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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Fatima—A Sociological Analysis

A RECENT issue of *The Freethinker* contained an instructive and diverting account of a visit to the miracle-working shrine of Fatima by our Portuguese correspondent, "N.F." It must, we imagine, have been an unique event, almost, we think, sufficient to induce the immaculate "Queen of Heaven" to make another appearance upon the hallowed spot! However, readers of Zola's *Lourdes* must admit that Freethinkers may visit miraculous shrines, to the manifest advantage of their readers, if not of their souls.

We propose in the following paragraphs to subject the miracle of Fatima to a scientific examination; only the science which we propose to employ as the basis of our analysis is the mundane science of sociology rather than the "heavenly science" of Theology.

Our readers will recall the bald feature of the Fatima "miracle." In the autumn of 1917, three children who appear to have been watching sheep—an occupation traditionally not unknown in religious circles!—"saw," or so they said, a vision of the virgin, who announced that she would return to see them on certain specified dates, which she subsequently did. The fame of the "miracle" naturally spread far and wide, and a huge crowd assembled to see the Queen of Heaven descend. But these irreverent sightseers were destined to disappointment. The Holy Mother of God duly appeared with a truly terrestrial punctuality to the fortunate children. But no one could see her except them.

On the last occasion, however, the sun performed a whole series of acrobatic tricks and rushed round the universe with a fine disregard of both Newtonian and Einsteinian physics; all of which struck terror into the beholders and predisposed them to believe in the miracle—a not unnatural sequence in a land immemorably given over to gross superstition. The subsequent growth of the Fatima cult, visibly embodied in the splendid shrine described by our correspondent, has now been officially recognised by Rome; though, with her usual caution where anything new is concerned, the miracle, like its predecessor at Lourdes, is not *de fide*, not yet proclaimed an officially-accepted dogma of the Catholic Church.

The substance of the rather incoherent message originally delivered by Our Lady of Fatima was concerned primarily with Russia, for which land the Faithful were to pray and expect an answer to their prayers in her speedy conversion; and with Portugal, to which the Lady conveyed her Divine Blessing.

What was the explanation of this remarkable apparition of the *de facto* goddess of the Catholic World to, what appears from its name to be a former Muslim shrine—for Fatima is, of course, the name of the daughter of the prophet Muhammed, and Portugal was under Arab domination for several centuries. For the Vatican is a worldly-wise institution which does not waste its miracles; least of all, its greatest miracle, the apparitions

of the "Queen of Heaven," which, historically, have been few and far between.

Miracles form part—and a very important part!—of Catholic evidence, and they happen when, and not until they are wanted in the interests of the Church. If, for example, Eire was to show signs of "apostatizing" from the Faith, it is a long-odds probability that St. Patrick would be on the spot in the proverbial jiffy! (On the European continent this peculiarly Irish saint does not cut much ice in Catholic circles, hence his non-appearance. In present day Eire, it would still be, by all accounts, quite superfluous!)

So far, to our knowledge, the Holy Mother of God has only descended twice to this vale of tears: in Guadeloupe in Mexico, and in Lourdes in France. In Mexico her appearance coincided with the enforced conversion to Catholicism by their Spanish conquerors of a vast Indian population immemorably accustomed to worship feminine as well as masculine deities, and needing a spectacular demonstration that the white Gods were more potent than their own, a demonstration thoughtfully provided by "Our Lady of Guadeloupe."

Whilst in 19th century France, "the eldest son of the Church" stood in deadly danger of destruction at the hands of anti-clerical forces released by the French Revolution. Hence the Lourdes affair (1858) also, the then Pope Pius IX had recently, though not yet officially declared infallible, proclaimed the Dogma of the "Immaculate Conception" of the Virgin on his own authority (1854). This high-handed action had provoked a good deal of criticism within the Church itself. Hence "Our Lady of Lourdes" obligingly came to the Pope's assistance by declaring to Bernadette: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

In the Catholic Church precedent counts for much. In the light of the above precedents afforded by previous visitations of the Virgin, what are we to make of Fatima?

Both the time and place of the apparition are significant. The time was 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution and of the rise of "Atheistic Bolshevism," now the principal bug-bear of the Vatican, if we are to judge from the frequency and the ferocity of its denunciations. Whilst the place was Portugal, where an anti-clerical revolution had recently overthrown the ancient Portuguese monarchy and the clerical regime which pulled the strings behind its royal puppets (1910). The Vatican in this year was very interested in both Russia and in Portugal, and so was "Our Lady of Fatima," who mentioned both by name! Even in theology it is sometimes possible to affirm that 2+2 still make 4. (N.B.—With the pious Dr. Salazar, the pupil of the Jesuits, the Church is again in power in Portugal.)

It is, we think, possible to draw some positive conclusions from this mysterious affair. Rome has always had the reputation for possessing an excellent intelligence-system where secular politics are concerned. It would seem from the appearances of our Lady in both Lourdes and Fatima that in Heaven also, from which its

"Queen" descended in 1917, they also follow terrestrial politics with attention. Verb sap!

A final speculation. We learn from the Indian Press that an image of "Our Lady of Fatima" is now on a world-wide tour and has just visited India. Does this indicate that the Church of Rome now considers that the time is ripe for a world-wide "Crusade" to "convert" Russia—with Atomic bombs? And, of course, with the blessing of Our Lady of Fatima and her Church?

