

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Holy Bible

THE Mohammedans called Christians "The people of the Book," and the phrase was descriptive and exact. The Christian doctrines pre-dated Christianity; so did its mythology. The virgin-born saviour, the man made God by a ceremonial death, the conflict of the incarnated God with the prince of evil spirits, the final execution and resurrection, were all in existence before the Christian Church. But to the Western world at least, the Christian religion was a faith founded upon a book; not merely a record of sayings or doings, but a sacred book, something that owed its origin to the direct inspiration of the deity. The Christian Church took the Jewish Bible for its basis, it added another book in the shape of the New Testament, and it furnished the world with one of its greatest curses. It was bad enough when the interpretations of the will of the gods were made known to man through vision or through the utterances of oracles. Like the conscientious convictions of politicians these messages from another world could always be adapted to suit the occasion, and the history of both Greece and Rome showed, not only that these oracular utterances could be conveniently changed from time to time, but that they could be made to harmonize with a rather wide toleration and a progressive development of thought. In the absence of a "sacred" book absurdity was modifiable, and a toleration of sane thought was possible.

But with the coming of a sacred book and the foundation of an all-powerful church the situation changed. The Holy Bible of the Christian religion sanctified absurdities, legalized intolerance and moralized brutality. The Christian's Bible was not merely a treatise on religion, it was also an encyclopedia of science and ethics. All that men needed was to be found within the Bible. The work of the world was not that of investigation and discovery, it became solely that of interpretation—of the Bible. Knowledge that lay outside the Bible was unnecessary—more, it was dangerous, since it might lead men to doubt the sacred book. For centuries the philosopher and the scientist worked with the prison or the stake as a probable reward for their labours. The habit of measuring the truth of a new idea or of a new teaching by the standard of its agreement with the Bible became so ingrained that even to-day it is powerful. Within the memory of men now living it was a serious thing to propound a teaching that did not agree with the fetish book of the Church. Evolution was denounced because it was contrary to the Bible. The question of marriage and divorce is discussed by large numbers of people on the basis of whether the proposals do or do not differ from the teachings of "Our Lord." We have gained considerable liberty in these and other matters during the past two or three generations, but the shadow of the Holy Bible still lies heavy on the world.

### Thus Saith the Lord

Secure in its divine revelation the Christian Church went to the Holy Bible for its science, and astronomers and geologists, chemists, and biologists found the "Blessed Book" in the way at every step they took. The astronomy of Copernicus and Galileo, the geology of Lyell, the biology of Darwin were bitterly opposed, not because the teachings of these men were untrue, but because they contradicted "Holy Writ." The Church went to the Bible for its medicine, crushed out the medical science of antiquity, and in its place substituted cures by faith, by miracles, by a hundred and one ways which fed the revenues of the Church, and made diseases, that science ultimately conquered, endemic in every country where the Bible held sway. It took from the Bible the demonic theory of disease, and men and women were tortured to the chanting of pious invocations that they might be rid of the devils which Jesus had told them could be cast out "In my name." It found in "God's Word" the command "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and as a commentary on that text the squares of European cities blazed with the fires that were lit to burn men, women, and children charged with the crime of intercourse with devils. The Church found in the Bible the teaching that unbelief was the most deadly of crimes and belief the most powerful of virtues, and with sword and fire and prison and stake it burned and killed until it settled intolerance upon the European mind as one of its prominent characteristics. It found in the Bible the doctrine of the divine right of kings, a sanction for slavery, the teaching of the inferiority of woman, the subordination of this world to some fancied life hereafter. The story of European progress for the past fifteen centuries has not meant merely the discovery of truth; it has meant equally the fight against the influence of the "Sacred Book" of the Christian Church.

### The Nemesis of the Jew

Those who clung most to the sacred book suffered the most. Devotion to a stupidity generally carries with it its own nemesis. The Jew gave the world the Old Testament, with its "Thus Saith the Lord" as a bar to criticism and investigation. The Christian Church added to the Old Bible, the New Testament, and, to use a simile of Ingersoll's, they fitted each other like the upper and lower jaws of a hyena. The Christian lost no time in bettering the lesson the Jew had taught him. The Jew had been frankly intolerant in the name of his one God; the Christian added two more Gods and became intolerant in the name of moral duty and social health. The Jew had an exclusive belief, but he was not very anxious whether the rest of the world was saved or not. The Christian also preached exclusive salvation, but he gave it a form which masked its supreme vice and developed an elaborate tyranny to compel the outsider to come in. The net result of the Christian addition to the Jewish Bible was to moralize intellectual vice, and to inflict upon the people who gave the Church its "Sacred Book" a

long drawn out persecution to which the world can offer no parallel. The Jew suffered from the evil he gave the world. If the Christian Church had intended to make the Jew suffer for, say, inflicting the Bible on the world it could have gone to work in no more deadly a manner.

