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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Meaning of History

HOW many books have been written to tell us the real meaning of history I have no means of computing, but they must run into thousands, and I do not think it unfair to say that most of us are as much in the dark as ever. The meaning of history, as given to us by so many eminent writers, depends on their own likes and dislikes, and on their particular bias.

Broadly speaking, it appears to me that if history has any lesson at all for us it is to show the way to a better standard of living for mankind in general. The trouble begins when eminent men and women tell us how to bring this about. Here, for example, is Prof. Benjamin Farrington's Conway Memorial Lecture, "Has History a Meaning?" in which he gives at first a very broad survey of some of the writers in the past who have attempted to explain history before coming to the eminent Italian jurist Vico (1668-1744) who, according to Prof. Farrington, was the first, or one of the first, who saw the true light.

The trouble here is that it is by no means easy to get hold of the English translations of Vico's *Autobiography* and his *New Science*, and I for one am by no means disposed to accept, without reading for myself, somebody else's interpretation of a man's work—for reasons which will presently be apparent.

Some of us feel, and have so felt ever since we entered the Freethought movement, that whatever history has to teach us in the way of economics, it must mean very little if we become enslaved to a totalitarian system or any other similar high-sounding name. The people who advocate this, hate the word liberty and loathe the word freedom, and I was not altogether surprised to find Prof. Farrington's lecture omitted any reference to these words. He may not of course have known it, but these Memorial Lectures are supposed to be given to perpetuate the memory of Moncure Conway, one of the finest of all Freethinkers. Often, on hearing them, I have not been surprised to find that Conway might never have lived at all as far as any reference to him or his work is given by the eminent lecturers.

It appears that the American sociologists who have given us the new edition of Vico's works "attempt to stress the influence Vico has had on the development of historical science among the different nations of the modern world and come in the end to the conclusion that its real future lies not with any particular nation but with the international movement of Marxism." Prof. Farrington has every right to advocate Marxism, but when I heard his lecture I waited to see if he would clearly define what he meant by the term and he did not do so. I was not surprised.

Like the term "dialectical materialism," Marxism is handled about as if everybody knew what it was, and as if its exponents were in perfect harmony with each other. I venture to say that Marxists differ as to its meaning

just as much as Christians differ as to what true Christianity really means.

We are always told that Marx himself declared that he was *not* a Marxist and I invite Prof. Farrington to tell us exactly what he meant? Is Marxism that of Stalin or of Trotsky? Is it the Marxism of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, of the Communist Party, of Tito—or even that of the late Prof. Harold Laski who was rightly considered one of the intellectual heads of Marxism. I make special mention of Prof. Laski because he always insisted that he was a Marxist, but in his own book on Karl Marx, exposed "the weakness of Marx's logic and the groundlessness of his assumptions."

Then there is what is known as the "revisionist" Marxism, that of Ed. Bernstein and his followers, and the various pathetic attempts made by Engels after Marx's death to tell us what Marx really meant. And what about our own War Minister, Mr. John Strachey, in the days when he was such an ardent Communist? He wrote a book on Socialism but advised his readers not to trouble too much about the first 100 pages of Marx's *Capital* as they were "obscure."

I stress all this because Prof. Farrington cannot conceive of any "reformed" education without "a liberal admixture of the classics of Marxism." Though he gives us the titles of many books, he does not tell us which are these "classics," an omission I greatly deplore. It would have been most instructive to learn how many Marxists agreed with him as to whether they were really classics, or whether there were other Marxian classics in complete disagreement with the contents of his own list.

Prof. Farrington dismisses the work of Frazer with the utmost contempt, and he appears to do the same with Darwin. He quotes Marx's "familiar" footnote to *Capital*, where Marx seems to care little or nothing at all for Darwin's magnificent work on the Evolution theory because Darwin did not give "equal attention" to the "productive organs of man." Prof. Farrington tells us that this footnote is "so packed with ideas" that we must have found it difficult to follow—a claim that is made for nearly anything Marx wrote. All I see in the note is Marx's intense jealousy of Darwin who had become world famous without troubling too much about "capitalist production" as being the great motive force in man's rise from the lower animals.

In any case, it seems incredible that any one purporting to tell us what is the meaning of history should omit all reference to the work of Malthus. As I have already said, if history cannot show us how to improve our standard of living, its message can mean precious little for the average working man. Malthus showed how population pressed on the means of subsistence and insisted that no matter how far "political justice" dominated in any country, the real problem was always the production of good and cheap food. The Malthusian problem of population is, of course, denied by all conforming Marxists no matter to which brand of Marxism they owe allegiance, but it is there none the less. To provide food for an expanding population in a world that

cannot itself expand is the great problem confronting us, and the history Prof. Farrington supports—dominated completely by Marxism—cannot help us.

*Has History a Meaning?* is published by Watts and Co., at 2s. net. It should be read by all interested in its leading problems and no doubt will cause heated controversy. This is all to the good for progress can never be achieved by mere complacency.

H. CUTNER.

## LET'S LEGALISE VOLUNTARY MEDICAL EUTHANASIA

WE have all read or heard of the act, in December of 1949, of Dr. Hermann N. Sander, of New Hampshire, in speeding the death of Mrs. Abbie C. Borroto, a cancer patient, who was under his care; and we have heard or read of the deed of Carol Ann Paight, in September of that year, in putting an end to the life of her cancer-doomed father.

Dr. Sander and Carol Ann Paight undeniably acted "outside the law." Nevertheless, if the cancer-tortured Mrs. Borroto did not expressly request Dr. Sander to end her life, she made it very clear to him that her suffering was intolerable. And it is admitted that Police Sergeant Carl W. Paight, a man who was greatly liked and respected by the people of his home town, was saved by his daughter from "very severe pain" over a period of time that might have lasted three months.

I would not deny that medical euthanasia should never be given without the request or the tacit consent of incurable sufferers, except in the case of babes, children, and adolescents, and also of adults who, for one reason or another, are mentally incompetent. Certainly, however, medical euthanasia for the purpose of ending unbearable physical suffering for which there is no remedy should never be denied to any who ask for it; nor, after due precautions against fraud and abuse, should it be withheld from any infant or child or adolescent or mentally incompetent adult whose relatives or legal guardians request it. Voluntary medical euthanasia, which, for obvious reasons, should always be extended to include these last-named classes of patients, is rational, enlightened, and humane. It is an act of the highest mercy. It is a deed of compassion for which legal authority should long ago have been provided by every state in this Republic.

There are men and women who, either actively or passively, oppose the legalisation of voluntary medical euthanasia with the saying: "While there's life there's hope." At the present stage of medical knowledge there was for Mrs. Borroto and for Police Sergeant Paight no means, immediate or in prospect, of restoring them to health. They had no choice between living and not living. They had a choice only between two ways of dying, the one good, the other bad. The words "while there's life there's hope" give no comfort to a human being who lies upon a bed of agony and who knows that, if no cure is quickly found, he or she will be dead in a few days or in several weeks or months, or that, in any case, his or her affliction is too grave for remedy. A certain American physician, writing in opposition to medical euthanasia, has said:—

" 'Hopeless' or 'incurable' disease is an out-moded medical concept. We have seen in our lifetime a great number of 'incurable' diseases become curable. Cancer may be curable the day after an

application for euthanasia." (Dr. Martin Gumpert in "The Nation"; January 28, 1950.)