F. A. RIDLEY.

ROME'S FALL AND ITS DISMAL DENOUEMENT

PROFESSOR BOISSONNADE'S *Life and Work in Medieval Europe*, admirably translated by Eileen Power (Kegan Paul, 16s.), is a work of permanent value. Indeed, Dr. Coulton avers that: "There is no book in English which gives so clear and comprehensive a view of the labour question all through the Middle Ages." Surveying his subject from the fifth century of our era to the fifteenth our historian has given us a vivid account of the calamities that saddened Western Europe after the barbarian invaders had found plunder and prey in the opulent territories of the Roman Empire.

Still, while Rome's Western domains were reduced to ruin, the civilisation of Pagan antiquity was preserved for nearly 1,000 years in Byzantium with Constantinople as its capital, and from this Eastern Empire and from the Moslem peoples the seeds of a new culture were sown which ultimately emerged as the precursor of modern European civilisation.

The Dark Ages began in the fifth century with Rome's downfall. Our author concludes that: "No one could have foreseen this disaster, which was of capital importance in history, because it nearly brought about the complete destruction of civilisation. Happily for the new world which was to spring from the ruins of the old, the good order established by Rome never entirely died out and it was on the solid foundations of what remained that the new States of the early Middle Ages were destined to rear themselves."

The Imperial Power, nearly destroyed by the victory of barbarism and religion, embraced over a quarter of Europe with all its most fertile regions. It was bounded in Britain by the Forth and Clyde; on the northern Continent by the Danube and Rhine while Gaul, Spain, Greece and Egypt were under Roman control. Even under a declining Empire all seemed fair. Many scores of cities with stately edifices, splendid squares, majestic temples, theatres, baths and other structures were busy centres of social and economic life, while Rome, Milan, Thessalonica and other cities displayed all the amenities of artistic creations. The rural retreats, again, were resplendent with villas, within which resided the patricians in sultry summertime. Although the countryside had been slowly depopulated Western Rome still possessed a population exceeding 30 millions, while the rich Roman provinces aroused the wonder, envy and cupidity of the surrounding barbarian tribes.

If Roman society remained aristocratic, ordinary citizens distinguished by fortune, ability or as public officials could enter the patrician order while a numerous middle class composed of merchants, small landowners and artificers provided an equilibrium serviceable to the State. Also, independent tenant farmers and workers both urban and rural, supplemented semi-servile labourers on landed estates and State workshops. Again, merchants and free artisans had their corporations, while

humanitarian influences and economic needs lessened the evils of that most despicable and unremunerative mode of labour—slavery—which, indeed, had nearly disappeared both in town and country.

The barbarian incursions of the third century certainly increased taxation yet a century later Roman Europe remained the most prosperous part of the world. Some provinces had suffered from the ravages of war but most had never known more plenteous times. As Dr. Boissonnade states: "In four centuries Rome had succeeded in transforming the part of Europe which lay beneath her law into a hive of productive activity. She had transformed even its outward aspect; forests had been cleared, marshes drained, the land cultivated. The plough and the spade triumphed over wild nature; cattle-breeding, corn-growing, the cultivation of industrial plants, fruit trees, vines and olives were developed to an extraordinary extent. . . . Industrial production grew the results hitherto obtained, as well as in the domain of minerals and metallurgy, as in those of weaving, leather, earthenware and glass."

Moreover, on the very eve of the barbarian invasions the organisation of industry and commerce became more efficient. Large ports were constructed, river communications extended, facilities for credit improved, while more than 90,000 miles of excellent roads were built. Even adverse observers commented on the progressive activities of the age.

Yet, despite all these appearances of social and economic stability the Roman administration was shattered by the Huns, Goths, Vandals, Lombards and other predatory invaders. Centuries rolled away before anything approaching the amenities of antique times was imperfectly replaced. Ultimately, the influences of Byzantium's civic structure and the imitation and adoption of the vastly superior agricultural and horticultural methods of Saracen Spain, Western Europe painfully emerged from its Christian Dark Ages.

Under the Feudal System the chief barons and clergy secured by fair means and foul the greater part of the most fertile soil in Europe. In the twelfth century the Church possessed more than half the cultivable land in Germany while the baronage owned the rest. In France, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands the proportions were much the same while in all these dominions the despised serfs were treated with far greater cruelty and neglect than the lower animals they tended.

The rural organisation of Feudal times made the villeins on the lords' estates entirely dependent on the good or evil will of their masters although their lord's authority protected them from the encroachments of an avaricious or despotic neighbour. But for long centuries the rural labourer was heavily burdened with rents and services of an onerous character. His dwelling place was a miserable hovel built of mud or wood with an opening in the roof which admitted all the light and contained and allowed the escape of the smoke from its scanty fires. Black bread, cheese, butter, small meals with occasional fish and meat made up his frugal meals. Also, the people were in constant fear of famine. As our historian states: "In France between 970 and 1100 there were no less than sixty famine years. In England the tradition is still preserved of the terrible dearth of 1086 and 1125. The whole of Western Europe experienced in turn this frightful scourge, which decimated the population of entire districts and brought in its train a revival of primitive bestiality." The plague and leprosy abounded where the hygienic measures of

antiquity had been forgotten. Moreover, pious platitudes naturally proved ineffective in mitigating the sufferings of the community. As Boissonnade avers: "In spite of evangelical maxims about the equality of Christians before God . . . the propertied classes held that villeinage and serfdom were consecrated by divine right, and placed the serf below the beast of burden. In the eleventh century a French serf was worth 38 sous and a horse 100. The Church did no more than counsel the lord to use charity and the serf to show unlimited obedience and respect. But the seigniorial class was devoid of the spirit of kindness and justice. . . . The lord had only hard treatment and contempt for the villein by whose labour he lived. His pleasure, as a churchman of the age admits, was to trample, rail, and scoff at the peasant and, ignorant of the spirit of equity and pity, he reigned by violence and terror."

