regret to say that I gave the medium's name as Mrs. Estelle Roberts when it was, in fact, a Mrs. Eileen Garrett. The affair happened *nineteen years ago* and I, unfortunately, relied on my memory instead of checking up on the case as I should have done.

Yes, Mr. Cutner, I *can* supply you with the printed account of the seance as taken down in shorthand by the secretary of Mr. Harry Price—he was then Director of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research—together with comments by an R.A.F. officer who came from Cardington, where the airship was built, specially to compare the protocol with the Air Ministry's findings after the official inquiry. He agrees that the statements made by the medium—said to have come direct from the dead Commander of the airship, Flight Lieutenant Irwin—were consistent with the Air Ministry's Report.

The seance took place *two days* after the crash and long before the official inquiry was held. No one at the seance knew anything about airships, nor expected any contact with Irwin. Being myself an Airship Commander in the first world war, I knew Irwin personally (we used to fly the same 'ship on alternate patrols over the Aegean), and so I am well acquainted with his distinctive manner of speech. He always spoke very quickly in

clipped, jerky sentences, which was the way his voice came through, according to Harry Price. I am quite convinced—and so was the R.A.F. officer who examined the Report—that no one could possibly use or understand the highly technical terms used by the medium unless he was an expert in airship construction or a pilot.

Here are some examples of what I mean: "Ship badly swinging—starboard strakes started." Now, could a woman who did not know one end of an airship from the other, possibly know that airships were always referred to as "ships" and that nautical terms were always used, such as "starboard strakes"?

Or again: "Engines too heavy,—airscrews too small"; "The bore capacity was entirely inadequate to the volume of structure"; "This exorbitant scheme of carbon and hydrogen is absolutely wrong"; "Useful lift too small—elevator jammed"; "Greater lifting than helium"; "Flying too low altitude—unable to rise—same with S.L. 8—tell Eckner."

S.L. 8 was afterwards verified as the number of a German airship, "S.L." standing for "Schutte Lanz." Dr Eckner was the constructor of the Graf Zeppelin. Irwin would have known this but Mrs. Garrett could not possibly have known it.

Other statements made were: "Fabric all water-logged and ship's nose down—unable to rise. Cannot trim. New type of feed wrong. Almost scraped the roofs of Achy." Every statement was afterwards verified as correct. Achy is not shown on ordinary maps but only on large-scale flying maps such as Irwin had.

Finally: "At Inquiry to be held later it will be found that the superstructure of the envelope contained no resilience and had far too much weight." The R.101 was the *most rigid* airship ever constructed and its envelope was considered by experts to be too heavy.

Mr. Price concludes with this statement: "The medium has never possessed any sort of engine or motor car and knows nothing about aeronautics or engineering. The conversation of Irwin was packed with terms that few men could reel off with any degree of relevancy—and *every term used was relevant*. Thought transference can be ruled out. Not one of us was thinking about the disaster; not one of us had any technical knowledge of airships or their engines; the name of Irwin had not been mentioned, nor the disaster discussed."

I am sending Mr. Cutner the particulars he requires (and seems to expect!) although I do not care twopence whether he, or anyone else, is impressed by the records of the Irwin seance. All I know is that it has given me a desire to inquire further into this problem.

Spiritualism practised as a religion and a money-grabbing racket revolts me, but psychic phenomena as a subject for scientific research interests me a great deal. Mr. Cutner will doubtless scoff at whatever evidence is put before him—in fact, he admits he is a 99 per cent. scoffer!—and he is, of course, entitled to scoff if it pleases him to do so. I certainly do not follow his argument when he suggests that "energy" should be produced from *dead* bodies in order to disprove Materialism. Can he not realise that *it is* this mysterious energy, or life-force that animates the physical body and only when it is withdrawn does the body die? So how can he expect to find it there *after* death. My problem is to discover what happens to that energy, or force, after it leaves the body. I do not see how it can just disappear into nothingness.

Mr. Cutner is also entitled to indulge his sense of humour on comic professors who can so easily be bamboozled by conjurers, but I have never met one of them, and I defy him to produce one single conjuror

or other trickster who can imitate Mrs. Garrett's "performance" at the Irwin seance. People who talk in this way and deride scientific investigators like Dr. Rhine and Mr. Harry Price are not likely to influence anyone whose mentality is even slightly above that of a child of six.

So now it is up to Mr. Cutner to tear Mr. Price's report to shreds. As for the Air Ministry's official report, it is *his* job to get hold of that, not mine; but I cannot help wondering what he, and all other orthodox Free-thinkers, would really have thought if I had been unable to produce for his inspection this report of the Irwin seance. No doubt they would all have concluded that it was just a lovely dream—or nightmare from their points of view!

