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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

After Forty Years

LIVING in Paris forty years ago, one of my delights was haunting the book cases round the Seine, and in the many streets where one could pick up extraordinary rarities at unbelievably small prices. In art and literature, Paris appears to have been miles ahead of most other countries and certainly, as far as literature is concerned, its output was always enormous. Bookshops abounded everywhere, in almost any back street you could find one with all sorts and conditions of books carefully priced and laid out on stall. There was hardly an aspect of culture which was not represented. The French have an uncanny knack of dealing with the most abstruse subjects in the clearest terms and they are bang up to date. Alas, in those days, which now seem a century back, I had neither the purse to avail myself of a fine library, nor any place to put it. I could only hope for better luck in the future.

Naturally, I was always on the look-out for Freethought works, for in the world of Freethought the French genius for satire then reigned supreme. You could buy, cheaply, Voltaire and Diderot, d'Holbach and Pigault-Lebrun, and many other perhaps less famous writers whose books ran for over a century, doing their deadly work generation after generation. These old eighteenth century writers appear to be almost forgotten now, but looking through d'Holbach's *Christianity Unveiled* recently, I was staggered at its modernity. Argument after argument could well have been written yesterday by many of the contributors to this journal.

But among all these French Freethinkers one seemed to stand out above all others and that was Lec Taxil. Taxil was certainly an extraordinary character. From the age of about 20 to 25, his output was enormous. He hit the Roman Catholic religion with a bludgeon, without mercy. He got in the heaviest body blows at its priests and cardinals and Popes. He magnified every priestly crime (if it could be magnified, that is). His *Life of Jesus*, written in French slang, was actually a masterpiece, blasphemous to the nth degree, without a shred of reverence, certainly the despair of all our own "reverent" Rationalists if they know it. It should be translated into American slang for the delight of all who revel in satire and wit. Taxil had no scruples either in translating out of Latin into French books used in the particular where the questions asked of women in books, articles, and lectures, Taxil made himself one of the greatest nuisances the Church had ever encountered. And then—he was suddenly "converted"! Almost overnight, Taxil humbly submitted to the Church, made a pilgrimage to Rome, kissed the Pope's ring, and there was an end to his propaganda. His book *Confessions of an Ex-Freethinker* had a great circulation and thence-

forth he used his pen to bolster up the Church, especially against the notoriously atheistic Freemasons.

In one of his essays, the scholarly historian of the Inquisition, Henry C. Lea, gives an account of Taxil and the Freemasons, an account most amusing for those who guessed that the "conversion" of such a notorious atheist was not all it claimed to be. Taxil tricked the Church completely, his conversion was a fraud, and though he later wrote one or two rather important works on social matters, he died during the first World War almost unnoticed.

I mention this mostly to show that forty years ago one could really buy Freethought works in Paris. New editions of some of the most important ones were issued, everywhere one could buy Taxil's books, Dupuis, Volney, Pigault-Lebrun, and scores of others. And now?

I think it is not unfair to say that Freethought works as such have nearly completely disappeared. I recently searched literally hundreds of bookstalls—there was not a single writer with a Freethought reputation represented. True you can still buy Zola—but not because he was a Freethinker. Books on culture, on science and art, on philosophy and languages, on the latest development of the atom bomb, on the chances of war, and so on, you can buy by the score. But works making a frontal attack on religion have nearly disappeared.

I looked at most of the bookstalls lined up on the bank of the Seine hoping to pick up something with the words "libre penseur" on it. As far as I could see, this title has disappeared. If you are an Atheist in France, you are almost sure to be called a Communist. It is taken for granted; and in some of the discussions I had I found it difficult to convince people that to be a "libre penseur" completely excluded any idea of totalitarianism. Even the books of Dr. Couchoud and his friends, who have all done so much exploring the origins of Christianity, were conspicuous by their absence. Of course, they can be ordered, but I found little enthusiasm among booksellers to order any book not already in their shops.

But what about books in favour of religion? They abound, more or less, everywhere. God exists and His Church is Roman Catholic. And more extraordinary still is that one meets everywhere intelligent people who have the utmost contempt for religion and yet who get baptised, married and buried by the Church and whose children go through their "premiere Communion" as solemnly as the most fervent believers. These people ridicule the Bible, its science, history, and chronology—but go to Church! I cannot explain the paradox, but perhaps the average Frenchman is more afraid of "Atheistic Communism" than he is of the Church, and is not aware that Freethought is also the bitterest enemy of Totalitarianism. For Freethinkers the lesson is plain. Eternal vigilance—or Liberty will vanish from our Earth.

H. CUTNER.

"NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD"

"Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 3, page 14, line 5.")

THAT reference appeared at the end of the commercial traveller's report after a particularly depressing journey. The boss looked it up, and found that the words were: "This is a bloody business." That old chestnut came to my mind the other night as I listened to the Evangelist on the sea front of Dambore.

The preacher was a thin, pale-faced elderly man, and the members of his audience, chiefly women, might be classed as anæmic. Yet they were all for blood, for the blood, the cleansing blood, the atoning blood, blood of the Lamb, the blood that was shed for us. . . . He talked "Of Cain, and long since then of bloody men . . ." and with evident relish he enumerated a goodly number of the blood letting episodes in the Bible, sacrifices, slaughter, seas of blood, and the supreme and bloody tragedy of Calvary.