### The Boomerang

It is nothing to say that Jews have often preached tolerance where the Christian has practised it. That is true. But persecution has some curious consequences. Often enough it preserves the thing it is intended to exterminate; it may also create a sense of value of the thing that persecutors deny their victims. The Jew has often enough been found preaching tolerance while holding on to a book which is the very essence of intolerance. But the credit for this is not to be placed with his religion or his Bible. The persecution he has undergone has led not merely to a pleading for toleration, but also, to the growth of a respect for something to which his religion is foreign.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Dr. G. G. COULTON'S FINAL RELIGIOUS STUDY

OWING to the second World War, and Coulton's death in 1947, a contemplated conclusion to his *Five Centuries of Religion* was never composed. But a work was ready for publication dealing with *The Last Days of Medieval Monachism* (Cambridge, 1950, 45s.) which the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press decided to issue as Vol. IV of Coulton's *magnum opus*. This long and elaborate work, which extends to 833 pages, seems likely to rank as the premier authority on Monachism for many decades to come. As usual, Coulton is eminently readable, and his subject matter is skilfully arranged. He shows how monks and nuns, all solemnly sworn to Obedience, Poverty and Chastity, more and more frequently openly disregarded their vows and became increasingly worldly as the years rolled away. For centuries before the English Dissolution, the scandals of Continental nunneries and convents were denounced by moral Churchmen, whose protests against cloistral depravity and crusades for reform, are extensively cited by our author. None the less, Coulton concedes that in earlier generations the monks had helped to preserve priceless Pagan manuscripts, even if they ruined or destroyed others, although we apparently owe more ancient masterpieces to the Byzantine scholars of the Renaissance and the Moslem Arabs of Spain, as well as important contributions to science and philosophy.

In the much vaunted 13th century, constant accusations of many forms of misconduct were made against abbots, priors and brethren. As Coulton avers: "Long before the 15th century there had been repeated calls for monastic reform. It had been demanded by local Synods and great Councils, by Popes and even by the State . . . The monks of Fulda, in 812, petitioned Charles the Great to the effect 'that such [brethren] be chosen for Holy Orders as are learned in word and proved in holy conversation; not thieves and criminals and men totally ignorant of priestly law.' Already, in this ninth century, the question of monastic disendowment came up. The historian of St. Martin-d'Autun recognises that real glory of his abbey was past before A.D. 1000."

Certainly conventual life was not entirely evil, yet in surveying successive centuries, Coulton cites case after case where abbots, priors, brethren and minor officials, consistently ignored their vows, especially where money and chastity were concerned. Monastic buildings went to rack and ruin, while spare food intended for the poor and

depressed by pious benefactors, was commonly thrown to the many pet animals kept by the monks. Again, the bequests of pious patrons for the saving of their souls, by means of masses, were squandered by the abbey authorities by gambling, excessive wine drinking, fornication and costly viands. Indeed, the fondness of the Religious for the companionship and favours of the frail sex are constantly admonished. The Regulars, from abbots and priors downwards, in contravention of their vows, wandered abroad and spent the night with their concubines. Abbots were notoriously the fathers of children borne by their neighbours' wives, or even given birth to by the Superior of a nunnery or by younger and more attractive sisters. This, of course, is quite natural, and is the penalty paid for sacerdotal celibacy. Nor were children born out of wedlock restricted to the cloister. Popes and Cardinals had sons known as nephews, save in the case of Cardinal Borgia, later Pope Alexander VI, who openly acknowledged his large family.

Coulton conclusively proves that the evasions and excuses of Cardinal Gasquet in his apologia for the monasteries are unreliable, if not deliberate falsifications. As a matter of fact, all the charges brought by Henry VIII's minister, Thomas Cromwell's Visitors against the abbeys had long been the commonplaces of Visitors appointed by Popes, prelates and princes, and were well known to the more enlightened lay population.

Like the apostle Paul, the Church Fathers had a very poor opinion of women, whom they regarded as Satan's concubines. Eve brought sin into a previous paradise, and some theologians doubted whether women possessed immortal souls. One Scottish monastic reformer, Robertus Richardinus (Robert Richardson), in the 16th century, avowed that religious men should walk abroad with downcast eyes and that nuns should be veiled. Coulton quotes his assertion that St. Augustine "warns us to beware of woman beyond all else, because she has ever been beyond all others in harm to the human race. For woman is an animal prouder than the lion, that fiercest and proudest of brute beasts; more wanton than the ape; more venomous than the asp, more false and deceitful than those monstrous syrens. No animal, not the most ferocious, can worthily be compared with the feminine monster. The lions in their cave feared Daniel, so did the dragon; yet mad Jezebel slew the righteous Naboth. Jonah escaped alive from the whale's belly; yet Samson, mightiest of men, escaped not from his own wife. John Baptist lived unharmed for many years among dragons and asps, yet Herodias no sooner knew him than she slew him. Why should I say more of this matter?" Yet he continues with two more pages of defamation of the female sex.

Their critics condemned the monks for eating flesh on fast days and other forbidden occasions, but to the modern mind this is a very venial sin, even if a sin at all. Yet, to their orthodox contemporaries this constituted a very serious infringement of their Rule, unless this laxity had been granted for a money payment at the Court of Rome. Indeed, indults and indulgences were almost invariably procurable for cash down in the Eternal City, where ecclesiastical lawyers abounded and prospered. Even when abbots and other Religious were found guilty of crimes or misdemeanours by officially appointed Visitors; fined, purged or dismissed from their posts, they very frequently ignored these sentences and, even in the most flagrant cases, such as murder, manslaughter or bodily injury, by compurgation or other devices, escaped all real punishment for their sins.

Coulton exposes through documentary evidence the calculated malpractices of both Dominicans and Francis-

cans. He notes how their brazen misappropriation of money left by humane benefactors for the helpless poor was a root cause of the growing dislike and distrust of the clergy.

