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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Authority in Religion

THE forthcoming proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary brings into sharp relief the question of the role of authority in religion. For the "Assumption" is a dogma which, as even the *Church Times* has recently admitted, cannot possibly be defended either by Reason or History. For this new canonical dogma, in which hereafter, the world-wide following of the Catholic Church must, henceforward, believe under pain of eternal damnation, is one that rests upon no evidence whatsoever: no secular historian records it, of course, and even the "sacred scriptures" of the New Testament, which record so many fantastic happenings, that appeared credible to what Bishop Barnes himself has described as "an age of intellectual decline," have absolutely nothing to say about the celestial elevation of the uncorrupted Body of the "Mother of God" to Heaven. No record whatsoever exists in either "sacred" or profane history of this startling metamorphosis which is, furthermore, as incredible in the light of modern astro-physics as it is from the point of view of historical credibility.

However, the Roman Catholic Church, which has contained in the past, at least, many learned specialists in historical research and many learned astronomers—the Vatican Observatory is still said to be one of the best in the world—still proclaims the Dogma of the Assumption with absolute assurance. No one saw the Body of the Virgin ascend to Heaven, no one knows where "Heaven" may be, and every educated Catholic, including, surely, the Jesuit astronomers of the Vatican, knows that any normal body travelling at any speed possible for a human body to travel, would still be only a very short distance from the earth as and when compared with the illimitable immensity of the stellar spaces as disclosed by modern cosmogony. "Heaven" is invisible to the modern telescope, and yet, to receive the "uncorrupted body" of the Virgin it must be a material place, with appropriate dimensions observable by a telescope. For we ask our readers to note that, by including the *Body of the Virgin in Heaven*, Rome necessarily makes the definite assumption that Heaven is a concrete material place and not some vague "spiritual" never-never land.

Indeed, in view of this admission, we could ask the Vatican some very awkward questions, as, for example, where is Heaven, and how long would it take the body of the Virgin to get there? And—still more intriguing questions for hard-boiled Atheists—where also is Heaven's opposite number, Hell, in the locality of which, to be sure, most readers of *The Freethinker* have a more specific and intimate interest—at least, if the theologians are to be believed!

However, notwithstanding the above, after November 1, 1950, the canonical Dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin will be "de fide" and, as such, absolutely

binding upon all Catholics, including the most learned historians and the most erudite astronomers who, at least, must know that all and any evidence for the alleged event is conspicuous only by its absence. If ever there was a doctrine made obligatory in religious circles by authority, and by authority alone, here we surely have it.

The role of authority in religion is, incidentally, the *real* point at issue between Rome and the Reformed Churches of Protestant persuasion. Questions of dogma are only secondary, while the striking contrasts in liturgies and in ritual which so strike the superficial visitor to a Catholic service for the first time, are really quite trivial; it is still firm Catholic doctrine that ritual depends on doctrine for its validity, and not vice versa. The *real* contrast between Catholicism and Protestantism lies, we repeat, in their contrasting attitudes to the role of authority in religious questions. Compared with which fundamental attitudes, the mere number of dogmas professed is quite secondary.

It has usually been held since the Reformation, and some Freethinkers (or, at least, some who claim to be such) still appear to hold the belief that Protestantism is actually more rational than the Church of Rome. This, however, is only so when judged by rationalistic principles themselves which are the negation of revealed religion. From the point of view of revealed religion itself, it has always appeared to the present writer that Rome must be regarded as incomparably more rational, at least in the sense of being more logical, than are the Reformed Churches, ranging from Lutherans and High Anglicans upon their extreme right, to the Unitarians and modernist "liberal Christians" on the extreme left. It is, we think, this essential logicity which constitutes Rome as the direct antithesis to thorough-going Rationalism and Atheism that explains why so few ex-Romans or, for that matter, ex-Atheists stop for long at any of these half-way houses or, "feather-beds for falling Christians," as Erasmus Darwin once aptly designated Unitarianism.

For consider what is actually involved in the assumptions of revealed religion—we mean, of course, the real thing and not the pseudo-theism, "vegetables dressed up to look like meat," as a friend of ours once wittily described the beliefs of some "reverent Rationalists." Religion holds the transcendent reality of God, of a supernatural Universe, and (usually) of a Future Life of endless duration for the immortal soul. Now it is quite certain that, whatever may have been the case in more primitive ages, modern science can tell us nothing of such a God; modern psychology knows nothing of the "immortal soul," and modern astronomy knows nothing of any Heaven or Hell. Nor is secular human history much more helpful where the alleged entry of the Supernatural into History is concerned, e.g., whether there was an historical Jesus or not, at least it is indisputable that his contemporary secular history gives us no help in the quest for Christian origins.

In such circumstances, only revelation can tell us anything at all about the basic truths alleged to be at the basis of religion. Apart from revelation, God becomes merely the "Unknowable," and that does not carry us very far. Moreover, a revelation, to be effective, must be permanently embodied in an authoritative institution. Whilst to be quite sure about the revelation and its invisible source, an authority is necessary who can be relied upon not to err. In which last connection an infallible individual who, so to speak, is always on the premises, is much more reliable than a book, which may be misinterpreted, even if itself infallible, by fallible men, or than an institution which is cumbersome and unsure in which of its organs infallibility resides.