W. H. WOOD.

LAST MOMENTS

(Concluded from page 246)

Some deaths among the ancients are remembered as being peculiarly appropriate. Thus Anacreon choked himself with a grape-stone. Petronius opened his veins and bled himself to death, amusing himself until nature was exhausted by listening to love verses, jocular stories, and laughable epigrams. T. Pomponius Atticus, in his seventy-seventh year, when he found himself attacked by an incurable illness, called his friends around and asked them if they could show any reason why he should not die, as he chose to do, by voluntary starvation. Lucretius was alleged to have died by his own hand, but the story is not without suspicion of having been concocted by some enemy of the Epicureans, as it first appears in the Eusebian chronicle. Epicurus himself is stated to have been afflicted with sever sufferings, aggravated by stone in the bladder. Yet from Diogenes Laertius we learn that he bore his sufferings with a truly philosophical patience, cheerfulness, and courage, and passed away in peace.

King Darius is said to have commanded, as he was expiring, that the following words should be inscribed on his tomb: "I could drink much wine and be sober." Probably that was a famous qualification in his day. Far different is the epitaph ascribed to Cyrus. "O, man! whatsoever thou art, and whencesoever thou comest, thou wilt come to the same condition in which I now am. I am Cyrus, who brought the empire to the Persians; do not envy me, I beseech thee, this little piece of ground which covereth my body." Similarly the Emperor Septimius Severus placed this inscription on his urn: "Thou soon wilt be the habitation of a man the world was too narrow for."

Sydney Smith says: "It seems necessary that great people should die with some sonorous and quotable saying." Mr. Pitt said something not intelligible in his last moments. G. Rose made it out to be: "Save my country, heaven!" The nurse, on being interrogated, said that he asked for barley water. Mr. Foote, in his *Infidel Death-Beds*, has, of course, alluded to Goethe's cry for "More light!" upon which so much has been written. The meaning, of course, was purely physical. Still more absurd is the exclamation of Kant's biographer upon Kant's last phrase, "It is enough." "Mighty and symbolic words!" They probably alluded to the attentions he was receiving.

If the last words of eminent men are often invested with a significance they do not possess, there are no doubt instances of striking expressions having been used at the lightning before death. "Draw the curtain, the farce is played," is credibly ascribed to Rabelais, whose con-

fessor declared that he died drunk. Ignatius Loyola died with the word of his society, "Jesus," on his lips. Edmund Kean's last words on the stage were: "Othello's occupation's gone—I am dying, speak to them for me." Judge Talford died on the bench while remarking that the chief thing required in English society was sympathy 'tween class and class. Muhammed died declaring: "I come among my fellow labourers on high." Scott's oft-recited last words of Marmion were taken from an actual incident in Scottish history. The words of Latimer at the stake, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as shall never be put out," are a part of English history, and will be remembered as long as the Church of Rome endures.

There are many instances, also, of the ruling passion strong in death, from the gaming pedestrian who offered, when an angel, to fly the parson for fifty pounds aside, to Napoleon Bonaparte, whose last words were "tête d'armée." Bentham died like a true Utilitarian. He said to a favourite disciple: "I now feel that I am dying; our care must be taken to minimise the pain. Do not let any one of the servants come into the room, and keep away the youths; it will be distressing to them, and they can be of no service. Yet I must not be alone; you will remain with me, and you only, and then we shall have reduced the pain to the lowest possible amount." When the end came, he died imperceptibly without struggle or suffering. Life faded into death as twilight blends day with night.

"Give Dayrolles a chair" were the last words of Lord Chesterfield. Even more urbane was the merry monarch, Charles II, who thought not of his many sins, but apologised to his attendants for the trouble he was causing. He confessed he had been a most unconscionable time in dying, and hoped they would excuse him.

Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood, made observation on his pulse almost until it ceased to beat. Bayle, the sceptic, died in harness. So much did he despise life that he would not be persuaded to take anything that might assuage the heat of a slow fever that long had preyed on him. He spent the great part of the night that he died correcting what he had written against Le Clerc, and, just as he had finished his correction, he expired. Petrarch was found dead in his study with his head reclining on a book, as was his wont when studying. William Blake, in the hour of death, lay chanting songs, the music and the verse rippling impromptu from him. He regretted he could not commit those inspirations, as he called them, to paper. "Kate," he said to his faithful wife who consecrated her life to aiding his genius, "I am a changing man—I always rose and wrote down my thoughts, whether it rained, snowed, or shone, and you arose, too, and sat beside me—this can be no longer." Cunningham, in his *Lives of the Painters*, says that his wife, who sat watching him, did not perceive when he ceased breathing.

Haydn, just before death, played his famous "Hymn to the Emperor." Most striking of all were the last moments of Mozart. Calling his friends around him, with them he sung his grand "Requiem." "Did I not tell you it would be my dirge," said the dying musician, and so passed away in melody.

The Chevalier Bayard, when mortally wounded, ordered that he should be laid down with his face to the enemy, saying: "Having never yet turned back to a foe, I will not begin on the last day of my life." When Sir Charles James Napier lay dying, Mr. McMurdo, his son-in-law, seized the shattered, shot-torn fragments of the colours of the 22nd, and waved them over the expiring

warrior. A grim smile of satisfaction crossed his face, and so he passed away.