Our historian devotes two chapters to St. Albans Abbey, whose affairs he deems crucial to an understanding of the causes of the dissolution of the English monasteries. In France, the Crown had already denounced "the abuses, scandals and defects which are at present and which increase daily in the estate of the Church in our realm of France." This emboldened Henry VII and his Archbishop Morton to investigate affairs at the famous St. Albans Abbey, which was reputedly opulent, and certainly powerful. Its scandalous condition has been greatly minimised and the occasion, Coulton contends, of considerable literary dishonesty. Hence its importance to those who value the unvarnished truth.

Earlier episcopal attempts were made to ascertain the administrative methods of the Abbey, but the Abbot claimed exemption from inquisitors, and his claim was granted. To secure the Abbey's immunity a document, which Coulton surmises was forged by the Abbot himself, purported to render the Abbey completely exempt from visitation. The revenues of the Abbey were then low, but there was no retrenchment. Abbot Withamstede then went to Rome where he purchased "a confirmation of Boniface IX's indult permitting St. Albans to farm not only their lands but their appropriated churches." This proved a lucrative financial transaction. Later, Cardinal Morton entered the Abbey and was shocked by the demoralisation and embezzlement revealed. Yet, with all the turpitude disclosed in the Reports of Visitors to innumerable monasteries, little or no punishment for transgressions, however heinous, is recorded.

Coulton gives chapter and verse for all his repellent charges, which extend through many generations. Scandals are reported which, were they not so conclusively verified, would seem incredible to contemporary students of ecclesiastical history.

T. F. PALMER.

## SISTERS

### I

LEAVING room for pedestrians to pass them on the pavement two nuns stand back against a shop window.

The bus waits here for three minutes. This enables me to study the pair of women without their being aware of my scrutiny.

They are contrasts to the hundreds of women who pass me daily. Few of them need more than a cursory glance and call for no second one.

It is not the specialisation of their attire. One sees enough nuns about to be so accustomed to their different garb as not to notice it as anything unusual; not more than dozens of uniforms seen during a day in town.

Therefore my attention concentrates upon their faces. Unlike they are, but both worth analysis. One would attract admiring and responsive looks anywhere were she in normal feminine dress.

She has a bonny face, broad and full cheeked, against which the chin is noticeable, marked off each side by a dimpled cleft. Her colouring is high, the cheeks pink-flushed and the pouted lips red, parted to reveal white teeth. The eyebrows are arched, black, matching long lashes which curl slightly.

Outstanding feature is her eyes. Juvenile as she is of contours and complexion her eyes are those of a girl still innocent of life but interested in it. Deepest brown of

pupils, the orbs are large and lustrous, not rolling or moving consciously as they watch passing traffic and people, but melting into liquid wonderment at fresh sights and activities presented to them. When she looks upward her regard is bold and flashing.

With that goes a faint smile, more exactly a friendly yet mischievous gaze at the everyday world. It impels one to ask the question: "Why is she a nun?"

### II

Macbeth's King Duncan warns us not to seek the mind's construction in the face. Nonetheless, the second nun could hardly be thought of in another vocation, so well does she look this part. She is as much introvert as her colleague is extrovert.

Her cranial and featural conformations are delicate but not weak. One can imagine she is stronger of character and readier in emergencies than her companion.

An oval face tapering to a pointed chin has skin of such silken smoothness as to create illusion of semi-transparency, leaving one thinking the bones beneath are nearly visible. But there is no unhealthy pallor. The clearness of brow and straight nose and faintest mantling of pink in the cheeks put to shame the powdering and rouging of too many girls and women vainly attempting the impossible; renewal of childhood bloom and freshness.

So this nun's fine lips are curved to a pencil-drawn bow, yet firmly set, hiding the teeth and preserving the lines of her jaw. Lipstick on them would appear crude and harsh, repulsive. They have sufficient colour for her resolute face, in which every feature is naturally good, the fair eyebrows and pale lashes shading moveless but thoughtfully downcast grey eyes.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

## RAISING THE WIND

When the padre talks business his talk's much less  
"posh,"

"Let's get down to brass tacks, we need some more  
'splosh'!"

"I've got to get Busy, like old Captain Morgan,  
To boost up the bowels of the bally old organ."

"We've got to find some way of raising the 'oof,'  
To patch the pin-hole in the rotten old roof."

"Well, there's one stunt that piles up the pieces of  
eight,  
(If the weather-clerk smiles) it's the Vicarage  
Fete."

"I'll get a few hints from the old thimble-rigger,  
And rake in the dibs to a nice, nifty figure."

"You visit the rich, while I call on the poor—  
—I'm open to wager that I'll bring back more."

"One more thing will bring in the stuff by the barrel—  
—Co-opt the choir for a crack Christmas Carol!"

"We'll get the community heaping the hoard,  
And when the job's done, well, we'll all thank the  
Lord!"

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

"There," said he, shouldering his burden again, "you have a batch of dancing-dolls which I am going to deliver straight away to a toy-merchant in the Rue de la Loi. There is a whole tribe of them inside; I am their creator; they have received of me a perishable body, exempt from joy and sufferings. I have not given them the gift of thought, for I am a benevolent God."—ANATOLE FRANCE (*"The Gods are Athirst"*).

### ACID DROPS

Although all Christians, most Jews, and large numbers of Rationalists, believe in the Crucifixion of Jesus, its anniversary as an historical event shifts about every year, and has to be calculated through the movements of heavenly bodies like the Sun and Moon. For any other religion but Christianity, this would prove the story as being quite mythical, and as belonging to astro-mythical legends. This would, however, never do for the above mentioned believers, and they would fight to the death to observe it as genuine history.

