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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Shrinking Church

IT is not only in actual numbers that the Church of Christ, that is, all the Churches collectively, is shrinking. Bishops and parsons moan almost without ceasing at the fewer and fewer people who are active communicants. They are aghast, not only at the apathy of the people but at their ignorance of both religious history and the Bible. Jesus Christ appears to be for them not the great Prince in shining armour ready to do battle for the cause of Peace, but some inexplicable figure seated in Heaven at the right-hand side of himself, and literally doing nothing at all. And the multitudinous sermons vociferously preached year in and year out all over the country seem to appeal only to the people who are already thoroughly converted. They are either unheard or ignored by the great mass of "Christians."

No one can doubt that the slow but steady undermining of religion—of all religions—by Freethought is the principal cause. Our victory here is not spectacular. We cannot claim the allegiance of a number of bishops and priests who have "come over" as the result of our propaganda such as occurred when John Henry Newman threw over his strong reasoning powers, joined the Church of Rome and took with him many of his confrères. But we can claim to have influenced large numbers of the more intelligent clergy who, in these days, are not quite as ready to consign their flocks to a literal Hell as were their forebears. We have put out the fires of Hell, we have made the average parson ashamed of a diamond-studded Heaven with its sexless Angels wearing nighties, and forced them to concentrate on an ethic rather different from the Oriental one they used so lovingly to teach. Modern ethics are based on modern needs, and owe far more to science than to the book of legends and myths called the Bible.

All this leads me up to the point I wish to make—not, indeed, on my own authority which counts for nothing at all here, but on the authority of the Rev. Mervyn Stockwood. In the *National and English Review* for May he has an article entitled "Our Dwindling Ministry," and it must make very painful reading for all Christians. The number of Anglican clergy before the first world war in England was more than 20,000; to-day, with a much larger population, there are perhaps 14,000, and this number may soon drop to 10,000. Although he does not deal with them, Mr. Stockwood could well have added that the decline in Nonconformist circles is quite possibly greater.

What is the reason for this? Why are young men not interested in the Church these days? It is the fashion, of course, to say that the Church used only to attract the fool of the family—but I could never wholly subscribe to this opinion. Most of the established clergy are University men with degrees and, though fools have scraped through here and there, the examinations are by no means easy and require high concentration and effort. Moreover, I have personally found parsons when away from the Church keenly interested in all sorts of things and many are genuine authorities on out-of-the-way subjects.

No doubt whatever that the financial aspect of a clerical career helps to repel many young men who, even for Christ's sake, are not quite disposed to minister to a flock on a perpetual poverty basis; who are by no means inclined to bury themselves in the heart of the country and preach constantly to a congregation of farm labourers and their wives; or who cannot see why the often harassing duties of a busy industrial parish are worth wasting one's life and energies for without even a thank you from his bishop. Let us give credit to the many unselfish parsons and priests who have done this for the love of God and little else.

The modern young man has, however, been inculcated with both historical and scientific teaching, and he must find it hard to talk about the Temptation of Christ by a literal Devil without a guffaw—even if it is inward. He knows that the Bible story of the "Creation" has no scientific evidence whatever to support it, and that the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man is even repudiated by churchmen who get paid for teaching it—to children and savages. He dare not talk about "revealed" truth, or about miracles, to any body of young people these days who have gone through even elementary examinations in science. He is obliged, if in Holy Orders, to teach the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth and, if a Roman Catholic, the Assumption of Mary—but, if he really has had a course of scientific training at his University, he knows that all this is primitive nonsense and has no validity in a modern world. That there are members of the Established and Nonconformist Churches who are prepared to defend the "old, old story" is no doubt true—but it is surely *their* numbers which are dwindling.

Mr. Stockwood tries his best to analyse the causes of the Church's failure to attract the enthusiastic and all-believing young man without touching the question of "doctrine" at all. The difficulties are mainly, he thinks, financial, the expenses during the time of training when a man has to be kept for a number of years without doing anything productive, and the very poor salary he has to be content with later—not only to provide a living for himself and his family, but also to provide all sorts of additional expenses connected with his clerical duties and which have to come out of the same salary.

Mr. Stockwood suggests that "suitable" men should be allowed to continue their secular professions and do their parson's work as "part time." He obviously thinks that, after a hard day's work in the office or whatever the secular profession entails, a man will be quite ready to drop his well-earned rest and light-heartedly fill all his spare time with Christian duties to the parish—burials, baptisms, weddings, preparing sermons, etc.—and all for Christ's sake. And this appears to be his only way of stopping the rot.