What puzzled me was not that this sad, gentle looking creature seemed to delight in the sanguinary, but that the recital of such fearful doings had no perceptible effect on the audience. The blood simply didn't get across. Now, had I been describing the Savold-Woodcock fight, some of the old dolls would have fainted. It seems that the blood of our Redeemer, shed on Calvary, no longer cuts any ice like the eye of a modern prize-fighter whose fresh blood (shed for King Solomon) recently spurted over our civilisation.

When the old lad was telling the old girls the old yarn about sprinkling blood on the doors of the Yids to deceive old Herod, I left the meeting.

But my mind had started working on man's obsession with thoughts of blood. The favourite books of my childhood were called "bloods"; they related fearful, gory crimes and I loved them; for lighter reading I studied "Famous Fights of the Prize Ring" (weekly, one penny) and revelled in such phrases as, first blood, tapping his claret, bleeding profusely, re-opened another cut, both boxers bespattered with blood, the ring was a shambles, and so on. My school chums who shared by literature, none of them over ten years of age, were not embryo criminals but children of a frankly bloody-minded age. Not for us the pillow-slip boxing gloves, but the bare mitts, no rubber covered cosh of street warfare, no long range unspectacular fighting of modern war; cold steel was the stuff, at close hand the dagger or the sword, and then the glorious charge with fixed bayonets. That was against "natives," primitive, I think, was the word used for this operation. But at home we had our own blood-letting ceremonies. In the drama, Sweeney Todd, who specialised in cutting throats (to the effusion of quite a lot of blood), and Eugene Aram, who bashed his victim, as Irving told us, till "the blood gushed out amain," were greatly appreciated. Then along came Jack the Ripper, the bloodiest, and the most popular murderer in our history . . .

I looked out to sea to divert my thoughts. Near the pier I saw a fisherman selling freshly caught mackerel. I bought five for a bob, and took them to the digs.

"Dirty, filthy things," said my landlady, "scavengers of the sea." She refused to handle them but was gracious enough to allow me to manipulate them at the scullery sink. At that moment Alec McConkey came in, the pockets of his raincoat bulging significantly.

"There you are now, Aunty," he said, putting three bottles of Guinness on the table, "and here's something special for yourself." He produced a big black pudding.

Mrs. Skinner was delighted. "If there's one thing I love for supper it's a fried black pudding."

Chacun à son goût, I thought, as I spread out my fishes; I had never before critically and aesthetically regarded a mackerel—it is indeed a thing of great beauty. I could become lyrical about the iridescence of its colouring, but neither Mrs. Skinner nor McConkey have any poetry in their souls. I had thought fish were bloodless creatures, but the severed head and body exuded thick, beautiful blood of a rich crimson lake hue. I was admiring the colour scheme, to the landlady's expressed disgust, when Alec pushed me aside and then skilfully dressed ("guttled" was his inelegant expression) the fish ready for the frying pan.

"Do you know Jack, I'm going to join you in this feed," said the big fellow, "we'll leave the pig's blood to Aunty."

Like all landladies, Mrs. Skinner detests being called "Ma," but she responds cheerfully when Alec calls her "Aunty." Of course, a frequent bottle of stout, a carton of ice-cream, or a parcel of chips helps the amenities. She spread the table, put two frying pans on the cooker, then sat down to prepare her own meal—the purple-black *boudin*, beloved of the Breton peasant, which in my literal childhood, we called "bloody puddings."

Came to my mind a weird ballad of a dissolute sailor-man; the old memory had been stirred by the sight of the ensanguined, decapitated mackerel, and quickened by Mrs. Skinner's activities with the black pudding.

Yes, I thought, Alec remembered the ballad: " . . . there he sat, a spittin' up, the purple blood like wine, the purple berludd like wine . . ."

We made a duet of it. I did the Inkspot voice while McConkey was a fruity Pop-eye.

"The purple blood, it did run out, like wine . . ."

"Oh, you dirty pigs," said our landlady.

"Well, I like that, Aunty, and you with the pig's blood, the unclean animal—God's cloven people. swine. Here, Jack, how's this for a good verse,

So there she sat, a cuttin' up the purple, bloody swine."

Mrs. Skinner mistook artistry for vulgarity. But as Alec had manipulated the corkscrew, she didn't get huffy, and presently we sat down to a fine tuck in.

The mackerel were scrumptious. As was to be expected Alec turned on some of his Freethought reflections, about food, clean and unclean, and old customs. Jesus didn't wash his hands before he dipped them in the dish, why should we fool around with unsuitable implements when eating fish? (As a matter of fact we didn't.) Then he put a poser to Mrs. Skinner. When the five thousand were fed with five fish, were they sprats or sharks, were they cooked, and if so, in what manner and where?

The answer—and a jolly good answer too—was that it was a blessed mystery. I told of the meeting at the sea front, and the speaker's pre-occupation with blood.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear that Mr. Whitely is carrying on the good work so well. My dear husband always said we must stick to the blood, the blood of the Lamb, the cleansing blood, the atoning blood that was shed for us on Calvary. We must never lose sight of the Cross dripping with the Saviour's blood."