Many efforts have been made to give the Crucifixion a fixed date—which it would have had if it had been an historical event. And even such an earnest Christian like Sir R. Ackland wants this, for it was he who moved leave to introduce a Bill to that effect—the Bill, in the end, being brought in by a majority vote. It will, of course, be violently opposed by most Christians, who for some unknown reason, prefer a movable date. Whether they know that Easter is quite Pagan and based on the Sun-Myth, is not clear, but they prefer to let sleeping dogs lie.

We were, of course, sorry to read that an Italian girl, only 14 years of age, died in front of the Pope at a Palm Sunday audience. We would not have mentioned it, but had a Freethinker died while having an audience with a prominent Freethinker—what magnificent “news” it would have made for our newspapers this Easter!

How can “our Lord” resist the eloquent pleading of the Pope this last Easter? He begged, in front of a crowd of 200,000 people, in heartbroken accents—“Triumph, Triumph, O Jesus,” and we are assured that he did not add, “Or get out!” Still, we cannot help asking again, of what use is a God or even a Son of God if he doesn't do anything? Neither Jesus nor God seems to have had any “triumphs” lately, and even whole-hearted believers have to be gingered up with revivals, or at least religious uplifts. Why not threaten to replace a God who does nothing with one who does? After all, the Pope would not have dared to “plead” with Christ Jesus to triumph unless he had miserably failed.

Christian Freemasons are not taking kindly to the idea that Freemasonry is not Christian and are flooding the pages of Christian journals with their protests. The Great Architect of Freemasonry is undoubtedly God Almighty, the Jewish, Christian, and Mahomedan God. What else could a great Architect be? In any case, according to some of the writers, the doors of Freemasonry “are closed to none but the Atheist.” And yet, if we remember aright, Charles Bradlaugh was a Freemason, and certainly some Freemason Lodges on the continent are quite Atheistic.

But all this does not prevent English Masons insisting that “English Masonry is based upon the open Bible which, of course, includes the New Testament. Without the Bible, Masonry is meaningless.” Yet, protest other Christians, “Does Masonry expressly acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord?” Well, whether Freemasonry is or is not Christian, there always remains the “sneer”—“Join the Masons if you want to get on in the world.” So it *must* be Christian.

Anyone who still disbelieves the wonderful miracles at Fatima should read *Eyewitness at Fatima*, by Mabel Norton. This lady, a very pious Catholic now, and a thorough believer then, actually saw “the sun describing a swift circle... and another... and a third,” and her narrative is “quite convincing.” If we were so impolite to call the lady an unmitigated liar we should deserve an eternal sojourn in the Lake of Perpetual Fire.

Although Dr. Takashi Nigai, a fervent Japanese Roman Catholic, was not present when the atom bomb was dropped at Nagasaki, he subsequently developed radium poisoning through it—perhaps a miracle in itself. Anyway, with a wound in his head so deep that a thumb could be inserted in it, he was on the point of dying when his mother forced him to drink some Lourdes Holy Water, and the wound immediately closed. Unfortunately, he is not quite cured but perhaps another drink will do the trick. This is the kind of twaddle pious Roman Catholics are expected to swallow whole—“for the greater glory of God.”

Thieves broke into a church in northern Italy and stole a golden crown and chain from a statue of Mary. These thieves will no doubt get completely away, God not being able to do any punishing these days. But in the Middle Ages, an insulted Almighty God or Blessed Virgin would have pursued these thieves with implacable fury. They would have died under the most horrifying tortures. It seems to us that people who desecrate God's Holy Palaces have to thank Freethought for God's utter helplessness these days.

The Rev. Frank Martin, who is responsible for a weekly uplift in the *Sunday Graphic* every week, cheerfully told his readers on Easter Sunday that he did not see how it was possible for “a thinking man to be happy without Christian belief.” In fact, to be happy you must believe in Hell and its Eternal Fires, in Heaven and its Pearly Gates and Golden Pavements, in Devils with horns and forked-tails, in Miracles and Angels, in the Virgin Birth, in the Resurrection of Jesus and his Ascension, in the wholesale Resurrection of Jewish Saints, in the Assumption of Mary, and the Infallibility of the Pope, in Lourdes and Fatima—but we really must stop. Fortunately, we are quite happy without all this drivel.

Both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York are bitterly opposed to any change in our divorce laws. What “our (celibate) Lord” said on the subject of marriage is God's final word—and as for the “hard cases”—so what? We are all very sorry, but “our (celibate) Lord” settled divorce problems for us nearly 2000 years ago, and why should “hard cases” dispute “our (celibate) Lord's” dictum? Besides we are a Christian nation and as such can bear our Cross—that is, the unhappily married should bear the Cross, not God's Bishops—and be heartily glad to do so.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has also been talking to London teachers in the hope that they would never, never, abandon the True Faith in their teaching. One of the questions he asked was, “What is the meaning of the material world” and his answer—so replete with wisdom and clarity—was, “The answer to the universe was not in creation but in the creator.” This should satisfy all ignorant doubters and bring back strongly the beauty of the religion of God, and all his Archbishops. What could we do without our Archbishops?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

ANON.—Christians are surely very divided on the problem of gambling and certainly "private pool tickets" are often sold on behalf of the church. They are also divided on theatre-going but most Christians do go. Thanks, however, for your communication.