What he has failed to see is that the scarcity of suitable men for clerical posts is not just a financial question—though I do not doubt that if the Church could provide a minimum salary of, say, £1,000 a year for a humble curate, and much more than that for a vicar, there would be no difficulty in obtaining an increasing number of "calls"

from God. But, in the ultimate, there would still be the "doctrinal" difficulties, and nothing, in this world at least, can get over these.

Mr. Stockwood carefully skims over the real difficulties, or rather I should say he prefers to ignore them. He knows quite well that the real reason why there are so few recruits for the Church is that if a man has to be honest with himself, if he has to preach sincerely, he has to *believe*. Can he believe these days? Is there a God in Heaven who looks after us as well as the humblest sparrow? Did Jesus Christ die to "save" us? Is not Christianity completely played out? He and his like may talk of "the Christian approach to life," but the day is over when this can mean anything. And for that, it is Freethought he has to thank—Freethought with its outlook of tolerance and its championship of truth in a secular world.

H. CUTNER.

### RELIGION AND FREETHOUGHT—A PERSONAL STATEMENT

[NOTE.—In three articles, published in this journal on February 25, March 4, and March 11, Mr. Frank Kenyon criticised the point of view which I have been forced to take up in recent months. I cannot expect to be given anything like the same space to reply. But I think that a final farewell to *The Freethinker* might be worth a page or so. In any event, I hope that this may make my position more easily understandable to the many who have been puzzled by it.—J. R.]

THE main attitude which Mr. Frank Kenyon sees fit to criticise, in discussing recent articles of mine, is my feeling that there are two kinds of knowledge—scientific and religious—and that these are not so much contradictory, as Freethinkers usually hold, as complementary. In other words, my opinion now is that we live in two worlds—a purely material world, which is the domain of science, and a world which I can only describe as spiritual. The spiritual world (which most Freethinkers do not admit to exist at all) is the world of values, the world of the arts, the world of religion. As I have already said in previous articles, we cannot *prove*, by any scientific laws of which I am aware, that Beethoven is greater than George Gershwin; we cannot *prove* that Raphael was a greater artist than the man who draws the illustrations to my small boy's weekly "comic": we cannot *prove* that moral and ethical behaviour of a purely personal (as opposed to a social) type is good and right and proper. Yet, except for that small minority which has got beyond spiritual considerations—that small minority, in other words, which is spiritually blind—these things are admitted by all.

Almost everyone, in other words, holds that Beethoven is more to be admired than Gershwin; almost everyone holds that Raphael was a greater artist than the comic illustrator; and almost everyone (to take a typical example) believes that the sale of contraceptives in slot machines is contrary to the moral interests of the population.

And if the spiritual world is the world in which these aesthetic and moral values are established, I hold that, in a similar fashion, theological values may be established though they also may not be provable in the strictly scientific sense.

That is the first point on which Mr. Kenyon and I would disagree; and I think, too, that it is a point which is fundamental.

The second point is this matter of international morality which had so much influence on me in the early stages of my mental pilgrimage. No Freethinker would for a moment wish to deny that there has been a decrease in religious belief and religious observance in recent years.

Indeed, Freethinkers and Rationalists have claimed that their propaganda is to a large extent responsible for that decrease. It does, however, seem to have escaped the attention of most that this decrease in religious belief has been accompanied by a decrease in the mutual trust between nations, until it is no longer believed by anyone that a treaty will be kept by a nation which does not consider it advantageous to keep. In 1914 the fact that the German Government could describe a treaty as a "scrap of paper" shocked the civilised world. Now the "scrap of paper" mentality (if I may so describe it) has spread everywhere. I know that when religious belief was general there were still wars. But those wars were not fought in the same way, nor was there the feeling that no international agreement could be regarded as binding. And, incidentally, one would like to know why Freethinkers like Mr. Cutner, who regard Marxist Communism as the most deadly enemy of mankind, ruthless and not accepting the "bourgeois" virtues of trustfulness, close their eyes to the fact that Marxist Communism is, after all, the logical end of Freethought.

In most spheres of knowledge if we find two changes (in this case the decline in religious belief and the increase in international distrust) happening more or less simultaneously, we usually consider that they are either cause and effect or they are both the results of some single cause as yet not understood. I cannot see that there is any possibility that these two changes are due to some other cause\*; therefore I have to conclude that the decline in religious belief is, at any rate in part, the cause of the instability of the world in which we now live. And when one remembers that a belief that God is the Father of Man does lead, in however theoretical a way, to a belief that all men are brothers, the destruction of the one belief may be expected to lead to the destruction of the other. The international aspect of the matter, indeed, seems to me to be quite beyond all doubting. I cannot understand how anyone can dispute it. You may feel that the case for the existence of God is not fully made out; but you cannot, as far as I can see, deny that one who disbelieves in God is less likely to look charitably towards his fellow man than one who has a belief in God's Fatherhood.