Rome possesses all the above desiderata for an authoritative revelation. The Revelation is guaranteed by the Church and is perpetually guaranteed by the Infallible Pope. Rome is, consequently, the only Church which to-day professes to be able to tell us anything about God and the supernatural since Infallibility is Religion's substitute for Science. The Vatican professes to know; whilst the other Churches, at most, guess! Can one wonder that, in a world which knows less and less about God and more and more about everything else, religionists turn to their last source of information, Infallibility, and that, consequently, the Infallible Church gains ground at the expense of her fallible rivals?

In final analysis, two fundamental outlooks remain to fight out their battle for ultimate mastery—the critical self-sufficient intellect which culminates in Atheism, and the authoritarian reliance upon Revelation guaranteed by Infallibility which to-day leads to Rome. This fundamental antithesis explains and justifies, in our opinion, the profound analysis of the illustrious Charles Bradlaugh, that the final battle for intellectual supremacy will be between Rome and Reason.

F. A. RIDLEY.

RELIGION AND THE FUTURE

JOHN ROWLAND in his review (September 9, 1950) of "What is happening to us?" gives the views of Canon Demant. These are briefly, that we are facing a breakdown of a civilisation, and that the cause of this is the decline in religious belief and observance which has set in during the past century or so.

There is no need to point out to Mr. Rowland that the breakdown of a particular society or civilisation has been constantly predicted by different people at different times.

With this in mind it is as well to make sure that Canon Demant is not following a well-worn theme, a theme which has run from Jesus up until now.

If the article gives a fair account of Canon Demant's views, it appears that he is.

But the present writer is also pretty sure that we are moving towards a breakdown of our civilisation.

I am in agreement also that the tradition upon which our civilisation has been based has incorporated elements which are Christian, Humanistic, and from Greece and Rome.

The issue then arises, which of these elements has set going and maintained the processes in the environment which tend to bring Western civilisation down?

For this crisis is different to those of Christian traditional theme, in that it is in the external world and can be demonstrated. I suppose that both Canon Demant and Mr. Rowland will agree that war is one of the factors which has already and is now threatening to cause our civilisation to collapse.

And which element of Western civilisation has gone to war, preached war and blessed it? Which element was the 30-years' war fought by, or the Italian Abyssinian War? And the countless thousands of Christians killed by Christians?

No one, surely, has the audacity to say it was the Humanist element or the Greek or Roman. As it happens, Plato had something to say on this matter relevant to our problems of to-day; he mentions it casually as if (as it appears) it was an accepted truth.

Plato is discussing the growth of a luxurious city. "The country, too, I presume, which was formerly adequate to the support of its then inhabitants, will now be too small, and adequate no longer. Shall we say so?"

Certainly.

Then must we not cut ourselves a slice of our neighbour's territory, if we are to have land enough both for pasture and tillage, while they will do the same to ours, if they, like us, permit themselves to overstep the limit of necessities, and plunge into the unbounded acquisition of wealth? It must inevitably be so, Socrates." Rep. 373, D. & V.

Plato and the Greeks saw the dangers of over-population. Possibly the Ancient Greeks are the only civilised people who have seen it.

Here, then, is one of the main causes of the threatened breakdown of our civilisation, the rapidly increasing world population. (Inevitably this brings to mind the teaching of Malthus, but here I only want to mention that Communism shows itself again as the true successor of the Christian tradition in our civilisation in its condemnation of Malthus and Darwin for accepting his teaching.)

No one can deny that the Biblical command "increase and multiply" maintained by the Christian tradition has been obeyed, whatever lamentations there may be about other Biblical commands.

From about 1800 the population of Europe began to rise sharply, and this rising population was largely maintained because there were practically virgin lands in the world to feed them and to emigrate to.

Despite the warnings of Malthus, Darwin and Huxley, it never seems to have occurred to the leaders of the Christian tradition that there is only so much habitable land in the world, and that it takes so much land to feed a person.

Even now, with rare exceptions, the leaders, having recently heard of the expanding universe, seem to think the earth is expanding. About 1860 John Ruskin said and wrote: "But the radical question is not how much habitable land there is in the world, but how many human beings ought to be maintained on a given space of habitable land. Observe, I say, *ought* to be, not how many *can* be." "Unto this Last."

Even before the rapid rise in European population, Europeans trained in the Christian tradition had shown themselves quite unfitted to go around the world.

"Then the Europeans arrived. . . . They moved into one of the richest treasure houses ever opened to man, and in a few decades turned millions of acres into a shambles." *Road to Survival*. Vogt. "With the rise in European population and the rise in other parts, man is increasingly compelled to say 'a piece of land can maintain so many.'"

The *ought* of John Ruskin is almost completely denied. The moral obligation to our earth-home turns increasingly into a petulant command: "The earth *can* support us, it *will* support us, it *must*."

Mother Earth must be exploited, developed, fertilised and pulverised until every tree is judged by its utility

value, hedges ripped up and replaced by concrete posts and wire, destroying the home of the birds and spiders, and then she gets a dose of insecticide.

This, that the Biblical command "increase and multiply" may be obeyed.

Under the Christian tradition we seem to start as children being taught to pick flowers for the glory of God (wild flowers at that, as I was), and we finish up in the same psychological trait under population pressure, cutting down the trees, thereby sending good soil into the sea, silting up the rivers, causing floods during rains and shortage of water in droughts; misuse of land, causing soil erosion and dustbowls; killing wild life and destroying the rhythm of nature.