As we shall prove in a further essay, the relative emancipation of the toilers, both industrial and agrarian, was later accomplished by changing economic factors, rebellions, labour unions, strikes and migrations from rural areas to townships where residence for twelve months and a day released them from the thralldom of their erstwhile landowning oppressors. Such secular activities ultimately constrained both spiritual and temporal taskmasters to adopt more humane methods in their relations with the labouring poor.

T. F. PALMER.

TEACHERS AND RELIGION

I NOTICE in the papers recently that an M.P. has been asking for the sacking of those teachers who do not believe in the Christian religion on the ground that they are not competent to teach what they do not believe. Apart from the fact that there are a number of contentious items in any educational programme upon which differing individual opinions are held, it must be obvious that with the exception of religion there is a general standard of truth which may be checked up by contemporary records.

Religion, however, has always been a "bone of contention" owing not only to the many religions, but the different sects into which particularly the Christians are divided. Even the Great Ones of the Christian Church are not decided upon what is the truth, and with every succeeding age the number of adherents becomes less and their beliefs less grotesque.

It just happens that I have been reading "Severn Stream" by Brian Waters, a geographical travel book, and I have come across the following in connection with Newton:

"Sir John Pryce . . . married the daughter of another baronet . . . who died soon after their marriage. . . . Not long after he married the beautiful daughter of a farmer. She did not long enjoy her position and left Sir John a widower for a second time. . . . He had the bodies of both his wives embalmed and kept in his bedroom. His interest in their DEPARTED SOULS was so great that, on hearing that the Reverend Mr. Felton, a curate in the town was dying, he wrote the following letter, as extraordinary for its style as for its content:

DEAR MR. FELTON,
I desire that you will not suspect that I am going to say that I look upon your case as desperate, but as God Almighty may dispose of you in a manner contrary to my wishes and expectations, and as I have abundant reason from my own as well as other people's observations of your conduct that you will immediately enter upon a happier state whenever

you make an exchange forth, I desire that you will do me the favour to acquaint my two dear wives, both of which you will be sure to find within those happy regions, and questionless within the same mansion too, that I retain the same tender affections and the same honour and esteem for their memories. And to tell the latter that I earnestly desire, if she can obtain the Divine permission, to appear to me, to discover the persons who have wronged her . . . that since she left me I have never known what joy or comfort means and that probably I never shall . . . that I have several weighty things to tell her of, and several important questions to ask her and that you will tell her that I think though I am not very sure, that she promised me an appearance after death.

Your friend and humble servant,

JOHN PRYCE.' "

It will be noted that this letter is described as 'extraordinary,' but I submit that to a sincere believer in the Christian religion it is quite consistent. Many times I have sung, 'There's a home for little children beyond the bright blue sky,' and if what I was taught is correct then Mr. Pryce was quite reasonable in asking the dying cleric to interview his dead wives, and it will also be noted that he required confirmation of such interview by one of his wives appearing to him in the spirit form. Granted the man was eccentric, but he was truly religious, but imagine the effect upon a class of youths of telling them this story and reading the letter! I believe even our M.P. would object to this example of True Christianity.

As an example of "Cherchez la femme" I may mention that Sir John married later Mrs. Eleanor Jones, who made him bury his two wives in the family vault, and to prevent any backsliding made him come and live in her home at Buckland in Breconshire!

T. D. SMITH.

ECRASEZ L'INFAME!

There is an evil power that stands
Against man's freedom in all lands;
A Church which seeks to rivet chains
On honest simple minds, and claims
To stand above men's toil and care,
To repress joy, and order prayer.

Their life repressive makes priests cruel;
Repressed themselves, they gather fuel
To burn their betters at the stake,
Or roast us in the fiery lake
Named Hell, a place these dolts invented
For those on whom their spite is vented.

Free men must fight the Church of Rome,
Strike hard for freedom, country, home;
Chase out these sots in petticoats,
With morals of lascivious goats;
Their prelates' pride exceeds all measure,
In God's name they forbid our pleasure.

Sane men will never madmen kill,
Nor imitate this Roman Evil,
But take from priests their ghostly power,
And lead them to a pleasant bower—
Where they can pray, confess and tup—
And keep these lunatics locked up.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

Many South African natives are reverting to Paganism under the Apartheid (Segregation) laws of Malan, said the Rev. Michael Scott. This is not at all surprising, for what can a Negro make of a religion which prates of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and that we are all God's chillun, but in practice, regards the native as lower than the animals? Equality before God! Yes, but not until you are dead.