This argument is far removed from sound reasoning and reality. A person who is pain-racked by a terminal cancer *to-day* can in no way be benefited by the fact that a cure for cancer *may* be discovered to-morrow.

The conviction that the physician should not be authorised by the State, even under proper safeguards and controls, to give medical euthanasia even to adult patients of sound mind who request this stroke of mercy which we never hesitate to bestow on a fatally sick or injured dog or cat, is invariably, though, perhaps, not always consciously, bound up with the belief that there is a God and that that God will or may hold to account anyone who accepts or who gives a mercy-death. None of us asked for life, nor did any of us want life. None of us, before he or she was conceived, had any need or desire for life on even the best of terms. Hence none of us is a God's personal property; and, therefore, not even a God could justly require a human being to endure severe pain or extreme misery here or elsewhere. It is the unequivocal right of any person so situated to decide for himself whether to end his suffering by self-inflicted death or by means of medical euthanasia at the hands of a physician. Only a fool would think it wrong or cowardly to throw aside a useless and intolerable burden he had not voluntarily assumed.

Moreover, the existence of a God—any kind of God—is neither a self-evident fact nor a demonstrated truth and the atheist and the agnostic have at least as good reasons for their non-belief as the theist or the pantheist has for his belief. One of the best of reasons for the disbelief of the atheist and for the indecision or suspension of judgment of the agnostic is that, in most cases, dying human beings and also dying non-human animals suffer greatly. It is not rationally thinkable that a God who willed or desires that this shall be. A God's goodness would not be essentially different from human goodness. A God would not be human; but any deity, if completely good, would certainly be humane.

In 1929, Richard Corbett, of France, was acquitted by a jury of farmers for having ended with a bullet the life of his cancer-tortured mother. The judge had previously said to him: "It was for God, not you, to decide whether your mother should have died." The jurors were wiser than the jurist. The judge's assertion, in one form or another, is the one most frequently voiced by opponents of legalised voluntary medical euthanasia.

Only the *positive* knowledge that there is a God and that he appoints a time for human death could excuse, though it could not possibly justify—opposition to voluntary medical euthanasia, opposition which is very seldom voiced by persons who are undergoing severe or incurable bodily suffering. To subject an irremediably diseased human being to prolonged physical torture and mental anguish merely because of a *belief* is the quintessence of stupidity. To allow this hideous sacrifice upon the altar of a hypothetical deity is to renounce the use and authority of reason. It is a barbaric anachronism that would excite the non-believer to laughter if it did not move him to tears.

Many opponents of the legalisation of voluntary medical euthanasia have quoted in support of their stance the command in Exodus: "Thou shalt not kill." Apart from the fact that, for obvious reasons, this Biblical injunction was not intended to be inclusive of every reason or motive for the taking of human life, the burden of proof lies heavy indeed, upon one who asserts the divine origin of the Ten Commandments. Comparative

few educated and cultured men and women of to-day regard the Old Testament as being, either whole or in part or in any sense, the "Word" of a God. One of the principal reasons for this is that we may also read in Exodus the following two pronouncements: "... whosoever doeth any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death," and "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." These two commands, along with many other savagely cruel Biblical passages, are attributed to the alleged God who is said to have handed down The Decalogue.

Truly, no dying human being is under obligation of any kind to endure excruciating physical distress, and, consequently, no physician is under obligation of any sort to deny to such a person a quick and painless death. This was tacitly admitted by those 379 Protestant and Jewish clergymen who, in 1949, publicly supported a proposed law before the Legislature of the State of New York "to permit voluntary medical euthanasia for incurable sufferers, when authorised by a Court of Record, upon receipt of a signed and attested petition from the patient and after an investigation of the case by a medical committee designated by the Court." Whether they would admit it or not, the action of these ministers and rabbis proved that they are at the least agnostics; for assuredly it goes without saying that no deity would be so greatly limited in power as to be unable to prevent distressful dying for man or beast.

It is true that these men of church and synagogue said that voluntary medical euthanasia in cases of extreme physical suffering "is in accord with the highest concepts and practices of religion"; but it is clear that all that they meant by the word "religion" was "ethical and moral ideals." And it has been abundantly proved that morals and ethics are of purely social origin; that they are a natural development of group-living; and that they receive no worthy support from supernatural beliefs and hopes and fears. American atheists and agnostics are conspicuous for their very great rarity in American penal institutions; yet though most of them, because of social or economic considerations, conceal their non-belief from the general public, they are now so numerous and they manage to spread their non-belief so effectively that priests, preachers and prelates frequently inveigh against them as a class.

(To be concluded.)

ROBERT H. SCOTT.

## THOUGHTS ON RELIGION

### VII

THE theory of the Word or the Logos as expressed in the New Testament has received considerable attention through the centuries. A study of the meaning and the possible sources of the theory, which is briefly stated in the writings of the Apostle John, furnishes evidence for the conclusion that it is a Christian expression of a subject of Greek philosophy and that the traditional translation of the word Logos in some parts of the Greek text of the New Testament by the Latin *verbum*, the French *verbe*, the Italian and Spanish *verbo*, and the English *word* may be incorrect, since none of these words have the meaning of Logos when it is used to denote reason, thought, or principle. The first written language of Christianity was Greek; and besides the New Testament there was a great amount of early church literature written in Greek. However, the Greek of the New Testament has had little popular influence because few people

except the Greeks have understood Greek; and I doubt if it has had much influence on Christian scholars for the same reason. When Rome became the centre of the Christian world, Latin became the language of Christianity and the Bible was translated into Latin; and in the present case we have an example of how Latin theologians established for *verbum* a special theological meaning which has been followed in other European languages even though some translations of the Bible have been made directly from the Hebrew and the Greek.

More than four hundred years before the founding of Christianity, the Greek philosophers had thought that the creative principle of the world was mind or reason. It would appear that Anaxagoras, who died in 438 B.C., was the first philosopher known to have conceived the creative principle to mind. Later philosophers called the principle, wisdom and reason. The conception of a reasonable or intelligent creative principle endured among the Greeks and the Roman students of their philosophies until the second century A.D., and perhaps later. At any rate, Marcus Aurelius, 121-180 A.D., who was one of the best of Stoic philosophers, described the disposing or guiding reason by which all things come into being and run their course. Again, he wrote of how every material thing quickly vanishes into the substance of the whole, how every cause is quickly absorbed into the reason of the whole, and how the remembrance of everything is quickly buried in eternity.

While the work of Marcus Aurelius was not published during his lifetime and therefore, did not affect his contemporaries, his philosophy regarding the creative principle of reason indicates what the Greek Stoics thought in this matter when the New Testament may be supposed to have been written.