Despite the warnings of the conservationists, Western man, under the influence of the Christian tradition, seems so puffed up with intellectual and spiritual pride that he appears to think or at least acts as if he can destroy the living resources of his earth-home, and yet still live.

Canon Demant says: "Pride is the fundamental sin." He is quite right, but it is sin against Mother Earth, not against a Father in Heaven.

I quite agree we have "to put ourselves to school at the lessons we have skipped." Let us go to school, Mother Earth will teach us, if we have enough humility to learn. If we persist in the intellectual and spiritual pride of the Christian tradition, she will become an even sterner dictator. Already we have had warnings and sharp lessons.

Praying to God or cursing our fellow men will not save us if we neglect her warnings. Outraged Nature will destroy us or drive us to destroy one another.

Having "put ourselves to school," we find there is nothing hard to understand in the Humanist tradition; it seeks to co-operate with Nature, that we may leave our earth-home a little better than we found it.

W. J. M.

"THOUGHTS OF A SUPPORTER"

WHILST engaged in theological controversy with Christians, one meets with continual interruption. The only thing of which they are capable is, keep interrupting, make the other person forget what they were going to say, then kid themselves they are in the right because he doesn't answer, because they've put him off.

Christians do not like an opponent to read from notes. Because then, if they interrupted him, they couldn't put him off. Another thing Christians don't like is corresponding. There again, this gives an opponent time in which to think, time to get the answers worked out. In a conversation they can interrupt him, and put him off. In correspondence he gets a chance to think up what he has to say. It gives him equal opportunity of getting his say in. This would not suit the Christians. It is too much like fair play for them.

Another thing I have noticed about Christians is their power of bluff. They will answer in a way which leaves one as wise at the end as one was at the beginning. There is a saying: "Bluff baffles brains." Never was the truth of this saying more clearly illustrated. When one finds fault with Bible quotations, the answer one receives is something after this style: "They didn't mean this, they meant that. They didn't mean that, they meant this. They didn't mean this or that, they meant the other." And so on. I cannot think of an instance, but the reader will find that to be correct. Christians have all sorts of ways of wriggling out. Any Bible quotation with which one finds fault, they will say that it was mistaken translation, or not intended to be taken liter-

ally. Or they will say that it is *spiritual*. They only say this about the parts that don't suit them. In this way they think they can rationalise *any* absurdity. It leaves one, as I've said before, as wise at the end as one was at the beginning. You don't know whether they're mad or you are. They explain things which cannot be understood by talking about things which cannot even be imagined. I repeat: "Bluff baffles brains"—never was the truth of that saying more clearly illustrated.

I prefer adulthood to childhood. Because quite apart from anything else, I would have been forbidden to read literature of an atheistic nature, by people who would not have taken the trouble to *think* that it *couldn't* be any worse than the Bible. II Kings xviii 27, Mal. ii 3, Ezek. iv 12 & 15, I Kings xvi 11, Hosea i 2, I Sam v 9, and many others. That's what annoys me about these religious people. They forget, the literature which they so much respect, is far worse, and so are they for recommending it. Because they say: "The best book to read is the Bible," and they don't mention any particular part. It's time they thought of "Throwing stones in a glass house," or perhaps even "The pot calling the kettle black."

On the back of the "Freethinker" there is, about every other week, a full list of publications. Of these I must have purchased the better part. In some cases several of each. Now the thing is this. Not until after I had bought all those others did it occur to me to have "Essays in Freethinking." Obviously, if a person is a Freethinker, the very *first* thing that would occur to them, one would imagine, would be to get "Essays in Freethinking," if they saw it advertised, yet I didn't think of it until last. That's queer. There are times when one cannot understand oneself. I had often seen "Essays in Freethinking" advertised, yet I didn't get it until *after* all those others. How slow I was. Not only is it, obviously, the first and foremost thing to think of *in* freethought (that is, if one sees it advertised), but it has the best possible title. Other books by the same author, and other authors, have rather misleading titles. One has only to look at the publication list to see this! Of course, they're good stuff, but if one were seen reading it, a casual observer might get the impression (from the title on the cover) that one were *religious*. One does not of course desire this, at any rate nowadays, when people are no longer put to death for being unbelievers.

The title, "Essays in Freethinking," however, leaves nothing to the imagination, and cannot possibly give a wrong impression. Moreover, this same book is the first and foremost, best possible way of putting it. I mean to say if, for example, one were pugilistically minded, one might feel inclined to buy a book on "How to box." If one were musically-minded, one might equally well feel inclined to purchase a book on "The elements of music." Now in just the same way, if one were *atheistically* minded (and if one saw the book advertised), one would just as likely feel inclined to purchase a book on being atheistic. What more natural, then, than "Essays in Freethinking," I wonder? Considering there is such a book, I mean.

In view of all this, it seems strange to me that I didn't have "Essays in Freethinking" *first!* Never mind, all those others were not wasted, they were all given to somebody (my identity not revealed), and it was good for trade. So it was all right in one way. My word, I still can't make it out, though.

A. HANCOCK.

ACID DROPS

The "Church Times" has had to reply to that "clever young man," as he is called, Mr. Fred Hoyle, whose broadcast talks on astro-physics "transmitted a forthright attack on Christianity." The *C.T.* admits that in his own field his "pre-eminent ability" is in no doubt; but he has no right whatever to invade the religious field. His "egregious error" is to suppose that religion's "sphere of interest" is "either the space time universe or a spaceless and timeless realm of spiritual reality." It is nothing of the kind. It "is concerned with both." So there! Mr. Hoyle must now admit that religion has won all along the line.