Mr. Kenyon also tends to "debunk" my mention of Einstein, Max Planck, and other leading scientific thinkers of our day as being more religiously-minded than their opposite numbers in (shall we say?) the 1890s. What he disregards in this connection is that I was trying to show that there is an increasing reconciliation between thinkers who, in the not very distant past, would have regarded themselves as being rigidly opposed. And there can be little doubt here that the average Freethinker is living-philosophically, in the past. The fact (as I said in the article which months ago announced my change of attitude) that Herbert Spencer is still regarded by most Freethinkers with an attitude not far from reverence is, to my mind, the fact which damns the philosophical outlook of Freethought more than anything else. The fact that Spencer was a dull writer one could overlook—though usually the man with a worth-while message manages to express that message in easily-understood terms. But the fact is that his outlook is now regarded by most philosophers (including, I should say, Rationalist philosophers like Bertrand Russell) as being fallacious and out of touch, naturally enough, with the way in which science has developed.

I am pleased that Mr. Kenyon admits that what is most wanted by mankind is what I termed a "change of heart." He does not, of course, admit my corollary that

\* Mr. Kenyon attributes the change to two world wars; my case is that the wars are part of the *effect*, not the *cause*.

a change of heart is not produced by a mere effort of will. In other words, my suggestion is that a change of heart is something which comes within that non-material sphere that, at the beginning of this article, I called spiritual. I cannot see that a discussion of what Mr. Kenyon calls the "upper and lower centres of the brain" really gets us anywhere. For one thing (and I admit I used to think this a quibble) if we hold that what determines our thoughts is some chemical or electrical impulse in the brain, how can we decide that this is true? To put the same thing in another way, which I think Mr. Kenyon would appreciate, who is to psycho-analyse the psycho-analyst? For I think that the way in which the materialist of Mr. Kenyon's type would explain the development of thought, and the way in which the psycho-analyst explains thought as due to some influence coming from the unconscious, are both subject to the same objection in that any such process can have no influence on truth or fiction, including the truth or fiction of the basic theories of thought.

I do not know that there is much more which I can say here and now. I cannot expect to command too much space, now that I am no longer in agreement with the philosophical attitude that it is the function of *The Freethinker* to advocate. I may, however, be permitted to add that I have written a book outlining at greater length what has happened to me, and I hope that this will appear within the next few months. I shall see that a review copy goes to *The Freethinker*, and I shall look forward eagerly to seeing what Mr. Cutner, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Kenyon, or some other contributor may say about it.

This article is in the nature of a farewell performance in these columns. But I reserve the right for more farewell appearances, like some singers whom I have heard! In any case, I hope that I shall be able, now and then, to send brief notes on what seem to me to be worth-while books. For by the reading of books we broaden our outlook. And now that I have reached some sort of harbour I realise that the average Freethinker, who believes himself so well emancipated, has really an outlook much narrower than he thinks.

JOHN ROWLAND.

### EUGENE SUE IN ENGLAND

THIS note is designed as a pendant to the two articles dealing with Eugene Sue that have recently appeared in this journal. It is concerned neither to evaluate Sue's literary worth, nor to assess his importance in this country. The purpose of these jottings is to draw attention to four of this author's lesser known novels that appeared in an English translation. Almost certainly there were other novels that were translated into English, but my remarks are confined to those works in my own collection.

*Therese Dunoyer* was published by J. Cleave of Shoe Lane, Fleet Street, in 1845. It appeared in fourteen penny parts, each of which was embellished with vigorous illustration. Alternatively, it could be bought in sixpenny parts, and was later issued with a title page and list of contents as a single volume. Although the illustrations are unsigned, they may possibly be the work of Henry Anelay.

Subtitled *The Watch Tower of Koat-Vën, The Temptation*, described as a romantic tale, appeared in penny parts during the latter part of 1844 and the early months of 1845. The fourteen parts cost a penny each, or could be obtained in sixpenny parts. Like the first title, it was later issued as a single volume, without the publisher's name, and dated 1845. Illustrations are again similar, and apart from the publisher, these two works are very

alike in appearance. The publisher of this second title was George Vickers of Holywell Street, the Strand (with Galignani of Paris), who at this time was commencing to issue G. W. M. Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London*, which ran from 1845 until 1850.