Before we read the *Scottish Daily Mail* we would have wagered that there is only one Misery Martin in the British Isles, but North of the Tweed is running a close second to our home-produced kill-joy in the person of Rev. F. Gardner, who sees in the "call of the open road, hiking and motoring" a cancerous growth of Atheism and Materialism sapping our very social life. It is obvious that his congregations do not contribute much to the collection.

In reply to a question in the House of Commons, the Under-Secretary of State for War said that compulsory Church parades in the army are not to be re-introduced. This decision, he added, "was not because the War Minister believed the practice of the army was inconsistent with Christianity," but because "the practice of compulsion was not consistent with Christianity." In sheer desperation we can only comment it must have taken the War Minister a long time to think of that one!

Delegates representing 200,000 Catholic Daughters of America were told by the Bishop of Scranton that "Secularism is far worse than Communism." As we have so often pointed out in these columns, Catholicism could "do a deal" with Communism were it not for its Atheism. Catholicism does not fear Communism, it is the Freethinker and Secularist who cause the wearer of the triple crown uneasiness. And it is good to see that Bishop of Scranton realises that.

Indians in Arizona have lost faith in their centuries-old rain dance and have engaged a scientist to produce artificial rain because of the continued drought in their district. The "heathen" was ever more logical than the Christian who still prays for rain.

Christians may again sleep easy in their beds for "blatant materialism" has had another set-back at the hands of the Peterhead Town Council who have thrown out a motion that children's swings and chutes should be opened on Sundays. The sanctity of the Sabbath is assured once more. 'Twas a famous victory.

A reader of the "Catholic Herald" wants to know whether Catholic M.P.s have abandoned their duty of pressing for more financial aid for Catholic schools. But Mr. Maurice Quinlan thinks that it is better that non-Catholic M.P.s should put the Catholic case, for they are more likely to impress the Minister of Education. Mr. Quinlan says that Catholics ought to be grateful that so many non-Catholics are in favour, including more than one member of the Jewish faith and at least one professed Atheist. We are fully aware that there are Atheists in the House of Commons, but a professed Atheist, and one in favour of Catholicism! We can hardly believe it! There are too few M.P.s of the stamp of Bradlaugh willing to risk losing their seat.

Dr. Leslie Weatherhead has been to Lourdes with "some Catholic friends," and says if "Protestants" claim that it has been commercialised, "it is utterly false." In fact, "it is wonderful to see evidence of Our Lord's healing miracles happening to-day." We always thought it was "Our Lady" who was responsible for the cures, but Mr. Weatherhead is now an expert on Lourdes, and he ought to know. Incidentally, the R.C. Bishop Beck told him that "Lourdes exists to honour God and Our Lady, and the cures are incidental." So there's a regular mix-up here.

The 80th birthday of Hilaire Belloc has been marked with a good deal of hysteria from the Catholic Press in particular, but one fact stands out. It is Belloc, the Roman Catholic, who is for Catholics more important than the man of letters. The *Universe* points out with pride that Belloc "demolished" H. G. Wells' "Materialistic Outline of History," a piece of insolent nonsense; but, of course, it will be believed by the faithful sheep. That many-times convert, Mr. J. W. Poynter, who is now reposing so soundly in the bosom of the Church, himself wrote a pamphlet proving that it was Belloc who was wrong and Wells who was right. And he certainly could not answer himself now.

Another "image of our Lord" has been photographed by ultra violet rays. Needless to add that on this fabric, which is in Wallduern, Germany, "the photo clearly shows the body of Christ with arms outstretched." The image is due to the accidental spilling of consecrated wine in the 14th century, and in addition there are eleven heads of "our Lord" around it. Needless also to add that it has already performed many miracles, curing the blind and the paralysed with equal enthusiasm. And there are people who want to know why we attack the Church!

According to the Rev. A. E. Chadwell, one of the Anglican missionaries in Korea, he is quite sure that God will use him and other missionaries "in building up his Church there." In addition, "more than ever before, Korea needs the prayers of the Church. These people never learn, their denseness is not merely ignorance, but positively harmful. Young American soldiers are being killed, Koreans are being slaughtered, and this gang can think of nothing but prayers. Or at least that is what they say—but one wonders sometimes if they are not really thinking of their jobs.

If there is one thing which can knock out the Roman Church for sheer hopeless credulity, it is Spiritualism, and no better champion of its claims has ever appeared than Mr. Shaw Desmond. From one of his latest articles we learn that "scientists" can now weigh and measure "materialised spirits" and a hefty young spirit can even knock you out. By "thought and wish," a materialised spirit is brought into being, and it can then easily pass through locked doors. "The astral country," Mr. Desmond tells us, "is to the pioneer the Country of Make-Believe—a word in which mirage is king, in which the paradoxical holds true. . . ." We prefer fish and chips.

The Church of Immortality in Los Angeles has asked the Secretary of State for permission to change its name because it is so embarrassing when people write to the Church of "immortality", and even newspapers have made the same mistake in announcements. A Church by any other name . . . !

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

F. TERRY.—Chapman Cohen's *Almost an Autobiography* is out of print.

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

All who are interested in Psychical Research as distinct from going to the usual public "seances," will be grateful for the many excellent papers published by the Society for Psychical Research in their *Proceedings*. The July number (31, Tavistock Square, London. 3s. 6d.) as usual has some excellent articles, the one dealing with Kant and psychical research is of exceptional interest. Prof. Broad has gone into great detail and discusses his connection, among other things, with the doctrines of Swedenborg. Kant's position was eventually purely "agnostic." The article dealing with "PK" and precognition is also of great interest.