After seeing that all is well with the Church of England, and that converts are being made as fast as they can be gathered in, the Archbishop of Canterbury is going on a long mission to Australia. It will be so easy to convert the Roman Catholics in that happy land flowing with milk and honey. Then there are the natives of New Guinea, Melanesia, and Polynesia, who are all thirsting for Christ, and would be more likely to swallow him if the dish is properly prepared by a real live Archbishop. And anyway, the Missionary Societies have fixed a target of £100,000 to be raised—and when it comes to money . . .

The "Holy Father" lost his voice the other week and could not address his lucky or unlucky pilgrims. But surely a little Holy Water from Lourdes, or a statue of Fatima, could have put that right in a jiffy? If Lourdes and Fatima keep on churning out miraculous cures by the baker's dozen every week, it is very churlish of "Our Lady" not to keep special miracles on the tap for God's Own Vicar. Will one of our distinguished converts—say, Mr. Evelyn Waugh, or Mr. Graham Greene, tell us why?

In recent numbers of the *Western Gazette* there have been some very pious thoughts addressed to Agnostics. The gentleman who writes them does not consider Agnosticism "wicked" which is deliciously kind of him. With Tennyson, he is ready to agree that there is such a thing as "honest doubt." But—how these people love these buts—how wonderful it would be if only Agnostics tried to get the same experience which fell happily to the lot of Pascal, Julian of Norwich, St. Francis, St. Teresa, Swedenborg, Wesley, and countless others.

Let us assure this so-happy-though-religious writer that one of the reasons we also are happy is just because we have given up the holy twaddle so fervently believed in by the children of God enumerated above. Incidentally, it is quite amusing to find there Swedenborg side by side with Wesley. Wesley, in the name of Christ, actually gave Swedenborg a thorough trouncing in what was once a famous pamphlet. If the two protagonists are still living within the pearly gates we expect some most unholy fireworks are regularly taking place there.

They are still at it. Now that the war is over German evangelicals are getting to work again, and one of the first pronouncements of Dr. Karl Leiprecht was to welcome women athletes, but they must do their athletics suitably and decently dressed in long skirts. No doubt that the sight of pretty girls in shorts made Karl harbour naughty thoughts—a calamity which could never happen if a full length skirt hid all feminine charms. We grieve to add that the girls told Karl to go to—well, at least, they didn't wear the sacred-hide-everything garments.

That scholarly Churchman, the Rev. S. Baring Gould, sang in "Onward Christian Soldiers":—

"We are not divided, all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."
but he obviously did not reckon with his Roman Catholic brothers in Jesus. The Rt. Rev. Monsignor C. Cowderoy, the other day, gave "certain non-Catholic" leaders in England a terrific wiggling for daring to oppose such a popular dogma (founded as it is on the strictest historical evidence) as the Assumption of Mary. The Assumption must be true also because it is backed by the "Universal Church composed of millions and millions of Catholics who all believe the same doctrines and the same authority." The "non-Catholics" belong to "an organisation which is so divided" that the mere idea of a "corporate" union with Rome is "fantastic." And that proves the Assumption now up to the hilt. Which, of course, is not in the least "fantastic"!

"Horseman's Sunday" is well known at Epsom, and recently the Rev. Arthur Bird was to have addressed about 300 people astride on all kinds of thoroughbreds, hunters and hacks, but found himself in a difficulty. He was at a loss to find any references in the Bible as to how horses should be addressed in a sermon. Our advice is to give any sermon, but to save it for a congregation of donkeys.

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now." Mr. Beverley Nichols tells a touching story of the battle of Arnhem, to readers of the *Sunday Chronicle*. The cellars of a house were packed with British soldiers very badly wounded. There was no food, drink, or medical supplies, so the lady of the house took a Bible and read it to them. We take it the hunger and thirst were at once relieved, and the pain from wounds ceased; it is so usual in such cases. After the war, a film of the battle was made and the lady offered a part. She accepted on condition that her face should not be seen in the film because she was a member of the Arnhem Atheists Society and would not like her fellow members to think she had changed. Mr. Nichols helps to conceal the lady's identity by giving her name, Madame Horst, wife of the Burgomeister of an Arnhem suburb, and the name of the Atheist Society to which she belongs. Really, Mr. Beverley Nichols should confine his writing to religious tracts for free distribution; there are still intelligent readers of the *Sunday Chronicle*.

Writing in the *Sunday Pictorial* for September 17, J. G. B. asks, "Why do the millions of heathens, agnostics and atheists in Britain to-day recognise such occasions as Easter and Christmas as holidays?" Dear, dear, millions of 'em! (We wish there were.) But J. G. B. has the question the wrong way round. It should be, why do millions of Christians in Britain to-day recognise Easter and Christmas as holidays? They are pagan nature-worship festivals and have nothing whatever to do with Christ or Christianity.