Here she spiked the last round of black pudding into her mouth; sacramentally she savoured the profane blood of the unclean animal.

Alec drained his frothy chalice; "Holy mackerel," he ejaculated like a great Amen.

FLASHBACK! In the dark interior of a church I see myself, again the altar boy, I swing the thurifer, a heavy incense ascends, a bell tinkles . . . CUT! Another ring, louder and insistent, brings me back to reality. Mrs. Skinner rises to answer the summons. Not by prayer

at the altar had the bell been rung but by guest at the hall door; the incense had been the mixed odours of fried fish and black pudding. Piscene and porcine perfume from offerings to the great god Pan pervaded the tabernacle of our communion. Alec had now lit his pipe, and I felt grateful that he didn't say "holy smoke." He looked thoughtful then spoke thus:—

"While man has ever been fascinated and dominated by blood, not till the discovery of Harvey did he become aware of the significance of the physiological fact of its circulation, that blood circulates in a series of sealed tubes, arteries, veins, capillaries, to every part of the body. So then it doth appear that the idea of blood is diffused through all literature and through all aspects of life, in all qualifications. Pure blood and poor blood, bad blood, good blood, black blood, blue blood, mixed blood; blood sports, blood feuds, blood banks, blood groups: Ha, an idea! A new name for Jesus. The Great Transfuser. We must try that on Auntie when she returns. Fish makes me thirsty but thank God, I have another three bottles of stout. We'll make Auntie squiffy and get her to give a testimony, and we'll sing her another verse of "The Purple Blood." How say you, brother?"

I could only answer: "Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 3, page 14, line 5."

J. EFFEL.

RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE

I KNOW that there is something quite infuriating in reviewing a book which will be unobtainable to many of one's readers. But at the same time there is some justification if the book is an important one, and if one feels that a review which summarises the book may stimulate interest. For one thing, if enough readers on this side of the Atlantic read a review of a book published in the U.S.A., that may lead to an English edition of the book.

At any rate, I have little hesitation in spending a column or so in discussing Mr. Philipp Frank's *Relativity: A Richer Truth* (Beacon Press, Boston; two dollars), since it seems to me to be one of the most valuable works which has appeared in recent years, dealing with some part of that disputed borderland between science, philosophy and theology.

Mr. Frank is the author of what is probably the best biography of Einstein yet to appear; and in his new volume he deals with the moral, ethical and theological implications of Einstein's theories of relativity. The ostensible reason for the book (and the centre of its argument) is to answer those somewhat superficial critics who have held that, since Einstein has proved the relativity of motion and of other purely physical concepts, there must be a similar relativity in the sphere of ideas. In other words, the book is concerned to point out that those who believe in the existence of so-called absolutes have more on their side than is generally thought in this twentieth century.

Thus what Mr. Frank holds to be more or less self-evident is that Einstein's theories do not prove morality to be relative. Mr. Frank's most interesting passage is that in which he deals with this matter of relative morality. He suggests that to say a boy is wicked really conveys very little unless we explain what we mean—that is, unless we say "wicked to his father, or to his teachers, or other boys at school." Yet he holds that when the particular kind of wickedness is thus defined, it is either true or false, and such definition does not

of necessity lead to any kind of scepticism about the bases of morals and ethics. What is meant, then, is that there are such things as absolutes, but these absolutes require, in the field of ethics, more careful definition than we are usually ready to give them.

What I have written up to this point may, to some readers, seem unsatisfactory. It is never easy to write of these abstract matters in a way which will be easily comprehended, the more especially by those who have not studied the book under discussion. But the conclusion of Mr. Frank's book is, I think, easier to summarise, since here he deals with the attitude of Einstein towards those final absolutes of ethics which we call religious.

Einstein believes in what he calls a "cosmic religion"—i.e., a correlation between Nature and the human mind. The believer in orthodox, traditional religion describes this kind of correlation by saying that the world was created by a Master Mind, usually called God. Some philosophers prefer other terms.

Einstein apparently uses the word "God," though not always in the way that the orthodox religious believer would use it. But at the same time, like many great men of science, Einstein has a streak of mysticism in his mental make-up. Here is the quotation which describes his attitude to mysticism and religious issues:—

"The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the sower of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our full faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness."

I know that there will be many readers of this article who will most fervently disagree with that statement of Einstein's; but at the same time it is useless to try to ignore it, even though we may disagree.

It is not easy to see just what is Mr. Frank's own religious position—I would hazard that it is something in the nature of Unitarianism. And that, too, would seem to be Einstein's view, judging it simply from the internal evidence of this book. But, whatever their views, there can be little doubt that this is one of the most important volumes on the philosophy of science that has appeared for a long time. It is to be hoped that an English edition will be published before long.

JOHN ROWLAND.

YEA-SAYING TO LIFE

"Religion" men those Eastern concepts call,
Fears, that to Western lands have made their way;
For Life-Denying are these systems all,
And Europe bring beneath an Eastern sway.

Strange, is it not, that Asiatic aliens
On Jordan's stream, or Himalayan heights,
The faith provided for Episcopalians,
R.C.s, and Baptists, and—well, lesser lights.