Dying in public has no doubt tended to bring out self-consciousness. John Barnveld, the Dutch statesman, falsely accused of a design to betray Holland to the King of Spain, spoke with dignity before his execution: "I am no traitor. I have administered with justice, and as a good patriot I die." Sir Thomas More was serene until the last. Seeing the scaffold totter, he is reported to have said: "I pray you, Mr. Lieutenant, see me safe up. As for my coming down, I will shift for myself." Stephen Dolet, burnt as an Atheist in 1546, is said to have been heedless of the confessor, and to have joked until the last. To him is attributed the pun, "*Non Dolet ipse Dolet, sed pia turba dolet* (Dolet does not grieve, but the pious crowd grieves)." Lucilio Vanini, also burnt as an Atheist (1649), reminded his executioners that their saviour died in despair, while he died undaunted. Had Boureau-Deslandes, who relates these and other stories, lived until after the French Revolution, he might have added many other instances. The Girondists went to the guillotine singing:—

"Contre nous de la tyrannie,
Le couleau sanglant est levé."

André Chenier is said to have recited the first scene of Racine's *Andromaque* on the road to the guillotine with his friend Roucher. "You tremble," said someone to the aged Bailley as he ascended the fatal steps (Nov. 11, 1793). "Tis with the cold," he replied. The apostrophe of Madame Roland to the statue of Liberty, erected for a fête near the scene of execution, is known by all.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

AFFIRMING IN 1949

If readers believe affirming instead of taking the oath 61 years after the passing of the Bradlaugh Oaths Act (1888) is now taken as a matter of course, the following will sadly disillusion them. Here is an "editorial" from the *Royal Leamington Spa Courier* of June, 1949:—

The Mayor's Parlour was on Monday morning the scene of what is believed to be an unprecedented happening in Leamington. A new magistrate, on being sworn in, did so by affirmation instead of taking the oath usually subscribed to by Christians. Normally, new magistrates take the customary oaths in court—in the presence of the public—but on this occasion, for reasons which have not been given, the formalities were carried out behind closed doors. There is, of course, nothing irregular in this for it is not laid down that a public ceremony should take place. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that in these special circumstances the usual procedure, scrupulously followed at the Quarter Sessions, was not observed. Mr. E. V. C. Crumpton was the magistrate whose oath had no religious significance. He is a trade union official, and was, presumably, nominated to the office of Justice of the Peace by the Labour Party. We feel the townspeople are entitled to be told of this incident.

Mr. Crumpton's reply:—

A NEW J.P. AND HIS OATH

Sir.—My attention has been called to a paragraph in the "*Courier*" which makes reference in hushed tones to an incident which took place behind "closed doors." In this connection my name is mentioned as a Trade Union official and a nominee of the Labour Party.

It is not clear whether exception is taken to the fact that I created a precedent, to my association with the Trade Union and Labour Party, or to the "closed door" incident, but I can envisage all three reasons being anathema to the "*Courier*."

In any case there was ample time for all the facts to have been ascertained prior to publication. Possibly that could have lessened the news value.

The facts are as follows: Prior to May 30 I informed Mr. Martin, the magistrates' clerk, that I desired to affirm instead of taking the usual oaths. This fact was com-

municated to the magistrates present prior to the Court sitting.

The Mayor (Councillor Wallsgrove) asked me whether I would prefer to affirm in the Court or in the room in which we were then assembled. I replied to the effect that I did not mind which course was adopted. The Mayor then decided, and no objection was raised by anyone present, that my affirmation and the oaths of the other three new magistrates should be taken in the Mayor's Parlour.

This statement should remove any impression, implied if not stated, that I had any personal hesitation about publicly declaring the fact that I have no religious beliefs.

E. V. CRUMPTON.

Finally, we append Mr. Crumpton's letter to *The Freethinker*:—

Sir,—Enclosed are portions of a local newspaper which comments upon the fact that upon my recent appointment as a magistrate I created a precedent by affirming instead of taking the usual oaths. It implies also that this was such a shocking thing that it had to be done behind closed doors. Certainly the Mayor, as Chairman of the magistrates, appeared to be rather shocked and twice made reference to the difficulties, each time being corrected by the magistrates' clerk and myself. Finally the Mayor, after asking my permission, announced to the other magistrates who were present, that as an Atheist I proposed to affirm instead of taking the usual oaths, and that he proposed to take my affirmation and the oaths of the other new magistrates in the room in which we were then situated, instead of in the open Court.

The newspaper paragraph was, I think, mainly intended to damage the standing of the local Labour Party with which I have been associated in various voluntary official capacities for about 30 years. In order to offset this my reply, also enclosed, was considerably modified, although the majority of people with whom I associate are fully aware of my views on religion.

I thought that the paragraph in question might be of interest to you as an illustration of the press attitude to a public declaration of a lack of religious beliefs. The editor of this newspaper is a prominent churchgoer and was acquainted with my opinions.

Yours sincerely,

E. V. CRUMPTON.

We are pleased to give publicity to the way the religious mind still works and Freethinkers should ever be on their guard against such religious bigotry. Mr. Crumpton is to be congratulated on his fine stand.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. KAY, BROADY and BILLING.
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street (bombed site), Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.
North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
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.
West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: MESSRS. E. BRYANT, F. WOOD and E. PAGE.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Spectre of Malthus," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.
Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWART and J. HUMPHREY.

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