There is an instructive note in the many appreciations of the work of Miss Isabel Newton who was, for 30 years, the Secretary of the S.P.R., and who has recently died. In spite of the fact that she must have met people by the thousand who believed in survival, she herself had her own ideas on the problem. She admired Mrs. Sidgwick and other earnest workers, but she "continued to hold her own much more sceptical views on the question of survival." Miss Newton had been connected with the Society for 47 years—but she always remained sceptical! An excellent lesson even for those "agnostics" who prefer never to make up their minds.

We were glad to see a letter from Mr. W. Spencer, the Secretary of the Darlington Branch N.S.S., in the *Northern Dispatch*. Mr. Spencer combated the notion that because members of the National Secular Society were Atheists, they were also Communists. He rightly pointed out that Charles Bradlaugh was a Liberal, and he might have pointed out also that both Ingersoll and G. W. Foote agreed with him. Secularism maintained the right of free speech and was completely against totalitarianism. Letters like Mr. Spencer's are valuable—and we should also congratulate the Editor of the *Northern Dispatch* for giving it space.

DID THE SUN STAND STILL?

RIGHT throughout the nineteenth century—ever since, in fact, Thomas Paine wrote the *Age of Reason*, desperate efforts were made not only by theologians but by scientists to prove that the Bible, God's Precious Word, was literally true. Of course, if hard pressed, some of the all-believing scientists would regretfully admit that a few of the miracles were perhaps not altogether based on fact; but taking the Bible as a whole, and because it came as a Revelation from God Almighty, if it did not square with science, then it must be science which was wrong.

The efforts to harmonise science with revelation during this century were never quite so enthusiastic, and most men of science, even Roman Catholics, preferred to leave attempts to do so, to some bright young priests or lady writers; but there have always been a few ready to fight like grim death for the Lord, and no one need be surprised, therefore, that a gentleman with the name of Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky in a book called *Worlds in Collision* has once again courageously stepped into the breach in which, with the aid of archaeology, paleontology, anthropology, geology, astronomy, psychology, and psychics, he has tried to show that almost, if not, all the miracles in the Bible are scientifically true.

I am going by the resumé given in the *Reader's Digest* for, unfortunately, I have not got the book itself—and I have never been keen to criticise any book that I have not read. But when we find the science editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Mr. John O'Neill, declaring, "This magnificent piece of scholarly research raises world history to a level of superlative interest" and another American writer, Mr. Clifton Fadiman, saying, "It may well turn out to be epochal as the *Origin of Species* of Darwin and the *Principia* of Newton," it will, I hope, be worth while to examine even the resumé.

The author of *Worlds in Collision* is a Russian doctor of law and medicine now in the U.S.A., and is a psychoanalyst as well; and it took him ten years to write his book, consulting "specialists all over the world," we are told. It is full of notes and citations from standard authorities with "confirming" data from "the Bible and the Talmud, from Egyptian papyri, Babylonian astronomical tablets, Mayan and Aztec calendars, and from the folklore of Arabia, India, North America, Tibet, China, and Peru." With such an array of support, Dr. Velikovsky takes the war right into the enemy's camp by proving that the story of Joshua stopping the sun is literally true.

According to the *Digest*, he produces "records from all over the earth which agree as to the time and as to the altered portions of daylight and dark in each area." He quotes "dozens, scores, even hundreds of confirmations." There is, in fact, "world-wide evidence" that the sun stood still exactly as described in Joshua.

In the Holy Book itself, however, the story is that "the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies," but Dr. Velikovsky appears to have forgotten this. The "catastrophe," he declares, was due to a great comet that passed the earth twice, "first about 1500 B.C. at the time of the Exodus, and again 52 years later, in the time of Joshua." It is not clear, therefore, whether Dr. Velikovsky believes that it was Joshua who commanded the sun to stand still as the Bible says, or whether, just at the moment when the children of Israel were slaughtering their enemies, up came a great comet

near the earth and caused, not the sun, but the earth to stand still. If the story of the great comet is true, then the Bible story is false, and Dr. Velikovsky has no more proved it true than the story of the Exodus.

By thus introducing a great comet near the earth one can prove anything—even the complete submersion of the continent of Atlantis. And one can go even further, as the erudite doctor in fact really does.

This great comet "whizzed around us in space until centuries after it was caught and trapped as a permanent member of our solar system . . ." What did it eventually become? It changed into the "showy but contented planet revolving on schedule around our sun—the beautiful star which men call Venus." Could anything be more piously convincing? Our astronomers will now have something to think about—the origin of the "contented" planet Venus.

It is true that Dr. Velikovsky confesses ignorance as to the origin of life, in spite of the Bible's emphatic and realistic account of that stupendous event; but the solar system, he insists, behaves exactly like electrons revolving around a nucleus. "In an atom," he tells us, "a planet goes around its sun millions of times a second"—and I was hoping to learn *exactly* how many millions of times a second; but perhaps exact figures are not altogether in his line. All the same, if you can grasp this "millions of times in a second" idea you will have some notion of what happens in our solar system. I myself have, however, sorrowfully to confess that I cannot visualise anything whatever approaching millions of times in a second. It looks to me exactly like that dear old problem so beloved of the ancient schoolmen—how many angels can dance on the point of a needle? I suppose the answer is either a lemon, or millions of 'em.