When Europe shall reject these alien gods,
And turn to native deities, or none,
Her sons with Life will cease to be at odds,
And Life-Acceptance be in Europe won.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

Catholic processions in the streets are not always confined to the Roman brand. The Anglicans can do them just as well, and one took place the other day in Wapping with all the usual paraphernalia, a crucifer and thurifer, etc., and 350 Church children, crowds of adults, and priests in their lace frocks, all singing Catholic hymns; in fact, the only absentee was the Pope (or his representative). And needless to say High Mass was observed on the Sunday. If anybody really imagines that Freethought has done its work, he should see one of these processions.

Two Canadian provinces, Quebec and Newfoundland, have no divorce courts, and a Private Member's Bill to provide them was, of course, defeated in the Canadian House of Commons. It provides a striking proof of the power of the Vatican—especially if it can get a Roman Catholic, like the Premier, Mr. St. Laurent, into a key position.

That doughty Missioner, Fr. J. Heenan, wants every Catholic to talk about the Catholic faith to one person at least every day, and "ignorance and prejudice will gradually be overcome." Well, what about following your own advice, Fr. Heenan? Why not have a talk a day with a member of the N.S.S. or a reader of this journal?

But this Christian Champion is not out for this kind of "conversion." He wants to convert the whole of England—a glittering prize for the Vatican, and has about as much chance of doing so as converting Israel. Only he wants no controversy with Freethinkers. That is far too dangerous.

Our "delinquents" had a good haul the other day when they stole jewels valued at over £20,000 from an altar cross—neither God Almighty nor his only Son raising a finger to stop this horrible sacrilege. A hundred years ago or so even the most hardened thief would think twice of robbing the Lord, but since then thunderbolts from Heaven appear to have decreased, and most of our modern "delinquents" (we wouldn't dare to call them thieves) thinks no more of robbing a church than a pub.

But the interesting point about the robbery is not so much that God and his representatives were caught napping, but that the police are working on a new idea to recover the property. Scotland Yard know how superstitious some crooks are. They will not handle anything with a religious background because it is considered unlucky, so the police-inspired story is going around that there is a "hoodoo" on the cross. The cross is back—but who has the diamonds?

Once again "heresy rears its ugly head" in the Church of England. The Rev. G. R. Mortimore, who has baptised 4,000 babies, has gone on strike and refuses to baptise any more. He says, "to sprinkle water on a tiny baby's head and to suppose that really achieves anything is really too much. Children should be baptised only when they reach the age of intelligence." But would they have reached the "age of intelligence" if they consented to be baptised!

"The laity are called upon by the Archbishop of York to fight Atheism and to be able to do this, it is necessary and vital," says Dr. Garbett, "to be so equipped as to be able to give an intelligent reply to questions and criticism

by Atheists." Evidently the Archbishop has not been very impressed by the laity's defence of Christianity up to date, or by the defence of many Christian Evidence champions, nor are we. Even after the new attempt to educate the laity, we still think that our criticism of Christianity will be unanswerable.

Apropos the Exeter Cathedral robbery. How much treasure is laid up in our churches? Would it not be more in the Christian tradition (so-called) to sell up and give to the poor? Or are curates the only poor left?

The cliff upon which stands the parish church of Mundesley-on-Sea is slowly crumbling away, so the parishioners have petitioned the King for help in saving the church from falling into the sea. This is surely the wrong address; the petition ought to be sent to Heaven, not to Buckingham Palace.

Children go to the Sunday school which offers the biggest bribes, objects the Rev. P. Carnegy. "They always ask what sort of an outing or Christmas treat the school can offer, and if the answers are not satisfactory they go to a school where there is most to be had." Dear dear, the little heathens!

Divorce is always wrong says the R.C. Archbishop of Southwark, Dr. C. Cowdery, for "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." How easy for a celibate priest to mouth platitudes. What knowledge can be possibly have of the normal life of people? This fiat, of course, applies to the ordinary Roman Catholic. If one walks with princes, or is powerful enough, clerical lawyers will find reasons why a marriage shall be annulled; a much nicer word than divorce.

The modern world is getting more difficult than ever for a real Christian. Turning the other cheek is easy to say—but, oh, how difficult to follow! Even the "laying on of hands to heal the sick" is frowned upon by the State. Take the case of the man and woman in Switzerland whose child, ill with meningitis, was prayed over by an elder of the church, the parents refusing to call in a doctor. Their faith was strong; they were true Christians following out the rules of Holy Writ. The boy died, and an unsympathetic police court sentenced the parents to imprisonment.

For the first time in the history of German parliaments a religious service will be held before all parliamentary sessions. To keep the peace, Catholic and Protestant will alternate in conducting the services before an improvised altar bearing a crucifix and candles. A Social Democrat deputy started off with Bible readings, hymns and prayers. Poor old God, what is He going to do with Adenauer for the Catholics and Schumacher for the Protestants? And what is going to happen when a Communist or a Freethinker demands an opportunity to give, say, readings from Rosa Luxemburg or Heine? That a Social Democrat should be the first to conduct a religious service is enough to make Karl Liebknecht turn in his grave.