No doubt John had some knowledge of Greek philosophy and derived from it the theory that Christ was the principle of reason by which the world was made. From this standpoint, the Christian theory of the Word is an innovation on a Greek theory; and an examination of early Christian literature reveals that there were many fantastic and decadent interpretations of Greek philosophical ideas, including that of a Logos, among the first Christians. Here are the first five verses of John, I:—

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"The same was in the beginning with God.

"All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."

A striking characteristic of this passage is its similarity to the Hebrew account of the creation of the world as related in Genesis, I. The first four verses of this latter Book are quoted below in order to show this similarity:—

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

"And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness."

The passage from John resembles a commentary on these verses. Verse 14 of John, I, shows that the Word is Christ:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

If an analysis is made of John, I, 1-5, there is the question of how, if the Word was God, could it be with God; for a person cannot accompany or be in the presence of himself; and we may suppose that this applies to divinity. However, the reasoning of the writer of this Book is characteristic of Christianity and is the kind of reasoning that has supplied us with Christian theology and the quiddities that have helped to cause wars, persecutions, and intolerance. It is also not clear either in the Greek or in the English translation to whom the pronoun "Him" in verse 3 refers, whether to God, the immediate antecedent, in verse 2 or to *the Word* in verse 1. If it refers to the Word, as I suppose that it does, then the Word, which is Christ, and not God, made the world; and this is in contradiction to Genesis, in which it is written that God made the world. Verses 4 and 5 might be supposed to mean that eternal life was in Christ or God, whoever is meant by *Him*, and that this life was the spiritual light of men; but how the life which is the light of men could shine in a darkness, meaning, no doubt, sinful men or the world of men, which comprehended it not requires a delicate exegesis, the conclusion of which is that such language means little if anything at all. The same method of exegesis applies to verse 14, in which we are told that the Word was made flesh and that God had an only begotten son who was the Word which was God; in other words, God procreated Himself.

WILLIAM RITTENOUR (U.S.A.).

### DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OR THAT STERILE ATTITUDE OF HUMANIST ALOOFNESS

QUITE recently the secretary of a Rationalist movement dealt with the striking fact that, like the majority of the church-goers, the members of British Freethought organisations were mostly aged persons. We must, he rightly suggested, do something to attract the youth whose impetus will result in pushing the movement ahead in a spirited drive.

A disgruntled gentleman was quick in repudiating this very idea. It is the maturity of life experiences, he maintained, that makes the Rationalist. Hence we must remain a select body of wizards, cool-headed and undisturbed by youthful spirit.

Incredible though it be, he remained unchallenged. And yet, even the Churches strive to gain the support of the future generation, knowing that only such movement that has youth's backing has a future. Although I myself belong to the older generation, I readily admit that after two world wars it is mostly our youngsters who are better suited to assess present-day realities. The majority of my generation is apt to use worn-out yardsticks, and if these are obviously at variance with the facts, they withdraw into ivory-towers, one of which is called Humanism.

This term, in frequent use with rationalists, has been applied to so many meanings, that first of all we have to agree upon its genuine significance. To this effect nothing may be better suited than a few remarks on Erasmus, the greatest humanist of the Renaissance.

Contacts with foreign cultures—through trade and the Crusades—had been instrumental in widening the people's outlook; consequently the strait-jacket of mediæval theology was loosened. Free towns sprang up and the development of trading resulted in such a degree of prosperity that the human mind, instead of seeking refuge in imaginary heavens, gladly settled on firm soil: for the

first time in Christianity Man and human concerns were focused. Humanism then is that system of thought or action concerned with merely human interests (or with those of humanity in general), and since in the course of those studies the humanists searched the writings of classical heathendom, first of all Greek and Roman literature, a classical scholar in general is also called a humanist.

This was the setting into which Erasmus was born; his story is told in Charles Reade's novel "The Cloister and the Hearth," so a brief sketch will suffice here.

As of illegitimate birth, he had no surname; his first name, Erasmus, he assimilated to a fancied Greek original with a Latinised doublet of "Desyderius." He finally styled himself Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (a native of Rotterdam), albeit he most certainly was born in his father's native town of Gouda.

When he was twenty, Bartolomeo Diaz reached the Cape of Good Hope; when Colombus discovered the outposts of the New World, Erasmus was ordained a priest. In quick succession more discoveries were made; the world—and with it human knowledge—physically expanded. "Why do all those silly names (of nations) separate us more than we are united in the name of Christ?" Erasmus exclaims (*Querela pacis*).

For a long time dependent on the benevolence of patrons for the leisure he wanted in order to satisfy his ardent craving for learning, he mostly eked out his living by taking pupils; he travelled about the continent extensively, teaching privately and studying wherever he went. But he refused offers of preferment from many countries, because he was determined, at all costs, to maintain what he considered his liberty. Though honoured by all the members of a papal circle, he wrote, when in London with his friend Thomas More, a satire in which kings, popes, bishops and the like, all came under his lash. In order to evade the Dominicans and Franciscans united for once in their enmity to the now classic learning, he went to Basel in 1529, until disturbances there led to the triumph of the reformers. To avoid the religious dissensions he moved temporarily to Freiburg, a centre of Catholicism ever since, but returned in 1532 to Basle where he edited the *Christian Fathers*. He died in 1536 of dysentery. He had been the friend and correspondent of the foremost men of his time, and more than 3,000 of his letters have survived.

Erasmus had ample opportunities for knowing what was the condition of education in Europe at the end of the 15th century: the cruelties, the ignorance of many of the professional schoolmasters, the futile sophistries, the subtleties into which learning frequently degenerated, the obscurantism and prejudice of many of the higher clergy. Considering Reason to be the only guide of life, the supreme arbiter of all questions, politics and religion included, he took the greatest care to keep out of the clashes and disputes. The humanists considered themselves a select group of spiritual aristocrats, writing in Latin, so as to keep apart from the vulgar masses; they repudiated the "narrowness of party" and recoiled from the violence of fanaticism.

Powerful friends, including the Pope, called Erasmus to declare against Luther, but he remained neutral—exposed to the obloquy of Protestants and Catholics alike. Both sides accused him of cowardice and insincerity, because he insisted in maintaining the "Middle Road." He never left the Church of Rome, though he refused to enlist in its service against the Reformers. When the controversies remained restricted to disputes between clerics, the humanists took up

benevolent attitude; but when it became clear that behind the disputes there were materialistic issues, involving the emancipation of the illiterate masses, they recoiled in disgust and horror. It was men's minds only that were eligible for emancipation, and this scope had to be limited to the educated circles. In the end, the upholders of the old order fell upon him as the author of all the new troubles, and the Lutherans, on the other hand, bitterly assailed him for what they deemed his inconsistency and wavering. When he attacked one of the fundamental positions of the Lutheran theology—that all human action was determined by divine necessity—he was ridiculed by men like Hutten on the one side, and by the Sorbonne—the great surviving stronghold of obscurantism—on the other.