A Polish correspondent in the *Tablet* writes: "There is a marked increase in the number of schools without religious instruction in Poland. At present there are 75,000 children in 210 schools of such a type." That is a serious matter for the priests in Poland. It means, unless they can get their God among the infants, his future is seriously threatened with extinction, and priests will no longer be needed.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

SUGAR PLUMS

The Glasgow Secular Society had a good send off for its indoor session in the McLellan Galleries last Sunday. There was a full house, and Mr. Rosetti's lecture on "Man's Animal Ancestry," and the questions that followed, were listened to with marked interest. The Branch President, Mrs. M. Whitefield, was in the chair, and made a strong appeal for local support. This evening (October 8) a lantern lecture by Mr. Morrison on "The Starry Universe" should make a very attractive second item in a well-prepared syllabus. The lecture begins at 7 p.m.

Professor H. Levy, M.A., D.Sc., lectures for the National Secular Society in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1, on Thursday, October 12, at 7 p.m., on "The Ethics of War." Admission is free, questions are invited, and readers within range of Conway Hall can help in a very useful way by making the lecture known and bringing friends to the lecture.

A syllabus of lectures arranged by the West London Branch N.S.S. may be obtained from the local secretary, Mr. C. H. Cleaver, 29a, Dunraven Road, Shepherds Bush, London, W. 12. The opening lecture, this evening (October 8), is by Archibald Robertson, M.A., on "How Man Made God." All the lectures will be held in The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, London, W. 1, and begin at 7-15 p.m. Admission is free.

The Failsworth Secular School holds its autumn services to-day (October 8), and Mr. J. Clayton will give two lectures. At 2-45 p.m. he will speak on "Secularism," and at 6-30 p.m. on "Ritual and Morals." The school premises are in Pole Lane, Failsworth, and those who have not heard Mr. Clayton should take full advantage of this opportunity, while those who have will make a point of being present.

A pious reviewer of a book entitled *African Ideas of God*, tells us that African pagans are "sure" of the existence of God—a happy frame of mind and belief which, we fear, is not shared by heaps and heaps of Christians. We are in full agreement all the same. Africans as a rule can see their God, they can talk to him, argue with him, and even wipe him off the earth if need be. In this, they are often powerfully helped by God's Witch Doctors who, dressed in special costumes—just as our own Witch Doctors have a distinctive dress—can

prevail upon God Almighty to give the people rain or withhold it, curse them just as Jesus cursed the Pharisees and, in short, emulate their white brothers in God in almost everything. Of course, Africans believe in God. Why write a book about such an obvious fact?

Readers will no doubt look out for the coming broadcasts on "Man Without God," the first of which will be by Lord Horder, speaking as a Rationalist. There are to be eight lectures in all—three by Christians, four by non-Christians, and one by a member of the Jewish community. It is a pity that, as far as we know, a forthright Atheist has not been asked to speak.

ON TWO CRITICS

ACCORDING to Mr. H. Irving, I have "eaten the leek" in my encounter with Mr. Yates—I am, alas, "much subdued." I think it is only fair to say that Mr. Irving will be in a minority of one among the readers of this journal if he really believes this nonsense.

Years ago, Mr. Irving asked us whether it was not "more reasonable to assume that the poems and plays of Oxford" were "titivated by Shakespeare" than otherwise? He now tells us that this was "an outrageous non-sequeter." And we are here in full agreement. But of course, years ago, I "burked the argument." I suppose it did not occur to Mr. Irving that it was not I but the Editor who has to say what may or may not go into these columns. Far from burking the argument, however, I dealt with it to such purpose that we are now told it is a "non-sequeter." But note what Mr. Irving now also adds: "I had read the poems of de Vere and I marvelled that anyone could conclude that the same hand wrote the great plays and sonnets of Shakespeare." In the face of this, Mr. Irving thought so much of the poems *then*, that he actually told us that they were probably "titivated" by Shakespeare! That is, he then thought these poems were so good that they bore the hallmark of Shakespeare's writing or genius. Non-sequeter or not, that is what he must have thought.

It is quite impossible to say what any genius may do if we only go by his early work. No one, and certainly not the H. Irvings of those days, would have thought that Byron's *Hours of Idleness* promised *Childe Harold* or *Don Juan*; and no one, reading the marvellous poems of the boy Arthur Rimbaud, would have guessed that only a few years after they were written he would fizzle out as a salesman. And whatever was thought of the *Sketches by Boz* at the time they appeared, few people could have seen in them the promise of one of the greatest novelists the world has produced.

In any case, some of de Vere's published poems, written mostly before he was twenty, were thought good enough to be included in many fine anthologies. In the few I have on my shelves, I have noted his poems in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*—a beloved classic for all who love poetry; in Beeton's *Great Book of Poetry*; in the *Pageant of English Poetry*, published by the Oxford University Press; and in Locker-Lampson's *Lyra Elegantiarum*, that particularly fine anthology of light verse. The editors of these books obviously must have failed to share the exquisite taste for poetry shown by Mr. Irving. Even Sir Sidney Lee says that de Vere "wrote verses of much lyric beauty." And he did not like Oxford.

As for my "sullen refusal" to discuss further with Mr. Yates, that again may be due to editorial policy for all Mr. Irving knows. I do not think Mr. Yates answered

my last article in the least, though this is, of course, a matter of opinion.

But many years ago, I came to the conclusion that arguing with Fundamentalists was a terrible waste of time. Armed with the *Bible Handbook*, I carried the war into the enemy's camp with enthusiasm; but nothing disconcerted me more than when a Fundamentalist, with tears streaming down his cheeks, asked me why I wanted to take away his only Hope of Eternal Salvation? If it says in God's Precious Word that the Serpent spoke perfect Hebrew to Eve, if it insisted that Joshua stopped the sun, if it narrated the historic fact of Jesus being carried about by a Devil—then it must be true. God said it, and he was Truth and Life, while Tom Paine was spewed out of Hell's Mouth. I gave in. I constantly get tracts and long letters from similar lunatics, and on the one or two occasions when I have answered them, I have repented far more than a converted Salvation Army convict.