We have all heard of High, Low and Broad churchmen, but it has been left to the Rev. C. Pratt, of Dearborn U.S.A., to find yet another "dimension"—the "Deep" churchman. We could, of course, give many descriptions, but British libel legislation is more stringent than American.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

- C. DRAPER.—Many thanks for useful cuttings.
W. SCARLETT.—For *The Freethinker*, 1s. 6d.
H. BROWN.—The Secretary acknowledges with thanks a donation of £1 to the Benevolent Fund.
H. F. V. LEEUWEN, Middelstegegracht 65, Leiden, would like to correspond with an English Freethinker. He is Honorary Secretary of the Leiden Branch of "De Dageraad," the Dutch Freethought Society which celebrated its 90 years in 1945.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, John Seibert, 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).

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

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

A Freethought Brains Trust has been organised by the Birmingham Branch N.S.S., and will be held in Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, Birmingham, to-day (July 30) at 7p.m. Readers in the area are invited to attend and submit questions and bring some Christian friends to take part.

Hampstead is not a safe seat for Christianity, states a writer in the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*. Personally, we doubt whether any district is "safe" for Christianity. The writer pleads with Christians not to engage in public squabbling (on Hampstead Heath) as this enables "militant atheism to assert its power" as the result of this disunity. It seems that the North London Branch of the National Secular Society, in the person of Mr. L. Ebury who has been speaking on Hampstead Heath for many years, is more than just a thorn in the flesh of the 'appy 'ampstead Christians. It is to be hoped, however, that Freethinkers in North London will not take this as an indication that the victory is won, but will redouble their efforts to give Mr. Ebury all the assistance they can.

The Government of Travancore-Cochin has brought into court the Malayalam daily *Keralakaumudi* for an article declaring that the Catholic clergy was exploiting the ignorance and superstition of the masses, quoting, *inter alia*, Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable to the effect that false relics are exhibited in Rome. The case for the prosecution is that "the accused promoted feelings of enmity and hatred between different classes in the State; and with deliberate and malicious intention outraged the religious feelings of the Roman Catholics."

THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*

A COUPLE of years or so back, I had the pleasure of reviewing in these columns an important work of Alfred Loisy, *The Birth of the Christian Religion*, originally published in French in 1933. *The Origins of the New Testament* is its eagerly awaited successor, also, like its predecessor, translated by the veteran Unitarian, Mr. L. P. Jacks, for so long the editor of the well-known organ of Liberal Christianity, *The Hibbert Journal*.

A word may usefully be prefixed on the career and theological outlook of the distinguished author of *The Origins of the New Testament*, the late M. Alfred Loisy. For the closing years of the nineteenth century, M. Loisy (1857-1940) was the intellectual leader of the Modernist movement which sought to reconcile Catholic Christianity with the assured results of modern science, and historical and literary criticism. This bold attempt eventually failed and Loisy, the enfant terrible of modern Catholicism, was eventually excommunicated (1906) by the arch-obscurantist Pope, Pius X (1903-14) and, together with his modernist following, was thrown, neck and crop out of the Roman Catholic Church. Loisy, however, maintained his interest in religion and in Christianity as an objective historical study. As a Biblical scholar and critical historian of Christian origins of international standing, M. Loisy continued to study religious problems as an independent critic, and down to the end of his long life continued to produce historical and critical works upon religious questions, in particular in relation to his specialist field, Christian origins.

Perhaps his most important work was his already mentioned *The Birth of the Christian Religion* in which he advanced his original and immensely learned critical reconstruction of the actual historical origins of Christianity. The work before us, originally written in 1936, was a kind of sequel to his earlier work on Christian origins and is, as its title implies, concerned mainly with the dates, authorship, and general character of the literature of the "New Testament," the canonical Christian Bible proclaimed originally towards the end of the second century by the Christian Church, in contradistinction to the "Old Testament," the "Bible" of Judaism and, in its first century and a-half, of the early Christian Church also.

Despite the general radical character of his critical works, which so horrified the obscurantist Catholic theologians of the Court of Pius X, M. Loisy never entirely broke either with religion as such, nor with the traditional exegesis of the New Testament. This fact stands out in the present book, which ends with an eloquent appeal for a rather vague modernist "Religion of Humanity," as against both Christian orthodoxy and the acceptance of a wholehearted rationalistic philosophy as applied to religion. In the latter connection, our author's scathing denunciation of Rationalism as static and lacking in appreciation of the facts of religious evolution, can hardly be taken very seriously as a criticism of Rationalism as such; though it is, no doubt, a justified criticism of some narrow-minded pseudo-rationalists whose advocacy does genuine Rationalism more harm than good. Like his modernist predecessor, Ernest Renan, another former professed student of Catholic theology, Loisy still clung to the illusion that "religion" can be separated from the actual concrete religions which have successfully arisen in human history and the errors, illusions, and literary frauds perpetrated

by one of which, Christianity, are so ably analysed and denounced in *The Origins of the New Testament*.

M. Loisy's exegesis is, perhaps, still somewhat conservative. He accepts the existence of a Pauline "nucleus" in the more important Epistles. But is it at all conceivable that the early Christian itinerant preacher, whose peripatetic travels are narrated in the Book of the "Acts of the Apostles," was really the author of these subtle, ultra-sophisticated "Talmudic" theological treatises which actually originated the Christian dogmatic system? Is it not much more probable that they were the product altogether of a much later stage of Christian evolution when the original messianic sect of primitive Christianity had quitted its original Jewish terrain and had begun to approximate to a Graeco-Roman "mystery religion?" The ascription of the name of "Paul" only indicates that there was such a person and that the Gnostic theologians who "borrowed" his name, evidently held him in honour as a pioneer worker.