It must have been a comet all the same in Joshua's day, for only a comet would have caused a heap of stones to drop on the earth; and Joshua narrates that Israel's enemies lost more because of the great stones dropping from heaven than because of getting killed with the sword. The point which puzzles such a confirmed sceptic as I am is, why the *enemies* of Israel were thus wiped out by the "great stones from heaven," and not the children of Israel? In the *Digest* resumé, this point seems to have been missed as, perhaps, unimportant.

The comet appears also to have been responsible for the ten plagues, which is not exactly confirming the Bible story. For there, it will be remembered, God is blamed for the beastly things, and not a comet. And the same comet gets the kudos for parting the Red Sea to allow the Israelites a free passage, Pharaoh following just at the moment when the comet had done its work and thus being swallowed up. Dr. Velikovsky is not to be put off his thesis by the horrid, infidel contention that there never was an "exodus," that the Israelites were never slaves in Egypt, and that the whole story is just a myth. Even if it is, he would contend that the comet was an actual historical one, and you can now see it as our beautiful planet Venus.

But just before its transformation, the comet destroyed the army of Sennacherib, and the story in the book of Kings is actually confirmed by Chronicles, the Talmud, "and other ancient sources." The idea that the Talmud, Chronicles, and the other ancient sources, merely copied from Kings, does not seem to have struck our learned doctor. He even gives you the exact date, noted also in "China and elsewhere." It was March 23, 687 B.C.—and such precision leaves me dumbfounded. In my simple way, I believed that chronology was in a hopeless

state, not only in the Bible, but in secular history, until a few great experts like J. J. Scaliger tried to put some order into it. To find the Israelites and the ancient Chinese agreeing on exactly the same date, given us in modern terms, proves that the age of miracles can be extended in all directions. Of course, if one argues with the doctor that ancient and modern calendars do not agree, he can confound you in a flash. The orbit of the earth changed "at that time" (about 747 B.C.), and so the Bible has once again been proved to be absolutely true.

I hope that I have not been unfair to Dr. Velikovsky—but as soon as I can get a copy of the book I will deal with that and not, as in this article, with a resumé. But perhaps the book is even more comic than the article? Or is it?

H. CUTNER.

THE MAN OF SORROWS

A TENDENCY, nowadays, is perceptible to regard the whole career of Jesus as a career of suffering. I think that this tendency is traceable to Handel's famous oratorio. Handel does not tell his listeners (was he fully aware himself?) that the expressions he sets to music, such as "despised," "rejected" (oh, the magic of that music!) are not taken from the gospels, but from the later, the post-exilic, Isaiah where, moreover, they are applied, not to any historical person but to an (imagined) Servant of Yahwè.

What do the gospels tell us of that career? To his boyhood there is a passing allusion . . . that he increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and Man, which, certainly, indicates at least well-being. Of his youth and early manhood we are not told a single item (in which respect he conforms to the "hero"-pattern of Lord Raglan). His first public appearance is at the baptism of John, who acclaims him as Messiah, if not as Son of God, while John's audience, by their silence, appear to acquiesce. Certainly, here, he is not rejected. Shortly afterwards (it would seem . . . the gospels are habitually vague as to length of intervals) follows his Galilean ministry in which, we are told, he is followed by multitudes . . . on one occasion we hear of 5,000, not to mention women and children. Assuredly, in Galilee, he is not rejected.

After, apparently, about a year of this (vagueness, again) he goes up to Jerusalem where, at once, we hear of the "triumphal entry." Not long afterwards comes the "cleansing of the temple" which he accomplished by his own prestige and authority, no one, apparently, interfering. After, it would appear, not many days, the priests and Pharisees complain that "the world is gone after him." We hear, then, that he teaches daily in the temple on to the very eve of his arrest. Yet, in less than 24 hours (interval definite, for once), the mob, we are told, is yelling for his blood! Mobs, as is generally recognised, are fickle, but such an extreme as this is, surely, incredible. It is, however, an episode in the trial before Pilate, and as has been validly remarked by a scholar, by the time of the gospel-writing, no more than rumours of that trial would have been available to the evangelists. If this appears hypercritical, we must bear in mind that in those days, there were no newspapers and no professional reporting. After some 40 years what would there be but popular memory? An experience of my own throws some light on this. At one time, I found that a rumour was current concerning my own death, which was of a tragic nature, place, mode and circumstances all being specified! In that case, the interval

was only two years. Such is the power of popular rumour. Yet this is the only occasion reported in the gospels when Jesus was rejected by any considerable number of people.

Finally, from one very prevalent source of suffering Jesus appears to have been exempt. He is never said to be ill. He seems to have enjoyed uninterrupted health.

Thus, after a brief search through the principal episodes in the gospels, we have not found a "Man of Sorrows."

EDWARD GREENLY, D.Sc.; F.G.S.

CORRESPONDENCE

LOGIC

Sir,—While I cannot claim that the arguments set out below are, in any sense, original, I do claim that they are timely. For, whether it is that I have only just noticed the trend in Freethought circles to discuss subjects of which the participants know, at the most, very little; or whether the tendency is of recent origin, is a matter which I am not much concerned with. That such a tendency does obtain, I shall attempt to show.