What I ask Mr. Irving—friendly like—is would it be worthwhile to enter into an argument on Communism with Prof. Haldane, or his brother in Christ, the Red Dean of Canterbury? What good would it be to discuss Spiritualism with a man like Mr. Shaw Desmond whose credulity is perhaps only equalled by that of Mr. Hannen Swaffer? I prefer to pass these by—I simply haven't the time to waste.

That is how I feel with Mr. Yates, and it was only because he ventured to refer to me so stupidly, that I took up my typewriter in reply. Had he refrained from his reference, I certainly would have avoided him as I do all Fundamentalists.

His reply to my friend "J.R." is typical of the kind of "reply" we get from Bible lovers defending their Bible. Those of us who do not agree that Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays are solemnly rebuked. We "ignore or belittle" Greene's allusion to Shakespeare's "tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide." We ignore it so much that Greenwood, in *Is There a Shakespeare Problem?* published in 1916, says "The passage in question has been quoted *ad nauseum*, but I must ask the reader's indulgence while I refer to it yet again." And he then devotes six pages to it. That convinced Stratfordian, John M. Robertson, for whose critical genius I have the greatest possible admiration, refers to the passage over and over again and, of course, so do all Shakespearean writers whether for or against. Does Mr. Irving now see what I am driving at?

Nobody knows exactly to what Greene was referring—except Mr. Yates and his fellow Fundamentalists. We know literally nothing about William Shakespeare of Stratford at the time Greene was writing. We ascribe the three parts of Henry VI to him because the plays are in the First Folio, but almost every editor of the plays agrees that, either they were not written by the author of Hamlet (whoever he was), or only partly by him. Howard Staunton, a staunch Stratfordian, whose opinion is of the best, admits that "the subject is of extreme difficulty, and one upon which there will always be a conflict of opinion."

The exact quotation of the line is (naturally) spelt wrongly by Mr. Yates. It should be, "Tygies heart wrapt in a players hyde" and it occurred (except for one word) in *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* before it appeared in the third part of Henry VI. But who wrote the *Tragedie* no one knows—except Mr. Yates. As he says, if Greene's famous allusion, that the Man of Stratford had a "tiger's heart," does not point to "Shakespeare as a playwright" it has no meaning. For

there is no one else who had a "tiger's heart" except William Shakespeare. And Mr. Yates ought to know. And the other part of the "allusion" proves that he must have written plays before he wrote *Venus and Adonis* which he claimed to be the "first heir of his invention." This means that he was a liar—unless we agree that *Venus and Adonis* was written when he was at Stratford or when he was (perhaps) "titivating" up the poems of Edward de Vere.

To continue the discussion with this kind of Fundamentalism is sheer waste of time, for no matter what I write there is always the other side—just as a Bible Fundamentalist will produce sheafs of arguments to show that Paine, Bradlaugh, and Ingersoll, are all fools.

Let me make quite clear that while I do not for a moment believe that Stratford Will wrote any of the plays, I am quite ready to agree that the Stratfordians can produce a few arguments which are not easy to answer. And I must repeat here what I said many years ago. These columns are not exactly the place where the Shakespeare problem should be fully discussed. I never for an instant intended anybody to imagine that, by claiming that the Earl of Oxford was an Atheist or that he wrote plays, that made him the author of *Hamlet*. The proofs are in a dozen books at least, and they have convinced me. That they have not convinced others is no more surprising than that Paine's *Age of Reason* never convinced millions of Christian believers.

H. CUTNER.

PENALTIES UPON OPINION

IN the course of a recent conversation with a close friend of mine on various themes, I touched on the subject of psychoanalysis, and, having dropped a few unflattering remarks concerning Freud, was bitterly assailed for being an "opinionated" individual. I am. And I imagine I always will be on those particular subjects to which I have given at least a fair measure of study and reflection. And I am particularly "opinionated" about those individuals who never reach any definite conclusions of their own, who vacillate and pivot like the weather-vane atop a church spire. They have weathervane mentalities, which shift with each change of the wind.

In the course of six decades I have picked up quite a few ideas that have become fixed. I hold definite ideas on the subject of God, a future life, Spiritualism, telepathy, clairvoyance, chiropractics, Catholicism, and even on Mr. Freud and sex. And these views, to me, are as certain as the colour of my eyes.

Psychoanalysis, I believe, is one of the trump swindles of the age, and for so stating my position, I lost a valued friendship. I am quite used to such losses, and am prepared to lose more.

Freud's dreamology has no more science in it than the dream books sold by gypsy fortune tellers, and I would as soon listen to the reading of tea leaves in a Greenwich Village tavern or to a palm-reader's futural revelations from the lines on one's hand as to Freud's claptrap on the interpretation of dreams.

When Freud tells us that dreaming of balloons, aeroplanes, and Zeppelins, rising in the air, has a sexual significance, we may as well conclude that dreaming of snaking a saltcellar, or smoking a cigar, or landing on a picket fence has an erotic connotation. I decline to accept such drivel in order to placate others. And I'll continue to be an "opinionated" individual if it cost me the last friend in the world.