Our author also insists upon an historical, though human, Jesus. He is no "mythicist" and, indeed, is usually regarded as their most formidable critic. However, the actual role played by his historic Jesus in the foundation of the religion named after him, is not a very important one. For Loisy repeatedly emphasises the point, which is, indeed, his most original contribution to the study of Christian origins, that our Gospels are not biographies of a man as much as expressions of the evolving beliefs of the Church at a much later period. One feels of M. Loisy's Jesus, as also of his English follower, Bishop Barnes, that he is quite superfluous in the story of Christian origins. Would it not make the whole story more simple if we admit that the whole question of a historical Jesus is unsolved and, probably, insoluble at this time of day? If we are to postulate an historical founder of Christianity, it would seem more logical to grant him a more active role than does Loisy. Perhaps as Robert Eisler suggested, we should look for a Messiah of the same calibre as the historical Bar-Cochba, who seems to have been a rather remarkable man.

The most important point made by *The Origins of the New Testament* is that primitive Christianity was eschatological and not historical. That is, it was solely interested in the risen Christ, the Messiah-who-was-about-to-come, and did not manifest much interest in the historical Jesus, who had, according to Loisy, actually lived in Palestine. In the above connection, a most telling point is made by the author, that the Risen Christ actually dictated an entire book, the Apocalypse ("Revelation") to the early Church, solely concerned with his future return to earth and which did not mention a single episode recorded about Jesus in our Gospels! Actually, as is here demonstrated in a masterly manner, the Church only became interested in an historic Jesus, when the Risen Christ failed to return. It was only then, in the second half of the second century, that the Jesus of the Gospels makes his appearance and the Gospel story succeeded belief in the second coming of Christ as the centre of Christian belief.

To re-establish Christianity on a new foundation, that of past History and not of future Faith, the Church required its own "Bible," its "New Testament" of canonical authority guaranteed by apostolic authorship.

How this need was met by the composition of our New Testament, essentially a second century compilation, forms the proper subject-matter of the book before us. The part played by Faith, ably seconded by down-

right and deliberate fraud, is here demonstrated with admirable clarity.

The Origins of the New Testament is, without doubt, an important book. Taken with its predecessor, the account given of Christian origins is one of the most original and impressive ever penned. Alfred Loisy was a very great scholar; I cannot recall a greater in the field of Christian origins. Whilst it is not obligatory to agree with him, it is obligatory to study his thesis. If the high price of the present book precludes its purchase, at least no decently equipped public library at all frequented by serious students and by Freethinkers in particular, should be without *The Origins of the New Testament*.

F. A. RIDLEY.

FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

LOGIC.—The science of correct reasoning and the bear of theologians. It is very obvious that no theologian can possibly be also a logician, and vice-versa.

If we accept the theologians premiss of an omnipotent being as the Creator, we must accept him as being entirely responsible for all the evil in the world as well as the good. The God who looked upon his work and found it good, being all-knowing, must have seen the evil at the same time. He must, in fact, have created it. All the hair splitting since the year dot has been unable to provide an escape from this fundamental fact.

The story of the fall from grace does not avoid it, because for Satan to tempt Eve, Satan must first be created. Therefore the God who created everything created Satan, the embodiment of evil. More than this, according to theologians, he did this for the express purpose of proving the worth of another of his creation, just as the motor manufacturers use a proving ground to see if their creations are worth while. How can it be necessary for omniscience to prove the goodness or badness of his work? He must know it before he creates it. Having created Satan and seen him bad, he could immediately have exterminated evil, instead of using him as a scourge for others he had created and found good.

Not only this. It is equally logical that an omnipotent and immortal being, wishing to create other beings "in his image" cannot endow them with anything less than his own immortality. If immortality is good in his eyes the converse must be bad. I do not agree that mortality is bad. I consider the idea of immortality to be the most ridiculously boring conception that the human race has so far been guilty of. But it is obvious that if A is good, Z, its complete antithesis, must be bad.

RETROGRESSION.—The act of going backwards. An example of this occurs in the Roman Catholic Church, which has recently decreed that it is to adopt a less uncompromising attitude in its relations with other Christian bodies.

For hundreds of years God's vicar on earth has insisted upon his complete infallibility in matters of dogma, any dissent from which was tantamount to a sin against the Holy Ghost. Now, under the stress of waning congregations, and a general revolt against the imbecilities of the Church, he is willing to compromise with heretics. In short, he feels that they should all hang together, lest they all hang separately.

The doctrine of infallibility has been holed so often as to make it resemble a colander or a sieve, but if only the Pope can get all the faithful together with him he will have no objection to setting sail in it. Nor, it may be said, will anyone else.

F. W. RENNIE.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE 37TH ARTICLE

Sir,—I have seen a criticism of my motion in the House of Lords of June 20 in your Lumber of July 9.