W. Strange, of Paternoster Row published *The Female Bluebeard* in 1845. This was a cloth volume, with a rather ornate gilt spine which cost 3s. Although there is a note by the translator, his name is not given, and it is impossible to surmise who he might have been. The thirty-four illustrations by Walmsley are bold in design and well reproduced, though their quality is not high. Strange, the publisher did not specialize in fiction, although he did issue J. F. Cooper's *The Governess*. Among his general titles were a *Guide to the Recovery of Small Debts*, priced at 1s., several guides to various parts of France and England, a couple of works on housekeeping, and some instructional manuals on such subjects as emigration, loan societies, advice to young men and so on.

*The Labrynth of Love* was published by John Lofts of the Strand. Bearing no date, it probably belongs to the same period as the foregoing titles. It is something of a puzzle, and may have been issued in 36 parts, numbers 1-34 consisting of eight pages each, and number 35-36 was issued as an extra and final part, as the length of the tale did not warrant two separate parts. Since the difference is only half a page, it is difficult to see why the required amount was not—as was usual in such cases—cut away. Probably 36 parts were advertised. On the other hand, the half-title before the title page suggests that the present copy was issued in book form, and was not merely the set of parts bound up with a title page and list of illustrations. The illustrations are of quite a high standard and are all full-page size, with no printing on the reverse sides. This again suggests that this was in fact a bound volume. The answer is perhaps that the novel was originally issued in parts, and later reissued as an illustrated work, the serial number of each part being retained either because it was reprinted from the same setting of type, or more likely, to act as signatures for the binder.

One last word regarding the popularity of *The Wandering Jew*; an edition was published by Edward Lloyd in penny parts in 1845.\* This work has the distinction of being the only penny Lloyd that appeared without illustrations. Another popular and abridged version of this story appeared in 1845, published by J. S. Pratt of London. This was a tiny volume measuring 3 by 5 inches, containing 512 pages and an illustrated frontispiece. The translator's name is given as Charles Wright.

Milner and Sowerby, who published an enormous number of cheap books, also published *The Mysteries of Paris* in their Cottage Library, costing 1s.\* Roughly the same size as Pratt's edition of *The Wandering Jew*, this was designed for the widest possible reading public. It is undated, as many of these Milner and Sowerby books are.

Incomplete as these notes are, they may give some idea of the popularity of Sue in England. Penny parts, or the Cottage Library, were designed for a wide public, and titles that appeared in this form were popular in the widest sense of the word. Further research would, no doubt, reveal other Sue titles issued like this. Cheap multiple publishing in the nineteenth century is a field that has as yet hardly been touched upon in England, while in America a good deal of work has already been done, notably by the devotees and enthusiasts of the dime novel.

VICTOR E. NEUBURG.

\* I have had to rely upon a bibliography and a catalogue for details of this item.

### ACID DROPS

After 2,000 years of persecution and religious wars, as well as the forcing of some brand of Christianity on all the nations of Europe, some kind of compulsion has still to be used to compel people "to come in." At a meeting of "Christian Action" the other week with speakers who included Dr. Arnold, a German, M. Andre Philip, a Frenchman, and Mr. R. R. Stokes, our Catholic Lord Privy Seal, there came from the platform the usual wheedling, exhortation, and assurance about Christianity which characterises so many of these footling meetings. "We Christians never lose hope" they all insisted, but surely this kind of talk should not be necessary *now*? How can these people explain why they have still to organise such huge meetings if Christianity really came from "God?"

Even "Answers," the well-known weekly, joins in all this terrific attempt to get people "to come in." The Church, cries Mr. E. P. L. Fisher (L.C.C. Public Advisory Committee) in this journal, "is militant here on earth." So what? Well, he is trying to explain that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners ceased to exist three years ago, as well as Queen Anne's Bounty, and why the new Church Commissioners are "not the same thing under another name." It is interesting to note that these are Sir P. W. Baker-Wilbraham, Sir Richard Acland, Lord Tovey and Sir J. Raitt Brown, and they manage to rake in from the Church estates £1,422,000 a year and from dividends £4,500,000 a year—though it is not stated whether these sums are subject to the dazzling super-tax which huge sums from private individuals have to pay.

Then there are the farms owned by the Church from which comes a gross revenue of £2,666,000 a year—all of which makes one wonder at the constant cry from poor curates and vicars at the awful inadequacy of their pay. In any case, it must make one wonder also how the Church can explain all its wealth in connection with its allegiance to the Prince of Peace, the humble Messiah-King, Jesus Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head and was ministered so devotedly by other equally humble people? Can it be explained?