W. Rennie ("Freethought Dictionary" *The Freethinker*, July 30) is a typical example of the tendency to which I have hitherto referred. For he defines Logic, "The science of correct reasoning and the bugbear of theologians." He adds, "It is very obvious that no theologian can be a logician, and vice-versa."

It is in complete conformity with the principles of logic to point to Father Copleston, S.J., in order to contradict this statement. Can the Freethought movement put forward a logician of the standing of Fr. Copleston? I do not know of any logician at all, of any recognised standing, who can be said to associate himself with the ideas set forth in *The Freethinker*.

One would expect that in an article on logic one would find, at the very least, some attempt to subscribe to the rules of logic. But Mr. Rennie makes no such attempt when he defines "his subject-matter. For by "correct" he certainly means "true." But as any elementary text-book on logic will tell him, logic is not concerned with the "truth" of propositions, but with their "validity." And that, while arguments may be logically valid, that does not make their conclusions true. It is for this reason that his attempt to reduce everything to an apparent absurdity by a process of "reductio ad absurdum" loses much of its cogency. He assumes that what is valid reasoning is also true. This is not so.

Mr. Rennie betrays a fundamental confusion in his thinking when he asks, "How can it be necessary for omniscience to prove the goodness or badness of his work?" Does he not know that "necessary" is a term of modality and can only be applied to the logical relations between inferences?

The converse of the proposition "if immortality is good in his eyes" is not bad, as Mr. Rennie claims, but "some of the good in his eyes is immortal."—Yours, etc.,

VERNON CARTER.

FREETHOUGHT AND COMMUNISM

Sir,—Mr. Cutner, in your issue of July 30, states that "if you are an atheist in France you are almost sure to be called a Communist. It is taken for granted." This, of course, is the result of the years of flirtation on the part of Freethinkers with the so-called revolutionary movements of the Left. Bradlaugh, you will remember, had no use for the Socialism of his day, and John M. Robertson was also consistent enough to reject both the myth of Christ and the myth of the masses, but they seem to be exceptions. Now we have got to a stage where, as Mr. Cutner sees (although he qualifies it with a "perhaps"), and as I have been permitted to point out myself previously in *The Freethinker*, it may be advisable for a Freethinker to support the Roman Catholic Church (the lesser evil) against the Moscow Church (the greater evil).

To the logical Frenchman or Belgian this is not such a horrifying matter as it appears to be to the more emotional English Freethinker. The tragedy is that the generally assumed connection between the Freethought and the Socialist/Communist movements, not only on the Continent but also here in England, should in the past have received so much justification, and that the present-day influence of the Freethought movement in the cause of freedom should thereby be weakened.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

LEO TAXIL

Sir,—This subject of Mr. Cutner's article, July 30, is very interesting and receives comment in Dr. G. G. Coulton's "Romanism and Truth" (1931). Gabriel Joyand-Pages, born at Marseilles, 1854, wrote, under the name of Leo Taxil, the "Secret Amours of Pius IX" and was fined 60,000 francs for it. As "convert" from Freethought he made a rapid fortune with his "Complete Revelations Concerning Freemasonry"—as a deliberate worship of Satan. He invented documents, invented rituals, and invented a whole volume on Woman in Freemasonry (which did not admit women). Pope Leo XIII published three official proclamations, 1890 to 1892, in encouragement of the impostures; and the Bishop of Grenoble was completely credulous. Taxil made bolder lying fabrications in the name of Diana Vaughan. Taxil knew that Romanists believed with Mr. Belloc and Father Pope that a Roman Catholic must be right in every historical question and his opponents must be wrong. He exploited this foible with consummate audacity. He was in the full current of Romanist tradition, which inspired the histories of the Patriarchs of Ravenna, not from documents or oral tradition, but "by the help of God, and with the prayers of the brethren"; which inspired a pious nun who imagined a whole life-story for the non-existent St. Philomena; and inspired the authors of a hundred other legends which genuine Catholic philosophers themselves do not accept. (See Vol. II, pp. 205-218.)—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE ROSS.

OBITUARY

ADAM GOWANS WHYTE

We deeply regret to announce the sudden death, on July 31, of Mr. Adam Gowans Whyte, in his 75th year. Mr. Whyte had been one of the leading figures in Rationalism for over 50 years. He was a founder-member of the Rationalist Press Association and closely associated with its progress, becoming the Vice-Chairman in 1946. All who knew him, and who read his many contributions to Rationalist literature, will mourn the loss of one of the movement's most ardent and skilful champions, and a man who claimed the respect and affection of all his colleagues.

The cremation took place at Golders Green on August 3, where a large number of friends and relatives, including representatives of the R.P.A. and the N.S.S., gathered to pay their last respects and homage to him. Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner gave a most moving and inspired address and the music from Grieg and Chopin added to the solemnity of the occasion.

C. K.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn 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.
- 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.: 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. L. EBURY and A. CALVERLEY; (Highbury Corner), 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 12, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. A. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Attercliff Baths Corner).—Sunday, 11-30 a.m.: Messrs. T. M. MOSLEY and A. SAMMS. (Barker's Pool).—7-30 p.m.: Messrs. T. M. MOSLEY and 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.