H. RILEY.—If the vicar wants to make a little money for a church hall this way—why not? It may be "undignified," but who cares? We are always pleased, all the same, for such items as yours.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS

Will members of the Glasgow Secular Society please note that the Annual General Meeting will be held in the Central Halls, Bath Street, to-day (April 15), at 3 p.m. Will all who can possibly attend, please do so.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. has begun its open-air work in the Car Park on Sunday evenings with Mr. H. Day as the speaker. There is no doubting the interest and enthusiasm of Mr. Day, and we hope that readers within range of the stand will give their support.

A very pleasant, chatty little work on the theatre, on plays and playwrights and, of course, on George Bernard Shaw, is *Theatregoing* by Harold Downs (Thrift Books, Watts & Co., 1s.). All who love the theatre—and who does not except out-of-date Christians like some of the Nonconformist sects?—will find in the author an excellent companion and guide to the stage. Although he touches here and there on plays of earlier generations, he is most concerned with the modern theatre and its future. We can heartily recommend *Theatregoing* to all readers who make the title one of their religious—or is it anti-religious?—duties.

Though religion is so very compulsory in our schools, we find Mr. A. W. Delacour, a London grammar school teacher, bitterly complaining that the boys and girls in our State schools are "utterly and abysmally ignorant of the Christian faith." He finds that he has to answer difficult questions such as, "If Jesus is God, why does he call God 'Father'?" Or, why does Mr. Hoyle on the wireless say that the world was made different from what it says in Genesis? Our sympathy goes out to Mr. Delacour, and his fellow Fundamentalists. The only way to get the children back to God is to forbid them to listen to the radio, never let them go to a science class, and confine their reading to the Bible alone. Nothing else. In this way, we'd larn the little brutes.

## HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

WE have passed another great ecclesiastical milestone, the official anniversary of the death and glorious Resurrection of the Son of God; the origin, whether in pure myth or distorted history, of that powerful historical force, "the Church of Christ militant here upon earth." That the Christian Church exists is, at least, a fact; and, like all things that pass beneath the sun, it must have had a beginning. (By the self-same principle, it must also, some day, have an end, even though the Church itself denies this). At Easter, when a still nominally Christian country celebrates the Christian version of the origins of Christianity, it is incumbent upon those who do not accept this version, to give their reasons why.

The Christian's own account has, at least, the advantage of being explicit. Upon "Good Friday," the God-Man Jesus Christ was crucified on Calvary "for the sins of the world." Upon Easter Sunday he rose triumphantly from the dead as, at one and the same time, the living proof of immortality and its guarantee for mankind in general. Historically, it is indisputable that Christianity emerged upon the strength of such a belief. It has been the common belief of Christians from the days of the writers of the New Testament to the latest broadcasts of the B.B.C. What are we to make of it all?

What, in actuality, are the "evidences" of Christianity? To the Catholic and in Catholic apologetics generally, the fundamental proof of the Resurrection is to be found, not primarily in the New Testament but in the actual "tradition" of the Church, the most important of which traditions is to be found, not in the existence of the New Testament as much as in the existence of the Church herself continuously since Apostolic times. Whereas, to the Protestant, it is in the books of the New Testament—in "the Bible and the Bible only"—that the Christian finds the fundamental evidence for his belief. Let us examine, seriatim, both the lines of "evidence."

That the Christian Church is an historical fact is, of course, obvious. Equally obvious is it that, somewhere and somehow, it must have had a beginning. These facts, we repeat, are obvious. However, the fact that Christianity, like everything else, must have had a beginning, does not necessarily justify us in accepting the Christian's own account of their origins; particularly, we may add, when, as here, it presupposes certain beliefs which can be proved to be much older than Christianity itself. In any case, it is almost a recurring "law" that no powerful institution ever describes its own origins and evolution objectively. This tendency is self-evident in secular history. Every powerful political organisation habitually falsifies its own past in order to enhance its present grandeur; the history of every imperial state, from Imperial Rome to Imperial Britain, is largely mythical to be later "debunked" by a more critical age.

If this is so in the case of the merely secular state, where only temporal interests are concerned, how much more is it so where we are dealing, as here, with allegedly supernatural institutions, the entire power and, indeed, existence of which depends upon the continued acceptance by mankind of such institutions' own account of their origins. Take away the positive belief that Christ died on Calvary, "a ransom for many," or belief in his subsequent Resurrection, and Christianity would collapse. At least, there appears to be little evidence in actual history that an entirely non-miraculous "ethical" Christianity, or what passes for such, of the kind now advocated by Dr. Barnes or my friend, Mr. Rowland, could ever succeed

in holding its ground for long as a world religion, the religious mind instinctively desires the supernatural, whilst the rationalist mind as instinctively rejects it. Historically, at least, "rational religion" tends to fall between two stools.

Accordingly, the fundamental claim of Catholic apologetics that the existence and belief of the Church guarantees the truth of certain events supposed to have transpired in Palestine nineteen centuries ago, is obviously false. Actually, it merely boils down to this: the Church, a powerful and power-seeking institution, first acquired power in a credulous age as a result of popular acceptance of a new version of the ancient myths of Divine Death and Resurrection. Such myths have been rooted in agrarian societies since the stone age and all that was new about these myths was the name of the God and the manner of his death; an up-to-date name and death congruous with the times when they originated. That is not to say that the myths were deliberately invented; such a supposition is, in fact, unlikely in the light of what we know about the emotional state of the times. The earliest Christians, no doubt, believed them. However, once the Church had "arrived" at the seats of power, it had a vested interest in perpetuating them; in fact, it was a matter of life-and-death for it to do so. Actually, Catholic apologetics have not inverted the correct order, for it is the Church that guarantees the truth of the Gospel myths and not vice versa.