Though religion in Scotland has ever been of the gloomiest kind, always ready to consign billions of people to Hell, and almost universally accepted by Scotsmen, this is not yet enough; for their Free Church has issued a Report which, we are told by the Edinburgh *Evening Dispatch*, is "along the familiar lines of unrelieved gloom." It appears that even in remote Highland villages they are feeling the impact "of imported godlessness and religious indifference." This ought to be very good news, but Scots "meenisters" are beginning to see in this a cloven hoof, for it means that their jobs are not quite so secure as in the good old days when a minister was recognised as almost a God himself. Is the Almighty deserting bonnie Scotland? Shades of John Knox! It's enough to make the grand old Reformer turn in his grave.

At a big rally of the Churches in Hyde Park, the Archbishop of Canterbury distinguished himself by pointing out that "toleration" was a particular Christian virtue fostered only by Christianity; but, he added, it must not be confounded with apathy. Most people who know something of what G. W. Foote called the "Crimes of Christianity" will wonder how even an Archbishop can so distort history; the idea that the Christian Churches ever preached toleration is quite a new one on us. Until it was curbed by the

secular powers and the advance of civilisation under science, the only toleration known by the Church of Christ was infamous torture, the auto da fe, imprisonment, the complete confiscation of one's property, and banishment. It was the heretic who preached toleration.

A Blue Book on ritual murders among the Basutos has been published, and its most interesting pages deal with the rival Christian missionaries and the effect they have on the natives. The Catholics, for example, who came in later than the Lutherans, are now campaigning against both heathenism and Lutherism, and the more or less simple Basutos are "shocked" at the unmitigated intolerance shown by the rival sects. And it will not come as a complete surprise to our own readers to learn that the most of the Basutos who have been condemned for ritual murders are actually professing Christians, as were, indeed, their chiefs. In fact, to Basutos, Christian ethics and religion were one thing, and their own primitive beliefs—just as true—were another. What can our missionaries now say?

Defenders of mixed marriages have a stout champion in Miss Attlee (who is 75), the sister of our Prime Minister. One of her reasons is that, "No doubt Our Lord and His Apostles were men of colour"—which is probably quite true if they ever lived. She told a *Daily Mirror* reporter that it was the Italian Old Masters who made the Holy Family white, but she was quite certain that "God did not choose a European to be the mother of our Lord." Miss Attlee's observations might have carried more weight if she had married a Hottentot or a Basuto—or even a Pigmy; but her remarks on the colour of "our Lord" will be received with horror by Dr. Malan and his Nazi confrères.

Not all our miserably gloomy but very religious Sabbatarians get their way in our popular press. *Illustrated* published a reply to one of these Sunday misery-mongers in which was asked: "What about the opposite side of the picture, the desolation, the boredom and hypocrisy of an English Sunday? The aimless meandering of young people . . . It is time we freed the English Sunday." Why not abolish it for good, call it a day of rest, and allow everybody the right to spend it how they please?

Speaking on religion the other day at London University, Dr. R. H. Thouless told his audience that "Evangelists" were in it because it was an exceedingly good racket—that is, because of the money they could get out of it in the shape of "a stout collection." Some, naturally, were sincere, others talked "nonsense." It seems to us that all this could apply to the genuine "Churches" as well, and it would interest us to know what Dr. Thouless could say in defence of religion which, like Christianity in the bulk, is not sheer "nonsense."

In the Yugoslav zone of Trieste, "Darwinism" is made compulsory in schools, and the *Catholic Times* appears to be very angry about it. Darwinism is merely a "theory" for Catholics, and they have noticed that, in this country, it is accepted as a fact. For example, it is Charles Darwin who "has the most marked place of honour in the South Bank Exhibition and Darwinian biology dominates the Dome of Discovery." This is bad enough, but when the South Bank *Guide* gives an eulogistic account of Darwinism and "merely a cursory paragraph on Christianity" it is time for Catholics to protest. Darwin—not Christ! Horror of horrors!

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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).

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Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Branches of the N.S.S. that carry on open air lectures are getting busy as the lecture notices column will show. The North London Branch are opening up at an old and successful spot at South Hill Park (Hampstead, L.M.S.) on Friday at 8 p.m. Messrs. Alexander and Ebury will be the speakers and it is hoped that Freethinkers within easy reach will give their support, not as a favour, but as a duty to the cause remembering that a well supported meeting is an attraction in itself.