However outstanding an individual may seem to be, he is but a tiny cog that cannot stand apart when all the wheels are moving. Man can only be man as a member of human society, and the individualist makes the mistake of attributing to man apart from society thoughts, purposes and rights which he only has (and only can have) as a member of society. Man cannot live and be an individuality apart from social relations and social obligations. Much as he may abhor the distortion of his ideals in real life, he has to take sides.

Erasmus, Luther and the others were unable to recognise the unity of Freedom and Necessity (Determinism); the dilemma reflects the dualism of present-day society with the manual producer of wealth on one side and on the other the thinker who fears contact with the material world. It is not to be solved by philosophical cunning or by means of "Common Sense" or mystified "Reason." Nothing less will do but a Social Act, the reconstruction of society which destroys simultaneously the false halves of one unnatural whole. Only then will Humanism become possible.

PERCY GORDON ROY.

**CONTRACEPTION**

THE religious conception of the unfulness of the flesh implicit in W. O. Bowers' article on contraception would almost incline one to agree with Bernard Shaw's statement: "Scratch a Freethinker and you find a Plymouth Brethren," if one thought that the attitude Mr. Bowers displays was in any way typical of the mentality of Freethinkers generally. In his book "Sin and Sex" the late Robert Briffault conclusively demonstrates the Christian origin of W. O. Bowers' apparent moral standpoint, and I refer him to this work for further enlightenment.

In 1947, the Stationery Office published a Statistical Review for the years 1938 and 1939 which contained some very interesting statistics concerning extra marital sexual relations. It appears that in those years nearly 20 per cent. of mothers conceived their first child outside marriage, and between 40 and 50 per cent. of mothers under 20 were pregnant before marriage. These statistics would seem to demonstrate that the gratification of natural desires outside sexual convention has very little to do with the availability of contraceptives and, what is more, they apply to a period before the late war which, our ecclesiastical moralists (ordained or otherwise) assure us, has brought a further decline in sexual "morality." In fact, the figures show that more knowledge and greater use of contraceptives might lead to a considerable decline in the number of unwanted children.

Your contributor's assertion that contraceptive slot machines would be stimulative of "impure" thoughts

in the minds of children and youths borders on the ridiculous. To be logical he should also demand the abolition of those shops which display books on sexual matters as prominently as possible, for surely—accepting for the moment the truth of his assertion—they, by the often lurid nature of their covers, would be a much greater temptation to "illicit" speculation and behaviour than a rather drab-looking slot machine. And while he is at it why does he not advocate the banning of nude works of art, all kissing, or displays of love in public, on the stage or screen, all sex instruction in schools—partially gained after bitter fights with the religionists—for surely, all these too tend to provoke "whispering" as to what they mean and "suggestive turns to the conversation between older youths and girls."

Also, it seems peculiar that he should be so insistent upon the possible lack of women with no sexual experience and of the fact that he has "yet to meet a man who did not expect his own wife to be innocent of previous sexual intercourse." It would appear that he accepts that double standard of morality admirably depicted in Maugham's story, "The Colonel's Lady," i.e., that it is quite all right for a man to have a mistress, but that it is the deepest sin for his wife to have a lover. That is the only conclusion one can draw from his concern over the "innocence of women, but not of men." Apparently the idea of woman as a sexual commodity (pure and untarnished for the use of cash-on-delivery purchasers only) has yet to be discarded even by certain professed Freethinkers. The fact is that many unions are wrecked because the woman has no authentic experience of sexual relations (and very often no correct theoretical knowledge either), and consequently is shocked and repelled by her discovery after her marriage is, one assumes, considered by Mr. Bowers to be below his essentially reactionary and Christian notice.

S. E. PARKER.

**PRONOUNCEMENTS AND PREDICAMENTS**

I showed Mary some Calvary Clover and said: "Look, they say that red stain was made by the blood of Christ." And Mary laughed up at me and said: "Silly, it's such a small stain, it really doesn't spoil it!"

The vicar's wife, it seems, had "one night of horror" on the platform. She found herself, one evening, on Ullminster Station with half-an-hour to wait. The platform was dark, and the vicaress feared that sin might be lurking in the shadows. Her inspiration had been to buy privacy and protection for a penny. But when the train steamed in, she couldn't get out of the closet. There was a lot of noise, and she couldn't make the one porter hear until the train had left. Now the porter was one of "nature's gentlemen," and he tried to be tactful by pretending to be interested only in the technicalities of the case. He insisted on showing the vicar's wife what had gone wrong with the lock. In the end—they were both locked in. And there was no prospect of release till the morning. So they both had to stand all night! He, because he was a gentleman and couldn't sit down while a lady was standing; and she, because she was the wife of a minister of God and couldn't take "that seat" in front of a gentleman!

In the convent, the nuns always called hairs in the soup "eye-lashes."

One afternoon, some vacuum-cleaner salesman called at the progressive school, and a little girl, who was in the nude, answered the door. He took one look at her and said: "Good God." And she said: "I'm sorry, there's no such person," and shut the door in his face.

[From a new psychological thriller *Pink Ribbon: As Told to the Police*, by Oswald Blakeston, just published by The Quality Press, 6s.]

## ACID DROPS

**The B.B.C. made a ghastly mistake** the other day—they allowed two Agnostics to poke a little mild fun at the Jonah and Whale story and a Christian speaker, a little reluctantly, to agree with them. This brought an avalanche of protests from Bible believers, one of these, a Mr. Paget, triumphantly pointing out that “two well authenticated cases” of whales swallowing men and disgorging them alive prove that the Grand Old Book is constantly supported by “human experience, natural phenomena and archæological finds.” The authorities are Sir Francis Fox and Sir J. Bland Sutton.

**It is difficult** to keep a straight face when reading this kind of thing even if sponsored by the B.B.C. There is not a scrap of truth in Sir F. Fox's account for it has been exposed as a thumping big lie dozens of times. As for the other authority no direct reference is given and it is quite impossible to check it up. We wonder what that completely irreligious Governor of the B.B.C., referred to recently by Mr. Tom Driberg, thinks of Jonah and the Whale story and this attempt to bolster it up?

**The Dominican student** who tried to introduce a new religion in Notre Dame the other week and had to run for his life from an angry crowd of loving Christians was sent to a lunatic asylum, and later released as he was considered quite sane. Perhaps Jesus Christ also would be sent to a lunatic asylum if he came back with a Trumpet of Glory from Heaven and tried to introduce a new religion in Notre Dame. But whether he would be declared sane afterwards is another matter.

**Exactly why** an engineer or a draper or a master butcher should be considered an authority on religion we have never been able quite to understand, but the *Recorder* proudly puts forward Sir Robert Bristow, a specialist in harbour construction, as an expert also in Christianity. Was “our Lord,” he pathetically asks, a “mistaken fanatic” or “the most profound social philosopher who ever lived?” He does not answer his own stupid question but gives us reasons why we are “put off” religion—reasons which reach the heights of downright silliness.