CHRISTIANITY AND WOMAN

(Concluded from page 311)

MOTHERHOOD is sinful, with seven days' uncleanness and thirty-three days' purification in case of a boy, and double these times in case of a girl baby (Lev., XII, 1-5). The word, translated "female" (nequebah) is too offensive and indecent to be translated literally. The New Testament refers to "the natural use of the woman" (Rom., I, 26 and 27). "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim., II, 12). "It is a shame for woman to speak in the Church" (I Cor., XIV, 35). "Women may be captured, violated, and then turned out of doors (Deut., XXI, 10-14). "Have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two" (Judges, V, 30). Jesus is given as saying to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John, II, 4). St. Bernard, the very flower of Christian piety, follows these words in writing a letter to a monk's parents on behalf of the monk: "What have I to do with you? . . . Is it not enough for you that you have brought me into this miserable world; that you, being sinners, have begotten me in sin; that, being born in sin you have nourished me in sin?" . . . (quoting J. McCabe). It is curious that Jesus is given as replying to the woman of Canaan: "Is it meet to give the children's bread to dogs?" (Matt., XV, 27), and similarly to the Greek, Syro-phenician woman (Mark, VII, 27). Was the woman a dog?

The Church founded on the Bible has obeyed its precepts to the letter. Lecky says: "Fierce invectives against the sex form a conspicuous and grotesque portion of the writings of the Fathers. Woman was represented as the door of Hell. Women were forbidden, on account of their impurity, to receive the Eucharist in their naked hands." Lecky in his "Europ. Morals" lists books of this class. In translating Clement of Alexandria and Methodius, some parts have to be left in Latin. To Athenagoras, a widower re-marrying is a "cloaked adulterer." Tertullian regarded a second marriage as equivalent to two wives at one time; describes children as "burdens which are to us most of all unsuitable, as being parlous to faith"; and says of women: "Do you not know that every one of you is an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law. . . . You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die." Clement of Alexandria: "Nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason; much less for woman, to whom it brings shame even to reflect of what nature she is." Gregory Thaumaturgus: "Moreover, among all women I sought for chastity proper to them, and found it in none; and verily a person may find one man chaste among a thousand, but a woman never." Women were to stay at home, and go out only to church, or to visit the sick, veiled. St. Paul, a Grecised Jew to some, a pure Greek to the Ebionites, had very pronounced opinions about marriage and women. Such were the "uplifters" of women!

Feudal legislation, says Lecky, placed women in a much lower legal position than in the Pagan Empire; and Henry C. Lea's "History of Sacerdotal Celibacy" has a frightful position and condition to record, including

the *jus primae noctis* (right of the first night), the discussion, concerning which, Mr. McCabe declares to be "otiose as during the greater part of the Feudal Age serfs were not protected by Law and the noble or his chief officials took any women that pleased them." Scott, in his "Moorish Empire in Europe," refers to this "right" in its various titles; seigniorial rights, *cuisseage*, *cazzagio*, *Reitschot*, *droit de prélibation*, and *maidenrent*, and observes "the age was wholly devoid of honour, justice and decency" outside Moorish rule: "the Church encouraged incredible ignorance and inhumanity of the age." "Women of Christian Europe, from tenth to fifteenth century, received no such social consideration and enjoyed no such educational advantages as in those countries influenced by Moslem culture . . . The graceful courtesy and deference to women originated among Spanish Arabs . . . general Christian condition if born in inferior position, classed with beasts of burden; subject to insult, oppression, humility, and dependence."

In modern times, Gladstone condemned the "shameful injustice" put upon women sixty years ago. Feminists relate the conditions of woman. On marriage the wife was compelled to surrender her name, her property, and the control of her person. Conviction of husband for a capital crime gave the wife no release from the marriage bond; yet his innocent wife and children were robbed of all share in the estate and reduced to beggary. A woman could not attest a will. Canon law gave the husband the power of compelling his wife's return, if, for any cause, she left him. She was then an outlaw, and it was a crime for anyone to aid her. Mr. Putnam says: "Less than fifty years ago, in New York, a husband recovered 10,000 dollar damages against parties who gave shelter to his wife. It was in the husband's power, in every part of Christian Europe and America, to repudiate any bargain, sale or gift, made by the wife, as of no binding legal force, even though she had brought the entire property." Helen Gardner says: "It is a significant fact that of all the Christian countries, in which the Church stands highest, and has most power, women rank lowest, and have few rights accorded them, whether of personal liberty or proprietary interest." For many hundred years the law bound out to servile labour all unmarried women between the ages of 11 and 40. Wives in England were bought during these centuries. As late as the 17th century, husbands beat their wives. Public whipping of women in England abolished in 1817. Blackstone ruled: "By marriage the husband and wife are one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage." Buckle: "In England, wives are still occasionally led to the market by a halter around the neck." During Queen Victoria's reign, says Mr. Putnam, a Petty Sessions Bench jailed a young girl who refused to return to service with her employer because she would be raped. As Mr. McCabe points out, it was not Christians but non-Christians "who led the revolt against the injustice to women, in the proportion of five to one." In Britain the pioneers were Mary Wollstonecraft, Fanny Wright, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau, Godwin, Owen, Bentham, Holyoake, Mill.

The status of woman is a test of civilisation. Christianity needed civilising.

GEORGE ROSS.

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