Thetford, the birthplace of Thomas Paine, is holding a Thomas Paine exhibition as its contribution to the Festival of Britain celebrations. The Executive of the N.S.S. sent a number of exhibits and the Official Guide Book issued by the Borough of Thetford contains a reproduction from the *Age of Reason*, published by the Secular Society Ltd., of a plaque dedicated to the memory of Thomas Paine by soldiers of an American Air Force Group stationed in this country. A portrait of Thomas Paine from the same publication is also reproduced in the Guide Book. *The Age of Reason* containing the illustration of the plaque and the portrait of Thomas Paine is on sale at the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, paper covers, 2s. 6d., cloth, 3s. 9d., postage 3d.

General MacArthur may have a lot to answer for, and a lot to live down—but he will find the solemn tosh of Congressman Dewey Short surely a calamity for the rest of his life. After the General had finished his recent defence, Short said: "We hear God speak here to-day . . . God in the flesh . . . the voice of God." Unless, of course, the General agrees with Congressman Short.

## A KEY TO THE APOCALYPSE

IN the pages of the Christian Bible, our "New" Testament, one book stands out in sharp distinction from the rest both on account of its unique subject-matter and of the, to Western eyes at least, bizarre literary style in which it was composed. This literary cuckoo, so alien to its context, is, of course, the Apocalypse or (in Protestant versions) the "Revelation of St. John the Theologian" (or "Divine"), which concludes the New Testament. The author of this, to our minds, fantastic work traditionally, but most improbably identified with the author of our Fourth Gospel, was a Jewish Christian who seems to have edited or, at any rate, based his work upon older sources of purely Jewish origin. The Greek of the Apocalypse is said by classical scholars, including its most recent Catholic translator, Mgr. Ronald Knox, to be execrable, "gutter-Greek" is the expression generally used. Of the Apocalypse, entirely Hebrew in thought and theme, it has been conjectured that its obviously Hebrew author first wrote it in Hebrew and then translated it into Greek.

The authorship and date of writing are unknown, though a doubtful tradition recorded by Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150), declares that the apostle John wrote it when (as the book itself states) in the island of Patmos to which he had been exiled by the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). It is quite possible that John, surnamed in the Gospels "Boanerges" or "The Son of Thunder" was actually the author of this work so replete with thunder and lightning! In which case, however, our "Gospel of St. John" must be by another hand, for it is only necessary to be able to read to see that the same author could not possibly have written both these so utterly dissimilar books. Be that as it may, it was its supposed apostolic authorship that eventually and only after much controversy, secured for this anti-Roman broadcast a place in the Canon of the Church of Rome.

Unfortunately, most readers of the Apocalypse are understandably baffled by the peculiar symbolic style in which this essentially Oriental composition is written. As in the case of its also symbolic Old Testament predecessor, the "Book of Jonah," they often mistake the symbol for the thing symbolised. (In "Jonah," the whale, or "great fish" which swallowed the prophet, was, of course, Nineveh, the City of the Fish God, to which Jonah was sent; any Oriental reader would have understood this. The author was not writing for American "middle-west" Fundamentalists who took the fish literally!) Similarly, much nonsense has been talked about "John's nightmare," not only by Christian Fundamentalists, but, unfortunately, by self-styled Rationalists as well. Certainly, "John" wrote in a style very strange to students of Western literature; perhaps, however, no stranger than would be, say, certain parts of *Paradise Lost* to an Oriental reader reared in a different literary tradition.

Be that as it may, the Apocalypse is written in a deliberately cryptic style which was characteristic of a recognised Hebrew class of writings. In any case, "John's" symbols are mostly quite easy to understand, since their author has obligingly furnished us with a key to their interpretation. When, for example, he tells us that "The Scarlet Woman" sits on seven hills, it can only be Rome to which he refers, the persecutor of both Christian and Jew. Similarly, the famous "number of the Beast," 666, could only represent a mystery to readers ignorant of Hebrew, for 666 equals the numerical value of "Nero Cæsar," the imperial persecutor. Whilst "the Woman clothed with the Sun" who gives birth to the Messiah, almost certainly represents Israel, the "Chosen Race"—

her Catholic interpretation as the Virgin Mary is only possible if it is assumed that the Messiah was identical with the Jesus of the Gospels and that the cult of the Virgin was already established when "John" wrote; both, very speculative propositions. Other symbols have lapsed with the passage of time; thus, the "two witnesses" could be any pair of martyrs; no doubt, they were familiar to his readers. There were many such when he wrote.