**One reason** is that “wrong emphasis” is given to the work of Darwin and Huxley; another is “wrong interpretations given to many parts of the Bible”; loss of faith in parliaments, deep divisions between the churches, the craze for speed, are among other reasons—all unadulterated nonsense. If Sir Robert knew as much about the Freethought case as he does about harbours he would know that the real reason is that Christianity is not true. It is just primitive Oriental superstition from beginning to end—and no other reason need be added.

**The “Church Times,”** we are delighted to see, insists that the texts in Matthew which give us such a thrilling picture of “the bodies of saints” arising at the time of the Crucifixion, and going back alive to the towns which buried them dead, are absolutely true. “It is no use trying to explain” them away “because we do not like” them. Hear, hear! The narrative is absolutely clear, and as authentic as the Crucifixion, and Liberal Christians giving it up should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Even the *Tory Recorder* believes every word and that surely is praise enough.

**With the solemnity** befitting its title, the *Schoolmaster* publishes a letter from a Mr. M. W. Tonge in which he says: “In my experience, the teaching of the principle of evolution as the explanation of life to-day definitely leads to atheism.” This revelation has obviously just struck Mr. Tonge, but he is quite right. If he goes on like this he may yet find out that the ancestors of Brumas were not the original pair of bears in the Garden of Eden.

**It appears** that it is not only the Christian God who is losing his grip but Krishna, like Father William, is also getting old. His temple in Ratnagiri (India) was recently burgled and robbed of many gold ornaments.

**The Lord's Day Observance Society** held its 119th Annual Meeting on April 20 last. Among the items discussed was the Brighter Sunday Association which, so “Misery Martin,” the L.D.O.S. Secretary, asserted, was out to smash his Society. The meeting was informed that a draft of the Bill which was to have been introduced in Parliament to legalise Sunday opening of theatres and music halls received a mortal blow at the General Election when no fewer than 417 M.P.s opposed any such proposition. This is considered to be a most important victory in the annals of the L.D.O.S. But also what a revelation of cowardice!

**The “Catholic Herald”** does not like *The God that Failed*, and in particular the contention by Mr. R. Crossman, M.P., that “The Communist, subjecting his soul to the Kremlin, felt something of the release which Catholicism brings to the intellectually wearied.” The “C.H.” gets really angry when Mr. Crossman points out that Catholicism is “totalitarian in outlook” and refutes the charge by stating that the Church holds a mandate from God, and that the Catholic concept of God's authority is reasonable. This seems to us to be as good an answer as any, but still does not explain the many obvious points of similarity between the two creeds.

**We have read** of boxers praying before a fight, we have also heard of an Irishman singing a hymn after a successful boxing match. But the Spanish boxer, Romero, will go one better when next he enters the ring. He is to have a piece of cloth which has been in contact with a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary sewn into his fighting trunks! We would still back any boxer with a lucky horseshoe in his glove against any prayers, hymns or holy rags.

**The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel** is badly in need of 72 priests, 39 laymen, and 79 women to fill vacancies they have abroad. Somehow or other God's call is not quite so easily heard these days. Lots and lots more money is also needed if “the bishops overseas” are not to be “disappointed”—though we have an idea that any money forthcoming would be of far more use here than to bolster up a dying superstition in native kraals.

## THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW—

Why did not Lord Ammon, former Chairman of the Docks Labour Board, who thinks that religion is the only solution to our troubles, suggest sending parsons instead of soldiers in the latest docks strike?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

G. WARREN, J. HUMPHREY.—Many thanks for cuttings.

T. BROWN.—We always appreciate news cuttings, particularly from the smaller local papers. The favour is enhanced if friends will mark them with the title and date of the issues.

*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.*

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.

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

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The business sessions of the National Secular Society Conference in The Grand Hotel, Sheffield, on Whit-Sunday, is for members of the Society only, they can speak and vote on resolutions. Non-members of the Society can attend the reception on the Saturday in the same hotel at 7-30 p.m., and the Public Demonstration in the City Memorial Hall, Barkers' Pool, on Sunday evening at 7 p.m., to which admission is free, with some reserved seats at one shilling each. The reserved seat tickets may be had from the local secretary, Mr. A. Samms, 18, Junction Road, Woodhouse, Sheffield, cash with order please.

For the information of readers in the Darlington district, Mr. J. T. Brighton will visit Darlington to-day, May 14, and speak from the Market Steps at 3 p.m. on "Man and His Gods," and at 7 p.m. in The Labour Hall, Garden Street, on "Is Sunday Sacred?" Mr. Brighton hopes to restore the Darlington Branch N.S.S. and will those willing to help hand in their name and address to Mr. Brighton, or to Mr. W. Spencer, 3, Aldan Street, Darlington. But in any case turn up at both meetings to hear Mr. Brighton speak.

Christian rowdies are interfering with the Sunday evening meetings of the Bradford Branch N.S.S. held in the Broadway Car Park. The best remedy for that is a well supported platform. Mr. H. Day, the speaker, is not aggressive or abusive in his remarks and deserves respect; he will get it when the rowdies realise he has a good following. The meetings begin at 7 p.m.

Councillor Backhouse, secretary of the Bradford Labour Party, is well known for his progressive views and outspokenness. This is particularly the case at meetings of the Bradford Branch of the National Secular Society. Recently he took a leading part in the rejection of an attempt to rescind a motion of the Bradford Trades

Council which advocated the abolition of religious teaching in schools. We congratulate him on his courage.

A summarised report of the International Freethought Congress in Rome last September is now available and can be had from the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C., at sixpence per copy, post free.

## THE HOLY QURAN\*

### II

THE *Introduction to the Holy Quran* makes ambitious claims on behalf of Islam. All other Prophets were ephemeral, their message was for their own time and race and had no permanent nor universal significance. Muhammed alone delivered a Divinely-inspired message good for all places and for every age. The Quran is, literally, God's "last word" to man and Islam is, or should be, the universal religion of Humanity, as Muhammed was himself, the last and the greatest of God's Prophets to whom all the earlier founders of religion looked forward and whose teaching they had foreshadowed and predicted.

Our author is a kind of Islamic modernist. His attitude to the religion of Muhammed strikingly resembles the current attitude in Western theological circles taken by liberal Christians like Bishop Barnes, Dr. Inge and the *Modern Churchman*; only, instead of Christianity, as interpreted by the modernists, being put forward as the universal religion and the culmination of religious evolution, in the work of our Muslim modernist, it is Islam that occupies this exclusive position.

Muhammedanism, like Christian modernism, is evolutionary after a fashion; that is, it recognises a kind of evolutionary process in the history of religion. Muhammed, like the Jesus of Dr. Barnes' *Rise of Christianity*, is the last and greatest of the Prophets, but is not the only one. Before him were Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, the Hebrew Prophets and Jesus, regarded as a man raised up by God as Muhammed's most important predecessor. The God of all these earlier Prophets was ultimately the same God who revealed the Quran to Muhammed. However, their revelations were temporary and provisional only, unlike his final and definitive one.