WOOLSEY TELLER.

(Reprinted from the *Truth Seeker*.)

IN DEFENCE OF H. G. WELLS

UNLESS a dispute between two of my friends directly concerns me, I am, at my age, loath to intervene. This is especially the case when the disputants are so well equipped to conduct wordy warfare as are my friends, Mr. Cutner and Mr. Rowland: one need only sit back and admire from a ring-side seat. But Mr. Rowland, to strengthen his case, I suppose, has referred to a now departed friend, Mr. H. G. Wells, in a way that I am convinced may misrepresent him.

Referring to a "tired little book" of Mr. Wells, "Mind at the End of its Tether" (Mr. Wells's last book), Mr. Rowland says that in it "Wells confessed that he had for long been wrong." In view of the fact that Mr. Rowland's article is headed "Freethought and Christianity," and also to the well-known fact that Mr. Wells was a Freethinker, whose later books, such as "Crux Ansata" and "All Aboard for Ararat!", had, necessarily, given offence to devout Christians, the claim, badly put, that Mr. Wells confessed that he had "for long been wrong," may be read as a repudiation by him of his anti-religious beliefs and writings. Maybe Mr. Rowland did not mean his statement in this sense, but this is eminently a statement to be queried at once.

This is the more necessary as the book in question is hard to come by. My impression is that only a few copies were struck off, and that there were quite a few people who might have an interest in buying up those copies to suppress it. I may say that I read "Mind at the End of its Tether" through three or four times (it is only about 35 pp.), taking notes from it, and my memory of it does not comprise any turning to religion in the face of the coming world catastrophe that he envisaged. Rather the contrary. He practically said that it was no longer possible to realise the reforms he had preached for half-a-century, for, as he wrote impressively, "this is the end." He did not, to my recollection, specify if the end was a physical destruction of life on this planet, or a running-down of mental life to an extended Dark Age. In face of this calamity he did not advise us to take to drink or religion, but to adopt a dignified attitude of stoical waiting for the end. Alas, his end was only a few months after the appearance of his final testament.

I think that Mr. Wells's mental "Odyssey" was from juvenile Freethought to a Rowlandese hankering for a "God, the Invisible King," and after middle-age back to the Freethought of his youth, as is shown by the books I have mentioned. This reverses the not uncommon pattern of certain of our Freethought colleagues and predecessors, which is: Christian—Freethinker—Christian. Our mental cycle, it seems to me, depends on how we were, in the Pavlovian sense, *conditioned* in our early days. That, and, of course, the state of our endocrine structure (= ductless glands).

It is four years since I attended Mr. Wells's funeral and five since I received my last letter from "H.G." He wrote then thanking me for amusing him by a long poem of mine, which was anything but religious. Incidentally, he described himself as "a very tired man indeed"—Mr. Rowland's very word for his last book, which was published in the same year. But there was nothing in his letter to show dispirited religiosity.

Perhaps a letter I received from "H.G." two years earlier (in 1943) may settle the state of his mind at that period. I quote from a part of it. "I find your 'Fanfare for Freethought' was acknowledged and you were thanked—while I was away in America. Now I've found it on my poetry bookshelf and I'd like to tell you how much I like it—rather belatedly." The words "how

much" were added to the secretary's typed letter in Mr. Wells's characteristic handwriting. To any one who recalls that this book was introduced by Mr. Chapman Cohen, and published by the N.S.S., that is conclusive as to where "one of the greatest Englishmen of our time" (*vide* Mr. J. B. Priestley's funeral oration) stood with regard to Freethought and Religion.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE

SCHOOL RELIGION

SIR,—A friend, who himself had never seen the inside of a church, considered it his duty to take his eight-year-old daughter to church, maybe so she could at least say she had been to one. On arriving at the door, he informed his youthful offspring that this was God's house and she must therefore make no noise. Her innocent reply was: "Why? Will he chuck us out?"

Have they decided it is a waste of time teaching religion in schools after all?—Yours, etc.,

J. G. BELLAMY.

OBITUARY

It is with a feeling of personal loss that I report the death in Glasgow on September 24, of Edwin Benjamin Gough, age 71. All who knew him loved him for his absolute frankness of conversation, his dry humour, his loyalty to truth, and his ever ready willingness to do a good turn.

He was for many years the auditor of the Glasgow Secular Society, and at one time our treasurer. To his widow and relatives we send our sympathy. A Secular Funeral Service was held by M. I. Whitefield.

M. I. W.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Accrington.—Friday, October 6, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON, A Lecture.
- Enfield.—Saturday, October 7, 6 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON, A Lecture.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, October 7, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. E. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. A. CALVERLEY and F. A. RIDLEY (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Mr. J. M. THORNTON, B.Sc., "This Queer Universe."
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall Library, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 10, 7 p.m.: "What Do You Expect of a Novel?" Miss MARJORIE BOWEN.
- Failsforth (Secular School).—Sunday, 2-45 p.m. and 6-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON, A Lecture.
- Glasgow Branch (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. MORRISON: "The Starry Universe."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Dr. BERNARD GRIMLEY, "Families and Governments."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Biology and Social Behaviour," MAURICE BURTON, D.Sc.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—7-15 p.m.: "How Man Made God," Mr. ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A.