So much for the author's "apocalyptic" style. Of vastly greater importance is its underlying content. This, if one penetrates below the celestial trappings, is no "nightmare" but is, on the contrary, grimly realistic. For, whilst its mise-en-scene is in heaven, the Apocalypse can only be understood against its actual historic background in *this* world here below. For this book, which, if and when considered as an historical work, might relevantly bear the sub-title, "Jerusalem versus Rome," is the only surviving literary work produced by one of the most tremendous dramas in human annals: the epic "Two Hundred Year War" which raged intermittently between the Jewish people and the Roman Empire between 64 B.C., when the Roman general Pompey first captured Jerusalem, and A.D. 135, when the mighty Roman military machine finally, and after a struggle which shook the Roman Empire to its foundations, drowned in blood the last great Jewish rising under the Messiah Bar-Cochba—"The Son of the Star." The author of the Apocalypse is a Jewish Christian who, throughout, identifies Christianity—if he was actually a Christian and not a Jew—with the terrestrial fortunes of the Jewish people in their contemporary struggle against Rome—one of the most heroic and hopeless struggles in history; the struggle of a people inhabiting a land about the size of Wales, against the most powerful Empire that the Western world has known prior to the Industrial Age.

Actually, "John" displays a very shrewd military judgment. For he evidently realises the hopeless nature of the struggle in which his compatriots were engaged. His work, in fact, could accurately be described as a Freudian "wish-fulfilment!" Only a direct Divine intervention of the Messiah could save the Jews in the hopelessly unequal struggle between the contemporary Jewish patriots and the legions of the Roman Cæsars.

Heaven duly obliges! The "operative" theme of "Revelations" is constituted by the terrifying intervention of the Messiah, that tattooed Warrior-King, so utterly remote from any other early Christian conception of Jesus, who leads his heavenly squadrons amid a terrifying crescendo of the celestial elements in an irresistible cavalry charge against which even the mighty Roman war-machine of the Cæsars is utterly impotent to make a stand. This Divine Warrior King, whom "John" does not seem to regard as an historical being but who, perhaps, as Mr. Archibald Robertson has happily surmised, may be anti-Roman insurrections, actually achieves the final victory of Jerusalem over Rome which baffled John of Gischala and Bar-Cochba without celestial assistance. "John's" vision ends in an all-Jewish Heaven in which Israel enjoys the fruits of victory. Rome, victorious upon earth, in the sphere of History, is defeated in the spirit, with the war transferred to the psychological plane. "John" was, perhaps, a pre-Freudian "Freud."

Whilst the learned continued to wrangle over the author's obscure symbols, the rebels against Church and State in later ages instinctively grasped the author's meaning; the Apocalypse of the old Jewish revolutionary became a kind of "revolutionaries' handbook" in later ages; "the Communist Manifesto of the age of Utopian revolts," as the present writer once described the Apocalypse in another connection. From the Donatists at the end of

antiquity, via the Anabaptists, down to the millenarian "Fifth Monarchy Men" who gave so much trouble to both Oliver Cromwell and to the Restoration Monarchy in 17th century England, successive revolutionary sects in revolt against the conventional order in Church and State, found their encouragement in the Apocalypse and found in its lurid pages an assurance of the proximate return of the Messiah, "King Christ."

I submit that the above historical "Key" to the Apocalypse will be found to shed more light than either the mystical quibbles of Christian Fundamentalists or than cheap sneers at what is, historically, a most significant and influential social document and, as and when considered from a purely literary angle, a bizarre but authentic masterpiece which has long since passed over into world-literature as the solitary surviving record of one of the most tremendous historical dramas.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### "DIVINITY OF BLUNDERS"

#### A "Supposed" Poem by Robert Burns

To gull the mob an' keep them under  
The ancients told their tales of wonder;  
A pious fraud, a holy blunder,  
A rainbow sign,  
An earthquake or a clap of thunder  
Were held divine.

By those whose faith to swallow doses,  
A wondrous story nothing loses,  
The dextrous feats ascribed to Moses  
Are proof as plain  
O' sleight o' hand as Hermon Bozi's  
Legerdemain.

Believe the stories of tradition,  
The magic royal competition.  
Let sense give place to superstition  
O' the sacred fountain  
Which con a midge by faith's volition  
Swell to a mountain.

A god of mercy just and good,  
Held forth as in an angry mood,  
Droonin' the world all in a flood  
To punish Hymen,  
And turning water into blood  
Just like a demon.

He murdered thousands in a trice,  
Made Egypt swam wi' frogs and lice,  
Had he made coos and sheep and rice,  
His hungry hordes then  
Might ilka ane ha' got a slice  
And praise their lord then.