Such is the religious philosophy propounded in this *Introduction*. Incidentally, the God described by our pundit has evolved a long way from the bloodthirsty and lecherous being whom the early Muslim crusaders believed had ordered the Faithful to exterminate "idolaters," and who had promised seventy-two celestial concubines in Paradise to every "True Believer" who fell in battle fighting the non-Muslim "infidels." Evidently, what Anatole France once said about the God of Christianity applies equally to his Muslim rival, "As I grow older, I become more merciful."

Our Muslim theologian subjects the earlier religions of mankind to a careful and detailed critical evaluation in order to demonstrate their essential inferiority to Islam, or more accurately, to his very modern interpretation of Islam. Freethinkers, whose distinctive attitude to all religions is to say, "A plague on all your houses" will probably find this the most interesting and valuable part of the book, rather than the later sections which continue

\* *Introduction to the Holy Quran*, by Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ud Din Mahmud Ahmad. The London Mosque, 12s. 6d.

to discuss dubiously authentic history about the origins of Islam and the biography of the Prophet, or apologetics, which are sometimes ingenious but more often appear strained and far-fetched.

In approaching other religions besides Islam the author displays in full measure that spirit of extreme and often acute rationalism with regard to their nature and claims which is such a conspicuous feature of so much religious apologetics that demand Faith in their own dispensation, whilst simultaneously applying standards of the most rigorously critical character to all other and rival religions. It is an elementary truism of Rationalism that one God always kills many others, and as is clear from the work before us, Muslim as well as Christian theologians are adepts in this species of "divine homicide."

It must be conceded that the author displays considerable controversial skill in dealing with rival faiths and must, indeed, be congratulated upon his extensive knowledge of the literature of rival religions and the remarkable familiarity which he demonstrates with modern critical scholarship and its conclusions with regard to the text of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.

Much of his Biblical criticism is really admirable and these sections would make excellent critical contributions to *The Freethinker*. Should he ever come to apply the same scholarship with the same critical ability to the Holy Quran as he does to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the reviewer would heartily support his application for membership of the National Secular Society!

The Old Testament is subjected to a penetrating critical analysis. The contradictory accounts given of the Creation in Genesis, where we have two discrepant accounts which represented widely different points of view and stages of culture, and the fantastic nature of the claim that Moses wrote the Pentateuch—in which, incidentally, had he done so he must have written the account of his own death—not to mention what our author terms "the savage teaching of the Old Testament," are ably reviewed in due detail and with due regard for the findings of critical scholarship with which he is evidently familiar.

It is here effectively demonstrated that our Old Testament swarms with errors, slips of the pen, and internal contradictions, which would be scarcely credible even in a reputable work of human literature with no pretensions to Divine authorship. In a work the verbal inspiration of which is guaranteed by its Divine author such elementary blunders are simply incredible.

After this erudite display of criticism, it is a little surprising to find our commentator claiming that the Hebrew Prophets, Isaiah, Daniel and Habbakuk, instead of predicting the coming of Christ, as Christian exegesis presupposes, were actually predicting the coming of Muhammed, the Prophet of Islam! As still more surprisingly did the wise King Solomon in the Song named after him, is a rapturous description of the Prophet. Really!

A chapter on the New Testament follows this rather remarkable lapse and here the author's critical judgment reasserts itself. This section is quite a masterly example of historical and textual criticism. The contradiction between reported utterances of Jesus and what is taught elsewhere in the New Testament is admirably brought out. The useful point is also insisted on that the New Testament, as a Greek translation of a Hebrew original lent itself to interpolations in the text. The critical view so ably expressed in European literature by M. Loisy,

that our Gospels are not primarily historical biographies about Jesus so much as statements of the beliefs of the Church about him at the comparatively late dates when they were written in their present form, and that they have, as such, been subject to repeated alterations in the interests of the Church orthodoxy, is here forcibly made.

Freethinkers in the past have tended, perhaps inevitably, to concentrate exclusively upon Christianity. The work before us will not only add considerably to the knowledge of its western readers, but will also serve the useful purpose of giving a more balanced view of current religious problems other than those peculiar to Christianity.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### A GROTESQUE SUPERSTITION

ALL superstitions are foolish. But there are beliefs which have something of nobility or beauty intertwined with their ritual. Yet, nothing good can be said by the thoughtful student, of the practice of vaccination, which has been neatly labelled "A grotesque superstition" by a famous pathologist.

Everything connected with the filthy rite is grotesque in the extreme. There is simply no case at all for the vaccinationists, and it is impossible to find a medical man or scientist of any standing brave enough to defend Jenner's ideas in public debate. And yet—and this is the point I wish to make in a Freethought paper—it is practically impossible to get anything truthful published about the history and practice of vaccination. But smallpox and glowing accounts of the epidemic in Glasgow have had huge headlines in the Press. Pictures and stories of the wholesale vaccinating of thousands of frightened credulous, and ill-informed persons have been a fine publicity stunt, a sad reflection for those who would substitute reason for superstition.

There is a large literature on the subject—most of it may be had free or at trifling cost from the Anti-Vaccination Society—and here are a few facts in brief:—

I broke off my writing at this point, and over my cup of tea, I read the evening paper in which was an article by the Radio Doctor on "The Virtues of Vaccination." As this popular writer can command a large following, it might be just as well to look at his "facts." Sometimes a controversialist speaks of the "true facts" of a case; of course, this is silly, for there can be no untrue facts. When Doctor Hill states "We know that vaccination prevents smallpox," the man who is guided by facts must cry out, "nonsense." For vaccination never saved a single life and has been responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands, it has been a far greater plague than smallpox. In case readers may think it is only a question of assertion against assertion, let me ask them to reflect on the fact that in the past twenty years vaccination has claimed three times the number of deaths that smallpox has (Registrar-General's figures). Is there any disease that Doctor Hill treats where he would urge a treatment that would be three times more deadly than the ailment? The Radio Doctor purports in a paragraph to give in brief the history of vaccination. Here are his words:—

"We owe vaccination to a country practitioner, Edward Jenner. He was the first to notice that dairy maids who had caught cowpox from a cow never got smallpox. 'Why not,' Jenner asked himself, 'human beings a dose of cowpox—which causes very little upset—and so make sure that for the next six or seven years they will not get smallpox?'"