When we turn to the New Testament itself, "the Bible and the Bible only" of Protestant tradition, we find ourselves confronted with a jumble of inconsistencies. For the idea that the New Testament, the distinctively Christian "Bible" is, or ever was an homogenous book containing an inspired message, is an exploded conception which dates from a pre-critical age. Actually, in our New Testament (excluding, that is, many equally bona fide expressions of early Christianity which, for one reason or another, were excluded by the Church from the finally adopted canon of Scripture) we find four versions of Christianity, each of which has only this in common, that it is flatly incompatible with the other three.

The Christ of the "Synoptic" Gospels is a human being who teaches an ethical code, punctuated by periodical routine miracles. The Christ of the "Fourth" Gospel is a God—"the Logos who pitched his tent amongst us," as the prologue to the Gospel unequivocally declares—who goes about in human form, to whom nothing happens by chance and who knows everything.

The "Christ Jesus" of the "Pauline" Epistles, who is a cosmopolitan deity, "in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek," who has only the slenderest connection with this world and who knows nothing of and never quotes from the Jesus of the Gospels—in the uninterpolated original, the Pauline "Christ Jesus" was, probably, a God pure and simple, with no historical background at all. Last, and, perhaps, most authentic—in the sense of actually being the oldest Christian version of all we have, the Jesus of the Apocalypse, "the Lamb slain since the foundation of the world;" a purely Jewish Messiah, a Warrior-King as remote from the Jesus of the Gospels as can well be imagined, who, amid a terrifying celestial *mise en scene*—wrecks terrestrial vengeance upon the enemies of the Jews; upon persecuting Romans and upon apostate Jews.

To find "the Jesus of History" in this distorted collection of mutually contradictory "sources" would be a feat of ingenuity compared to which the solution of the most

complicated cross-word puzzle would be comparatively an easy feat!

How did it all begin? We are, actually, still very much in the dark. The Crucifixion it embody some genuine reminiscences of the actual death on the Roman cross of some deflated Messianic pretender—there were many such in the Palestine of the first century. The Resurrection may be either a second-hand version of the older Syrian or Egyptian resurrection myths. Or it may conceivably have started with a vision of an actually crucified Messiah to one of his followers. It is, perhaps, significant that "Paul" in his enumeration of the Resurrection appearances, does not differentiate his own subjective vision of the Lord from the others—"Lastly, he appeared to me also." From which it could be argued that the *physical* resurrection was a later accretion upon what was originally conceived as an appearance in spirit only.

Actually, Christianity seems to have originated from the chance amalgamation of a number of myths, some purely mythical; some, perhaps, with a nucleus of actual history. In our submission, the present state of the evidence does not permit us to go beyond such tentative conclusions, without ourselves being in danger of creating new myths!

F. A. RIDLEY.

#### BE GOOD, SWEET MAID

MORALITY is a matter of being good. Being good, however, is harder of definition.

There are so many ways of being good. You can sell all you have to feed the poor, or pay your rates up regularly. You can write sharp letters to the Press or belong to the R.S.P.C.A. You can be a Socialist or a humanitarian, or an Elk, or an Anti-vivisectionist, or a Mormon, a Pacifist, or a Rotarian, or a Roman Catholic. The commonest method in this country is to profess Anglicanism and avoid thinking about religion as far as possible. In general, the cheaper ways of being good are the most popular.

Most, perhaps all, ways of being good, fall into two classes. Either you can do something of an altruistic nature (something that appears to you unselfish), or you can accept some extraneous code of rules, and try to live up to it.

This code does not have to be, though it often is, a religious code. There is the legal code, which is not only a matter of morals but also one of self-protection. And there are many other codes of a political or social nature. They are all very useful in so far as they provide a set of rules to satisfy Man's need for moral guidance and save him the trouble of thinking rules out for himself.

Man has an "instinct for morality," though not all rationalists will admit this. It is not a "gift from on high," it is not "Conscience," and it is not due to vegetarian ancestors eating of the fruit of the tree of Knowledge. It is a natural corollary of the fact that Man is a social animal. To live at reasonable peace with its fellows, the social animal must be prepared to sink a proportion of its self interest (and a larger proportion of its instinct for self-aggrandisement) for the common good. Man does this, and the instinct urging him to do so appears to him (mystically, as so much instinctive behaviour appears) as an instinct to morality.

This then will help us towards our definition. Being good consists of subordinating one's personal interests to those of one's tribe. This definition would be easier to appreciate if Man were a member of a single tribe with

simple homogeneous interests as, at one time, perhaps he was. To-day, however, he has many "tribes"; his family, his school, his town, his nation, his colour, his race, and his species; and many others determined by his work, beliefs and interests.

Being good consists of balancing the conflicting claims of these "tribes" with one another and with one's own. And in balancing them qualitatively as well as quantitatively—it's not "good" to benefit your nation a little at great expense to your family, for example, by shooting your grandfather because he is a theoretical Nihilist. Nor to over-feed your children by going without food yourself. But it should be noted that this adjustment of loyalties constituting morality is a personal adjustment. Man must operate this balance entirely by himself; it is a delusion that any other person can read the scale for him.