I cannot argue, of course, for the other speakers, but your critic should not make my appeal to apparently depend on the abrogation of the 37th article, but merely to be able to be aided by such a christian honesty. Your writer declares in his last paragraph that we should exist and perfect ourselves on an understanding of the wonders that constitute our existence. So do I; I call the existence "eternity," as a word which best comprises an un-understandable miracle. But your critic must surely agree with me that such a miracle needs nourishing and guarding, and the founder of Christianity has told us how. Why not obey him?—this is not quacky, but the most primitive common sense.

If a well-loved child is ill, the advice of a knowledgeable doctor, not a quack, is followed. If the world of humans is ill, the advice of the only non-quack ought to be followed too—not theoretically, but practically—and then the last words of your critic's desires might have a chance of realisation.—Yours, etc.,

DARNLEY.

CONTRACEPTIVES, SLOT-MACHINES, AND MORALITY

Sir,—In your issue for June 25, W. O. Bowen makes some interesting remarks on the morals of contraception. Be he Rationalist or Christian I would like to make some remarks also.

1. The machines are far less embarrassing than asking in Chemists shops, etc.!

2. The effect on youth! What right has anyone to attempt to dictate to youth, or anyone else, as to under what circumstances they shall "break the 7th commandment"? They are not children!

3. For thousands of years the mighty forces of religions have tried to get Youth, and others, to avoid sex intercourse outside "marriage," and failed completely.

Of course, there should be a safe method of indulging in it! Because that avoids preventable disease. The blood of the little ones, slain by preventable disease, cries from the ground for Justice, Retribution and Vengeance! Not against the "sinner" but against all those who keep them in ignorance of any means of safety. Broken hearts, ruined lives, perverted characters, and diseased bodies cry for Justice against the same people who keep others in ignorance of the practical ways of prevention. It is the results of actions rather than the actions themselves that constitute crime. Adultery is not a crime, but the results of that action may well be so. Therefore to avoid the results of that action avoids the crime. And all those who deny the practical means of avoiding any such results cannot be held blameless in the matter.

As for "women in various stages of undress," etc. (W. O. Bower had better join the Nudist Society for that does not apply there) why is it that the actions and "carryings on" of married people are deemed quite respectable and in order, and the exact same things by the unmarried called pornography, lust, decadence, etc., etc.? Also in these vile days there is no money for marriage and houses, etc.

As for girls, does any just man think that there should be any distinctions in these matters for either sex?

As for Religionists, does Mr. Bower know that in no case did Christ ever take the side of accusers, Pharisees (authorities) against the women sex "sinners"? Witness: The Married Woman; the Street Woman; and the (Miss) Mary Magdalene. In sex there is human love, however weak, and love—the Golden Rule—was and is the greatest law and without it all virtues are worthless and profitless. So no real Christian judges. Those who do are traitors and belong to "the generation of vipers." Through the Golden Rule, and through it alone, we might have had the Unity of Man, the Fraternity of all Nations, and Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all mankind. The Pharisees stood in the way and were cursed and likened to the "generation of vipers."

The Psychological revilings of to-day are destroying the chances of human love, peace, health and happiness and rightly was it said "Ecrassez l' infame"! Any honest man would say amen!

On the other hand, if Mr. Bower claims to be a Rationalist, as does the present writer (son of an ecclesiastic) I say this: Every honest Rationalist believes in the supremacy of Reason freed from any arbitrary assumption or authority and if he or she then denies this in the domain of sex relationships it becomes a vast piece of Hypocrisy in the face of Truth—and Reason. And it is an utter denial of The Golden Rule! And,

in my view, such partake not only of religious superstition but side with the orthodox religious views and join that "generation of vipers," and will, before long, share their fate.

Is love, sex and friendship to be denied to our women and the function to be made a Church and/or State regulated function for the purpose of the production of souls for heaven and work slaves and cannon fodder for Arbitrary Authority? Let Mr. Bower and others think again.—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT JELlicoe.

SHAKESPEARE AGAIN

Sir,—Without wishing to lengthen this controversy, may I ask Mr. Yates to clarify his latest pronouncement on "Greene's diatribe"? When Greene said "his tiger's heart wrapped in a *player's* hide," why does Mr. Yates say he referred to "Shakespeare's work as a *playwright*?" Considering that Shakespeare's "*first invention*" was published after Greene's death, how could anything Greene wrote furnish evidence for "Shakespeare's dramatic authorship?"—Yours, etc.,

J. R.

WORDSWORTH DONISTHORPE ("DON") FISHER

(Son of Greevz and Marie Fisher)

Obit July 4, 1950

Of two freethinking parents loyal son;
Three minds, three viewpoints, yet to truth but one.
They laboured well, each in his separate field,
But all to Freethought did allegiance yield;
Now, rest well earned, the son joins dame and sire,
But Freethought lives, and Truth cannot expire.

B. S.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Burnley Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.; Messrs. ROTHWELL and SHARPLES.
- Enfield.—Saturday, July 29, 6-15 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Messrs. J. BARKER and E. W. SHAW.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH and R. BILLINGS. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Sunday, 7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH and R. BILLINGS. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH and R. BILLINGS.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. A. CALVERLEY and L. EBURY. (Highbury Corner).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, July 29, 6-130 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELLSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- Padiham.—Wednesday, August 2, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Rawtenstall.—Friday, July 28, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Sati's Cafe), 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Brains Trust. Local speakers.