I submit that that paragraph is packed with "terminological inexactitudes," and is altogether misleading. We have to go further back in history. We "owe vaccination" to the failure of smallpox inoculation (arm-to-arm poxing) which preceded it, and which was so deadly that it became illegal. Jenner just didn't stumble on these simple dairymaids by accident, and when the trusting Doctor tells us that Jenner was the first to notice, etc., are we to infer that others noticed this strange "fact"?—oh, come off it, Charles, you know better, you're only pulling our legs! You know jolly well that Jenner was *not* a doctor—true, a country practitioner need not be a medical man, but you are writing to give the impression that he was. Jenner was a scheming rascal, and he was on the outlook for some other fake that would take the place of the discredited smallpox inoculation. So he worked the cowpox racket for all he was worth. And the medical profession, to whom it was a fine source of revenue (it still is) supported him wholeheartedly. The mental picture of Edward Jenner asking himself: "Why not, etc.," is just poppycock. Who on earth knew whether dairymaids were immune from smallpox or not; what statistical evidence was there? "And so make sure that for the next six or seven years they will not get smallpox." Tut, tut, Doctor, you are a humorous writer, but you're a poor psychologist. For you know jolly well that when Jenner's idea was first given to the world, vaccination was to give a patient *complete* immunity from smallpox. There was no talk of a time limit. That came later, and was forced upon Jenner, but even today there is no unanimity about how long protection lasts. How could there possibly be? For there is no scientific foundation for the fantastic belief that a dose of one disease can prevent the taking of another complaint. The history of the superstition has striking parallels with other beliefs now discredited by national minds. Jesus was going to return to earth immediately. Then in a few months, then years, and so on. Vaccination was to do the trick for all time, then a second time, and so on, and if we look at the matter from the practitioner's standpoint, once a week would be good business.

Facts and figures do not bear out Doctor Hill's statement that smallpox still is a great menace. There have been years when there has not been a single death, years when the great bulk of the people were "unprotected."

At the time of writing, there have only been about half-a-dozen deaths in Glasgow, one being a doctor, and three others, nurses or attendants. I assume that these persons were "protected." Will Doctor Hill explain that away?

I hope the Radio Doctor argues better on the Floor of the House than he does in the Press. To tell us that during an epidemic hundreds who were not vaccinated died, is an old argumentative trick of the pro-vaccinationists to impress the ignorant. But—and Doctor Hill knows it well—no anti-vaccinationist ever maintained that those who were not vaccinated could not take smallpox. All we do say, is that this practice of vaccination ought to be shown up for what it is, a ghastly fraud, a grotesque superstition.

J. EFFEL.

## ST. GEORGE FOR MERRIE ENGLAND

THE Editor felt that the anniversary of our Patron Saint called for something more than a cursory notice. So he sent the Special Correspondent down to the nether regions to get an interview with the celebrity.

The Special Correspondent had some difficulty in finding St. George's hideout. The first individual of whom he inquired, a sour faced fellow named Calvin, assured him emphatically that no such person had ever existed. However, with his second encounter he had better luck and he eventually located George of Cappadocia in Genoa Alley, a narrow street leading down to the Styx. The Patron Saint was sitting on a kitchen chair on the pavement before his abode.

"Morning, George," the journalist greeted him blithely. "How's tricks?"

"And who might you be?" growled the man of Cappadocia, looking at him under lowered brows.

"Well, seeing that we're celebrating the—er—termination of your terrestrial career, the gov'nor thought it might brighten the lives of our readers if I dropped in and had a chat with you."

"Oh, you want to hear tell of my glorious feat in killing the dragon, I suppose."

"Not quite. Our readers aren't very partial to fairy tales and anyhow, the way old Perseus told *that* one sounds better, I always think."

"Then, no doubt, you want me to describe how I led King Dickie to victory. The line of our brave Tommies had begun to waver before the terrific onslaught of the savage Saracen," proceeded the Patron, having risen to his feet, the better to wave his arms about in dramatic gesture; "even the heart of the great Coeur de Lion had sunk to his boots, when I sprang upon my white charger and, waving a flaming sword,——"

"Aw, cut it out, chum," interrupted the Special Correspondent curtly. "I represent the rationalist press. Our readers take even less kindly to miracles than fairy stories. What *they* want is a few personal reminiscences of your *real* life."

"Oh, you mean the bacon contract," said George in more normal tones. He sat down again. "Well, when I was a lad, helping mum in the shop, there was a feller what used to come in; he took quite a fancy to me and was the first to show me round a bit. One thing led to another until I got pally with a Roman general. I used to make love to his wife; that kept her busy and left him free to chase after his bit of fancy work. Through him it was that I landed the bacon contract for the Roman Army in Egypt."

"And by that time, I suppose you knew the fat stock prices backwards."

"No, nothing," retorted the Saint contemptuously. "About all I knew about bacon was that it came off a pig. I didn't need to know anything about pig's meat; all I wanted was a bit of business acumen, and I had that. I picked up a consignment of damaged Gadarene swine; some young devils had chased 'em over a cliff. Bit bruised and battered they were, but I got 'em all nicely packed with the best ones on top for the inspection. From that time I never looked back; launched upon the road to success. I——"

"What made you swop jobs, George, and go in for the Church?"

"Aw, that. Well, I'd made a pile, you see. I was in the big business and what I needed was some sort of position to carry it. The Church in those days was the best rack—was the most influential organisation. So I joined the Arians, who at that time were the boys on

## THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

By W. A. Campbell. With a Preface by the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson. Price 2s.; postage 2d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.

top, and got them to give me Athanasius' job, the arch-bishopric of Alexandria.

"Nice bit of work, George, me boy. All the same I always think you were a bit too rough with the hoi polloi, the common populace. You rather overdid the pressure, I fancy. After all, you ended up by getting lynched by the infuriated mob, didn't you?"

"Well, maybe I was, laddie. We all make mistakes. And it's true that I wasn't too well received when I arrived down here. The Old Man said it was all right my chasing up the Christians, but I ought to have left the Pagans alone. Probably he was right, for when it came to it, it was the Pagan mob what did me in. The Athanasian crowd didn't do a thing to me; they were always a poor lot."

"Well, they turned you into a saint of the Holy Church not much more than a hundred years later. Pretty good going for an old Arian reprobate. Then the English picked you up on their crusading and made you their Patron Saint. Tell me, Georgie, old boy, is it true that you paid a visit to the country of your patronage?"

"What, me?" exclaimed the Patron, as he spat disgustedly. "What should I want to go to that outlandish island for? There wasn't any money to be made there."

"So you never met the English?"

"English? Oh, those Saxon fellows. No, never had much to do with them. I had a Saxon for a slave once. All right for good hard donkey work he was; hadn't any brains, of course. But those fellows—they can't keep sober."

"In your time, perhaps, Georgie. Nowadays, they can't get tight. They can't afford it!"

With that the Special Correspondent wished the famous man good-day and hurried off to the airport to catch the return plane to Earth.

P. C. KING.

## LUCIFER

THE name of Lucifer is remarkable in having a clear significance as regards the fallen archangel in that it represents him as illustrious. Other names are derogatory, but then they were given to him after his rather violent ejection from the celestial realm. He is now rarely alluded to, or addressed, as Lucifer, but as Satan, the Adversary, Apollyon, the Destroyer, and, occasionally, in a quasi-ironical or jesting sense as Mephistopheles.

However, as a figment of the human imagination, a freethinker can appraise him more justly, and correctly, than one who is religious. Therefore, seeing that the name Lucifer means the Bearer of Light, or Light Bringer, we render him this salutation: "Ave Lucifer, movituri te salutamus!" ("Hail, Lucifer, we about to get into movement, action, salute thee!")