A general fault with the organised codes of morals already mentioned is that they provide readings without looking at the scales. They set up one reading which they claim to be the reading on all balances, past, present, and future, without any reference to what is on the scale pans. A particular fault is that some of them tend to keep a finger on one scale pan.

This is particularly the fault with religious codes. There is a large commercial element in religion, causing it to prefer the advocacy of profitable lines of conduct to those that are (in the sense already defined) moral. For this reason the Church tends to prefer devotion to good works and to place greater emphasis on charity to itself than on charity to those in need of it.

Too many are prone to assume that the moral teaching of the Church atones for its antiquated theology. This is by no means the case, it is the moral teaching of the Church with its misplaced emphasis that makes it a force to be opposed.

BISSETT LOVELOCK.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### ROBERT BURNS—A SUPPRESSED POEM

SIR,—Mr. Cutner's front page article in *The Freethinker*, April 1, remarks: "What Robbie Burns would have said of this cant and (religious) stupidity is not difficult to imagine," is plainly shown in Burns's poems, one of which "supposed" to have been written by the Scottish Bard, "Divinity of Blunders," clearly shows what the writer's opinion of Christianity is regarding its "cant and stupidity."

"Divinity of Blunders" is witty and in true Scotch dialect, and whether Burns is the author of it, is an open question. Anyway, it is well worth preserving in print; and, if space could be well spared for the 14 verses, which I have in typescript, I shall be pleased to send to you for the benefit of your readers.

I have tried to obtain evidence whether Burns is the author; and, from what I gather, one may judge from my endeavours, during 30 years or more. When at Alloway, Burns's birthplace, farmhouse and museum, which Colonel Robert Ingersoll visited and wrote, "In Burns's Cottage," August 19, 1878, a very fine poem, which I have.

The Curator of the Museum gave his opinion to me that he was in favour of Burns being the author, and by his introduction to a member of the Burns Federation, I was given a MS. headed "A Suppressed Poem of Robert Burns." The giver wrote to me, "The above satire which I succeeded in unearthing is without doubt from the pen of the great Scottish Bard. It has been suppressed for reasons which are not difficult to guess." The piece is a copy on the style of an old ballad and bears the above title in possession of Alexander Marshall, who occupies "Nanse Tannoeks," famous house in Mauchlin, and a favourite resort of the Poet, and as the question has been asked in the newspapers lately, "Was Burns a Christian?" let the readers of the poem form their conclusions.

I showed the MS. to G. L. Mackenzie, author of "Brimstone Ballads," with Introduction by G. W. Foote, 1899; also letters from Professors, Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities; and their opinions favour Robert Burns.—Yours, etc.,

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

### CHESS

SIR,—Judging by the review in *The Freethinker* of February 11 of a treatise on chess, the author of that monograph whose name was given as Kenneth Matthews, appears to care little for correctness; his only correct statement is that "shah-mat" means "Le roi est mort" (from the Persian noun marj, maut).

Most personalities connected with the invention of chess are fabulous; probably the game developed gradually from different sources, among them the ancient Indian *chaturaga*, Persian *chatrang*, and later *shatranj*. Another stage in this development was the Persian "Game of the Shah" (pronounced with a strong pectoral aspirate like the Scottish *ch*). "Shah" became Old French *echac*, and *échech*, English "chess," yet German still "Schach."

King Chosroes I (A)-Nūshirwān (A.D. 531-579) was the most famous of the Sassanid dynasty, who extirpated the heretical sect of the Mazdakites; I cannot see what they had in common with the followers of Marx's "Communist Manifesto." Chosroes—as mentioned by Firdusi—is Persian: Kasrāb, or Khosrau—with a good name, whilst his second name means "the Blessed," and not, as is stated, "Just," which in Persian is: hakk, 'ādil, abrar.

"Rukh" is NOT a soldier (Persian: sār-bāz, sipāhā, or lashkari); it could have the meaning of "cheek" or "side" (rukhat=permission to retire). The chessman called "rook," originally denoted by an elephant carrying a castle on its back, is in German still called "Turm" = tower, or castle. There was a middle Persian expression "rukh" for any fierce beast—with a secondary meaning of "hero" or "knight-errant"—and in particular for any animal used in warfare to carry the tower for the archers.

Similarly, the "knight" has only preserved his horse; this piece is called in German, "leaper," or "charger," whilst the pawns are "Bauern" = peasants, or yeomen, and the "bishops" are the "runners" or messengers.

The derivation of the "Exchequer" from somebody having always carried his chessboard with him appears rather fantastic to me. You know as well as I do that at that time the E. was a superior court that had to deal merely with the revenue and was so named from the chequered cloth on the table on which the accounts were reckoned (or settled by means of counters on that chequered cloth). Yours, etc.,

P. G. ROY.

### OBITUARY

#### MISS ELIZABETH WILFORD

We have just received news of the death of Miss Elizabeth Wilford, who will be well known to members of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. for her interest in Freethought, not only in Birmingham but in the movement generally. She was buried in Lodge Hill Cemetery on Friday, April 6, and a Secular Service was read by Mr. C. H. Smith, Secretary of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S.

R. H. R.

### LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

#### OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market Place, Sunday, April 15, 7 p.m.: JACK CLAYTON, A Lecture.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY, A Lecture.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

#### INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, April 15: Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D., "Peaceful Change in International Affairs."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The "Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone W. 1).—Sunday, April 15, 7-15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "A Freethinker Looks at the World."