ORIGIN OF ANGELS

(concluded from page 398)

The Heavenly Tribunal sits in judgment on men, beasts and plants; at the same time it passes sentence on whole countries and their inhabitants, with Satan as Public Prosecutor. This or that late patriarch acts as counsel for the defence. The Lord is kind enough to ask the opinion of his angelic jury, yet he decides authoritatively; the accused, of course, is not present. He does not even know that he is being tried, let alone the reason; yet all of a sudden he meets with his death in accordance with the Lord's sentence. Sometimes, it is true, even devout religionists may die, when they are urgently needed in heaven in order to help solve some tricky casuistry.

Further, the Lord's Tribunal decides on local crops, time and quantity of rainfall, etc., and according to the Talmud (Niddah 16b), a particular angel goes round collecting every single spermatozoon to place it before the Lord and inquire his future plans about it. Such is rabbinical totalitarianism.

When "the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7, 10), ten thousand times ten thousand angels dallied around the Lord, whilst another thousand times thousand "ministered unto him"—in all, 101 million. Since our planet, at present, is inhabited by nearly 2,000 millions of men, it is obvious why spiritual guidance must be lacking.

God knew of 70 countries only; consequently there were 70 national angels in the heavenly UNO to represent the interests of their countries respectively. It was they who had to suffer first the destiny meted out to their protégés. Generally Michael was alleged to be Israel's delegate to heaven. There can be no war on earth—according to the *Sohar*—but is preceded by auguries in the skies since it starts with a clash of angelic armies.

Angels are made of fire. The throne of God is being upheld by angelic animals; this effort makes them perspire so profusely that their fiery sweat (nehar-di-nûr) flows around the throne as the Milky Way. From this fiery fluid daily originate ephemeral angels (Chagigah, 14a). The "permanent" Cherubs or "wheel angels" (*galgâlîm*, Ez. c. X) are connected with the Lord's *mèr'kâbâh*, a throne on wheels. "And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle." As "eagle" stands for *scorpio*, and "man" for "amphora," this points to the four capital constellations, or four pillars of the world, with "cherub" standing for *taurus* (the Babylonians called "cherub" those stone guardians who stood in front of temples and were represented as winged bull-men). In Ezekiel, all these four astral demi-men are sometimes simply called *chayyôth*—creatures. These four angelic beasts, confirms St. Irenæus (Adv. hæc. III, 11), embody the four evangelists, and there must be four gospels in accordance with the four parts of the world, four main winds and the four pillars (*klimata*) upon which the universal Church rests.

In Catholic countries they celebrate a Feast of the Guardian-Angels on October 2; the archangels, as superiors, have their individual days.

Gabriel is celebrated on March 24, the day of the Spring Equinox, when the sun (then) entered the "fiery constellation of *aries*." Hence he is Ares or Mars, "Prince of Fire" and war hero. Origen noted (Contra

Cels., 1, 25) that *Gab'ri-ël* means: God's Hero, or The Virile God (from *gabar*=strong, valiant). His opposite number is—

Michael=Who (is) like—God, September 29. He is the one who was foremost in pious minds, obviously being a heavenly twin to St. George. In occult language, they occupy that part of the zodiac where *drago*, the winter-monster, threatens the world of light. He is depicted together with his astral emblem, *libra* (the scales), standing, with a sword or club (*Héraklès!*), or as an incense-offering priest with a book, by an altar. In the *offer-torium* for All Soul's Day, he is hailed as *Mercur-Hermès*, i.e., the leader of the souls, who with his *caduceus*, safely guides them through the threats of hell to Eternal Lights. Next we come to the astral Netherworld, realm of the "giants," Hebrew, *Rephaim*, hence—

Raphaël (October 24), God's Giant or the Titan-God (Gen. 6, 4). According to the *Qorân* he will, as "Israphil," be the angel of the Day of the Last Judgment. *Pinke R. Eliezer* has it that this is the position of the Great Angels around the Throne of the Lord:—

Uriel (God of Light, planet of Jupiter), in front;

Raphael, behind;

Michael, right hand;

Gabriel, left hand (though sometimes he changes place with *Uriel*).

The typical "Left" angel is *Shammael*, angel of Death, who gradually sank to Hell as Satan for having instigated a court-revolution. As *Shitân*, or *Malak-Taus* (Angel Peahen) he is worshipped by the *Jezidis*.

Finally, there is the order of the Seraphs, the Feathered Serpents (Jes. 14, 9; 30, 6. Num. 21, 6ff.) whose sting burns like fire (Deut. 8, 15). They are more of a natural demon (the Assyrian *Sharrapu**), probably. *Hezekiah* "brake in pieces the brazen serpent . . . for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it." (2 Kg. 18, 4.)

Men-like angels are a childish notion; flying creatures are, fortunately, limited in size. J. B. S. Haldane, calculated that "in order to fly, a human being would have to have such enormous wing-muscles that the keel of the breast-bone, to which they must be attached, would have to be over four feet long, his legs would have to be reduced to spindly stilts to economise weight—and even so his biological success would be dubious in the extreme." This "explodes a religious fantasy. It demonstrates the impossibility of angels, or at least of angels of the accepted pattern." (H. G. Wells—*Julian Huxley*—G. P. Wells: *Science of Life*, p. 748).

P. G. ROY.

* The *Jinns* of the Arabs are thought of as winged snakes—personifications of the flashes of lightning twisting across the sky (*sâraph*=to burn; *sârâph*=snake).

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS A MODERN DELUSION

Frank Kenyon

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