But Ichabod! The glory has departed! No longer does Lucifer stand on the left hand side of the throne of Jahveh—Jesus occupying the right-hand one. No more does he have Michael as a rival in pre-eminence.

Resplendent as Lucifer was, Archangel Michael, as per the indication of his name was, and we may suppose, is: "He who is as God." Indeed! No wonder Lucifer resented this assumption, as it is not likely Jehovah so designated him. But who knows? Chi sa? Eventually Michael was an able deputy as a divine "chucker out," as Lucifer found to his discomfiture. At present how stands his eminence? Droll and pathetic! A Christmas card defines him thus: Clad in red attire, seated, horned, tailed, and cloven footed, he has an inimical yet jovial smile, and an inscription informs one

that "sometimes, the Devil is a gentleman." That seems good enough. But the devil, as Lucifer the arch-angel, was an aristocrat!

There was, and still is, a most peculiar family status in the celestial sphere, viz., God the Father, and His only begotten son! Capital letters can't magnify this extraordinary paternity, as there was no Goddess the Mother. Then how did Jahveh generate Jesus? And Jesus and Jahveh, his Father, were co-eternal! Usually, parents precede their offspring! For the devout this is simply a divine mystery, and that is all. In any case, it is a relief to turn to another godly family composed of Osiris the Father, Isis the Mother and Horus, the Son. A satisfactory trio.

How Lucifer was cast out of heaven by Michael, God's able agent, is a hackneyed story. The Lord gave Michael the job and the archangel accepted the order with alacrity. Lucifer dropped through space for nine days according to some tradition, and alighted on Mother Earth no longer as Lucifer, but as Satan the adversary, not of mankind, however, but of the heavenly regime. The clergy give him an evil name, but there are Devil worshippers in Iran and—Lo, Behold!—neighbours give them a good reputation as being honest, reliable, and hospitable. Now this is an honourable status, and it reflects credit on the fallen archangel. Yes, indeed, the Devil is a gentleman.

GEORGE F. LAWS.

## RE PETER

NOT all men love Simon, called Peter the Rock, whereon was erected the Roman Church. It is not a question of catches or draughts of fishes or men, though indeed what is life to the fisher is death to the fish. It goes deeper to flaws in the fisherman's life, and faults in the Rock, which verily rock the conscience.

Take the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and here we may note that humanity and mercy, which pagans could observe, as well as esteem, cut very little ice with our Simon. Their offence in keeping back part of the price on the sale of their land, instead of laying it all at the apostle's feet, this retention—the first of its kind—of Peter's pence, was anathema maranatha to Simon, and the pair must be made an example. Peter says to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whilst it remained was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou has not lied unto men, but unto God."

After Peter's thrice denial of his Lord, this is rather like Satan reproving sin. And by what process of reasoning does keeping back money, incidentally one's own, constitute a lie to God, Holy Ghost, or anyone else?

But the words were enough. Ananias, hearing them, fell down and gave up the ghost, in fact petered out. And the young men, like so many Fascists, aroused, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him, apparently in a grave prepared before or ready to hand.

And his for an offence which might, perhaps, be compared with making an incorrect income tax return. Would Jesus have approved? And apparently not even a burial service!

And why this unseemly haste to inter Ananias? Can it be they were anxious to hush up the affair?

Did the fisherman know the difference between sale price and proceeds of sale? Commission, legal costs

land charges, out of pockets—were such items even thought of, much less taken into account?

Three hours later, the wife, still in the dark, came in, and Peter said to her, "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" And she replied, "Yea, for so much." Then Peter said to her, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out."

At these terrible words, she fell at his feet, and gave up the ghost, in fact, she also petered out. And the young men, like so many Fascists, enter the room, find her dead, carry her out, and bury her by her husband.

And we learn, without surprise, that great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things.

It may be pleaded for Peter, that he is entitled to the benefit of the doubt, in the case of Ananias. But, after Sapphira, who can doubt but that the deaths of both of these unfortunates must be laid at his door? The exact cause of their end, however, it not so certain. Was it due to some deadly exhalation from the apostle himself? Or some electric effect, as it were, to act as a kind of hot seat? A fast worker was Simon Bar-Jona, we know, in the matter of miracles.

If the saint, as it is said, suffered martyrdom at Rome, may it not have been a fair trial for this unique and most ghastly offence? An apostle, it appears, might act in this way. But the long arm of Rome had yet to be reckoned with, much as Britain to-day, within range of her power, would punish a tribal murder.

So Peter, first bishop of Rome, if tradition be true, is buried under the altar there:—

Here lies St. Peter.

H. N. ROBBINS.

CREATRESS

Forsake the scholar's gown; put by your books;  
Go out and wander in earth's several ways;  
Watch how man lives; note how he life betrays;  
In hours observant, study saints and crooks.  
Be not deceived by humble, saintlike looks—  
A shifty mind has oft a steady gaze;  
The man of peace, too, frequently displays  
The fiery aspect of the Mameluks.

But chiefly watch a woman with a child.  
Much will you learn about the future man:  
How he becomes submissive saint, or wild  
Rebellious youth; their infancy began  
Beneath the moulding law of mother's hand;  
One, made a saint, one, terror of the land.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE

NEW PRIESTHOODS

Sir.—In his excellent article on "New Priesthoods," in your issue of April 30, Mr. A. R. Williams might well have added that the new priesthoods may be worse in the long run than the old ones. For instance, the Christian, bowing down before Jesus, may well do less harm to his child by having it baptised than the non-Christian, bowing down before Pasteur, does to his by having it vaccinated, immunised, inoculated, etc., by a duly ordained member of the medical priesthood.

The moral seems to be that if one form of superstition is driven out another will take its place, and that there is not, and never will be, any rest for Freethinkers.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

OBITUARY

WILMOT HASTINGS

Although not unexpected, owing to a lengthy spell of ill-health, the death of Wilmot Hastings came as a shock. A member of the National Secular Society and regular reader of *The Freethinker* for many years, he had quite a passion for Freethought and never missed an opportunity for introducing it to friends and acquaintances. He was one of the survivors of the old-time team of music hall stars and often gave a snatch of one of his old songs and a few steps in the offices of the N.S.S. In later years, after retiring from the stage, he went to live in Teignmouth, Devon, and died there on April 21. Our sympathy goes out to his widow. We understand that no religious ceremony took place at his funeral.

R. H. R.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. HAROLD DAY.
- Burnley (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Darlington (Market Steps).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: "Man and his Gods," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
- Enfield.—Saturday, May 13, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Several speakers.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and R. A. CALVERLY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and R. A. CALVERLY.
- Nottingham Branch (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. MOSLEY. 6-45 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. MOSLEY.
- Padiham.—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Rawtenstall.—Friday, May 12, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Darlington (Labour Hall, Garden Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Is Sunday Sacred?" Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.
- Irish Rationalist Society (Hynes Cafe, 55, Dame Street, Dublin).—Friday, May 12, 7-30 p.m.: "Mind and Matter," Mr. PAUL O'HIGGINS.
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Dilemmas of Loyalty," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

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