Shakespeare was no Catholic, neither was he a puritan. Throughout his work, he seems to say, "a plague on both your houses." He put many of his tilts at Orthodoxy in the mouths of clowns and jesters so as to disarm priestly opposition, but the barbed shafts went home.—*Mimmermus*.

## CHRISTIANITY TO SUIT ALL TASTES

(Concluded from page 138)

Coglers, Brethren of the Free Spirit Fraticelli, Familists, Perfectionists, Perfectibilists, Princeites and Libertines believe that salvation is automatically gained by joining their respective sects after which they are incapable of committing sin. While the Runcarii sect maintains that no part of any person's body below the waist could possibly commit sin, the Paterniani adherents say that that part is sin infested. After salvation the Adelphians can foresee future events, the Bezslvestni followers becoming perpetually speechless. According to the New-Born, salvation is reserved until one is deified, a status that is possible for all to attain. The Semi-Pelagians strike a different note by maintaining that man is incapable of salvation under any circumstances whatsoever.

That souls sleep in a state of unconsciousness between death and the resurrection is a belief of the Somnists, but the Psychopneumones insist that after death the souls of the good become angels and the souls of the evil become devils. The Restorationists teach that the wicked will be restored to holiness and happiness after a temporary punishment. The Buchanites on the other hand insist that these unfortunates will be struck dead for a thousand years; while the Bourneans claim that total extinction will be their lot.

The Creationists believe that the soul is a separate creation of God and infused into the unborn child, but the Apocarites declare that it is eternal and uncreated and the same substance as God himself; while the school of Traducianism maintains that the soul is handed down from parent to child. The Philoponists and the Satanniani agree that both the matter and form of bodies will be restored at the resurrection, but the Conomites limit restoration to matter only, while numerous sects reject the resurrection in any form. The Duchobortzi sect claims the soul existed and fell before the creation of the world, but all these beliefs are countered by the Athocians, who deny the existence of the soul, and the Symmachians, who deny future judgment.

Many sects consider suicide meritorious. For instance, the Philipoftschins favour burying themselves alive or starving themselves to death, and the Circellions hurling themselves over a precipice. The Morelstchiki followers consider they are purchasing a martyrdom by burning themselves at the stake. The Flagellants think it is quite sufficient to "half kill" themselves, and the Skoptzi and the Valesians have Bible authority for self-mutilation.

The Quakers insist on quietness during worship, and the members of the Passalorynchiteae sect deem extreme silence so essential that they place their fingers across the nose and lips. This belief is strongly countered by the Jerkers and Barkers and Echetae sects, who consider it a religious duty to stamp and shout with exuberant displays of joy during service. The Agonielites deem it necessary to indulge in dancing, but the Ascitae followers have Biblical authority for their antics of dancing on bottles during devotion. The Beghards consider it essential to strip themselves naked; the Producians, on the other hand, reject worship and prayer of any description.

The Bible teaches the Waldenses to worship in stables and bedrooms and the same authority instructs the Adamites to strip naked and worship underground. The Sweet Singers deny both and make for the open fields.

The Sabbatarians consider it essential to observe both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, but the Rogerians teach that worship on the latter day is idolatry. The Nyctages consider it anti-Christian to pray at night, but the Watchers deem that a Christian duty.

Along with other sects, the Separatists have Biblical instructions to cultivate melancholy looks and to condemn all music and merriment in life, while the same authority makes laughter, joyousness and music essential for the Jumpers.

Baptism with water is opposed by the Seleucians, who insist on baptism with fire, and the Effrontes, who apply oil to the forehead after shaving it till the blood flows. Head and breast in water and feet upright in the air is an acrobatic feat that the Histopedes deem essential for baptism. The last two sects have strong opposition from the Hussites who maintain that baptism with either water or oil is definitely anti-Christian.

Together with other sects there are the Familists, Quakers, Montanists and Pneumatics, who each claim that their respective teaching is a greater authority than Christ, Moses or the Scriptures. There are the Abelites, Abrahamites, Cainites, Sethians, etc., each claiming to be following peculiar habits of their chosen Bible patriarchs.

The Bible instructs the Flemings, Sandemanians and Free-Will Baptists to wash each other's feet, the Excalceati and Sabotiers to walk barefoot, the Apostolicals to go bareheaded, and the Origenists to sleep on the bare floor.

The Starovertzi fraternity will not eat a potato as that caused the Garden of Eden trouble, but the Perfecti followers have reason to include that vegetable in their daily diet. Although the Albigenses will not eat eggs or cheese, a diet of milk is essential for the Malakanes. The food of the Melchisedechian Christians is polluted by the touch of those who are not of their sect.

A Biblical injunction forces the Dilectae and Epiphanes sects to reject marriage and practice unrestrained familiarity, but the Petrobrusians recommend marriage "as a high religious usage," while the Abstinentes denounce it "as a thing to be avoided by those who seek sanctity."

The Pueris Similes have Bible warranty for practising childish tricks and games and taking off their clothes as innocent children. An amazing number of sects teach that ignorance, illiteracy and/or poverty are Christian necessities, but these beliefs are countered by a sect, the Theophronians, that leans towards advanced learning and the utmost use of the intellect.

Although the encyclopædia deals with many hundreds of sects there is no claim of its being complete and, as numerous other beliefs have come into existence since its publication, a full list would surely make a rich assortment. One could take any one of the "true" Christian sects at random and note its various beliefs, and then set to work and find another "true" Christian sect that negates every one of them.

J. TROWER.

**WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY?** By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

**THOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds.** By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 4d.; postage 1d.

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