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THOUGHTS ON RELIGION

XVI

(Conclusion)

THE enemies of the truth and, I suspect, of mankind have made believe that the disbeliever in religion is a bad man and a bad citizen; and the exponents of Christianity have resorted to unrestrained vilification of philosophers and men of liberal views. The lies which Christians have perpetrated against honest men show how much moral goodness is derived from belief in Christianity and further show the characters of the Christian opponents of philosophy, freethought, and science. That disbelief in religion is synonymous with moral badness is a specious cry of the religionists, of which anyone who is not influenced by the superstition of the people needs no refutation. It is self-evident that the religious fanatics cannot compose a desirable society any more than the political fanatics can; and the proof of both of these facts is the history of Europe under the control of the Roman Catholic Church and under the sway of first one group of political ideologists and then another. The religious extremist with his mock faith in life and God, if he adds to his faith in tolerance, the desire to dominate others, and the power to dominate them, is socially dangerous like the criminal. It should be remarked about the sanctifying faith in life which some Christians have professed that most of them have never had such a faith; otherwise, monasticism and the doctrine of denunciation of the flesh and the world would never have flourished. Those who love life do not renounce it in order to live in monasteries and convents.

A curse, figuratively speaking, is on Sunday for the Christians; for they learn in childhood that it is a day of boredom and weariness of soul aggravated by going to church, by sermons, and by dreary hymns. It is difficult to forget the association between boredom and the Christian Sunday.

It is observable that excessive religiosity is usually visible in the physiognomy of those having it and that their facial expression indicates low intelligence or disturbed mentality. Excessive religiosity is a psychological phenomenon attendant on either low or disturbed mentality.

The day is gone in the United States at least when it is necessary to be reticent about being irreligious; and I suppose that the same is true in England. The people who do not think have no right in this age of education or in any other age to impose their superstitions and harmful beliefs on those who think.

There is about as much religion in this age as there has been in any other age despite the advances of education and science; for ordinary people are intellectually lazy and intellectually biased or dishonest and are thus exposed to believing the lies of the first charlatan who comes along; and traditional beliefs may thus continue to exist for centuries. If you have had a certain degree of intellect and have been honest in your speculations about existence, you may have stopped believing religion at an early age. The initiative and energy to investigate the problem of existence for yourself are necessary to free yourself from religious fictions; and it is just this voluntary thinking which ordinary people never do.

The barest concepts of justice are scarcely to be found in the Christian Bible; but they are found in Chinese sacred writings. This shows that the Chinese were to some extent a reasonable people and that the Jews and

Greeks who wrote the Bible were a crew of ignoramuses and barbarians. All is caprice with the god, Jehovah, in the Old Testament; and the god of the New Testament is no better. It is evident from an analysis of the Bible that the Jews, who were its chief composers, were not as a people logical or capable of useful social concepts. It has been to the great disadvantage of men that the Jews have transmitted their shallowness and religious fanaticism to Europeans and Americans.

Verses 104 and 105, Chapter X, of the venerable Laws of Manu are the rules for diet in extreme necessity which is ground for the sanction of cannibalism.

"He who, when in danger of losing his life, accepts food from any person whatsoever, is no more tainted by sin than the sky by mud.

"Agigarta, who suffered hunger, approached in order to slay (his own) son, and was not tainted by sin, since he (only) sought a remedy against famishing."*

Verses 106 through 108 are rules authorising, if necessity demands, the eating of dog flesh, cows, and the haunch of a dog. The jurisprudence of the Hindus, as here exemplified, is equalled only by that of the ancient Jews.

It is well known that apparently unrelated religions have points of similarity. This similarity is sometimes explained by writers on religion as being the result of the direct or indirect influence of one religion on another. It has been said, for example, that the religions of India have influenced Christianity; but this would be difficult to prove. The similarity between religions, like that between other phenomena of human life, is due in some cases to the fact that human nature is everywhere similar or the same and that men consequently cause similar phenomena wherever they live. The following quotations from Buddhist and Christian scriptures show a striking similarity between the fabulous accounts surrounding the deaths of Buddha and Christ:—

"When the Blessed One died there arose, at the moment of his passing out of existence, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring; and the thunders of heaven burst forth."—"Book of the Great Decease," VI, 14.†

"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent . . ."—Matthew, XXVII, 50, 51.

The association of great human events with calamitous and awesome natural events has been universal among men; for men by nature feel that they are the centre of the universe and that nearly everything happens in relation to them. There is no known direct connection between the sacred writings given above; and their similarity may be attributed to this trait of human nature. Cicero in his "Third Oration Against Catiline," which was addressed to the people, spoke of the supernatural signs which the conspiracy against Rome had caused; and we have here more thunderings and lightnings and more earthquakes. Cicero probably did not believe in supernatural signs but was appealing to the people to whom he spoke. Whether he believed in them or not, he has given another example of the belief of men in signs and omens and in the imaginary relation of natural phenomena to human events.

WILLIAM RITTENOUR (U.S.A.)

* Translation of George Buehler.

† Translation of T. W. Rhys Davids.