Wi' hocus-pocus rod in hand,  
Like Mother Goose's magic wand,  
They could the elements command,  
As legends run;  
Divide the sea or burn the land  
Or stop the sun.

Their prodigies bombast surpasses,  
Like dykes the ocean stood in masses.  
They'd flying prophets, speaking asses,  
Besides a saut wife;  
Their amorous ghosts o'ercame the lasses,  
Wha' lived that life.

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Old Samson's strength lay in his hair.  
Their jealous waters sterling were.  
Showers of fire came through the air  
Like brimstone danders,  
Saints lived in fire by virtue rare,  
Like salamanders.

The apostle Paul by fancy's whim,  
Soared up to Heaven as in a dream.  
And Satan brought him back 'twould seem,  
So says himself;  
But how could Nick to Heaven clim  
Wha's chained in Hell?

Just search the subject thro' the piece.  
'Tis fraught wi' blunders such as these  
That reverend priests their flocks may fleece  
Wi' wily conscience  
Teach human beings by degrees  
To swallow nonsense.

Yet moral truth shall gain the day,  
Illum'd by Nature's glorious ray.  
Anathemas shall flee away  
Wi' priests and de'ls.  
Sound reason shall the sceptre sway  
Hard at her heels.

(Presented by W. A. VAUGHAN.)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### THE N.S.S. AND POLITICS

SIR,—Your report of the annual Freethought demonstration includes the phrase "the meeting closed with everyone looking as though they had spent a really good evening." I can only conclude that the faces of my two companions at the meeting, and myself, are incapable of registering annoyance, sorrow, and despair. This was my first N.S.S. meeting and it served to completely destroy my hopes that membership of the Secular society would provide scope for the ideals of Freethought to which I am so passionately convicted, for it was often difficult to realise the meeting ever set out to be a Freethought demonstration, so obvious was the torrent of Communist propaganda produced by half the speakers.

The N.S.S. must be non-political if it is to fulfil its high purpose, and whilst it is clear that many members are Communists, it is utterly wrong that the N.S.S. platform should be used by these persons for Communist propaganda. The President emphasised that Freethought goes beyond mere Atheism; no one disagrees, but if N.S.S. meetings are to include Communist speeches, then by the definition of Freethought, they must also include Socialist, Liberal, Conservative, and all other political views, even Fascism.

One speaker spoke of the allying to Rome of other Churches and "reactionary political parties" to present a joint front to Communism. How much greater the tragedy if Freethought allies itself to Communism in order to fight Rome. For the N.S.S. to associate itself with Communism as practised by the British Communist Party, must mean the death of organised freethought in this country, as we have already seen the results of such association in the discrediting of some trade unions, and the failure of the peace petition, which but for the corruption of the Communists must have carried the signature of every thinking man.

It appeared from the demonstration that the N.S.S. is controlled by people who put Communism first and Freethought second, and who are prepared to use the society for their own political ends, whilst neglecting the true interests of the N.S.S.

I am an Atheist and Freethinker to my last breath, but I am as bitterly opposed to Moscow as I am to Rome, considering them to both be the arch enemies of freedom of thought, and I cannot continue to support a society which has been seduced by the political religion of Communism.

If the N.S.S. continues to allow its meetings to be used by these Communist speakers, it cannot hope for support from any non-Communist Freethinkers, and thus it will be split irrevocably in two, and die by its own folly.—Yours, etc.,

SIDNEY H. J. SMITH.

[Mr. R. H. Rosetti writes: "As chairman of the demonstration I do not hesitate to say that the statement that half the speakers produced a torrent of Communist propaganda is quite inaccurate.

The N.S.S. is non-party political. I saw no deviation from that during the evening; a speaker may be allowed to use the word Communism to illustrate a point without being labelled Communist."]

## SEX VARIANTS

SIR,—Nobody who is acquainted with my writings would accuse me of being pro-Roman Catholic, but I must protest against the statement made by your contributor, I. de L., that "It is no coincidence that Neville Heath and most other sexual perverts were Roman Catholics."

I know of no statistics which would provide evidence either to support or to disprove this statement, but thirty-five years' experience as a practising Sexologist leaves me with the impression that sex variants are about as frequent among adherents of one religion as of another or of none.

It is always an error, in controversy, to make wild statements which one cannot prove. It only weakens one's own case.—Yours, etc.,

NORMAN HAIRE.

"I love reason, but I am no fanatic in my love. Reason is our guide and beacon-light but when you have made a divinity of it, it will blind you and instigate you to crime."

"What we call morality is merely a desperate enterprise, a forlorn hope, on the part of our fellow creatures to reverse the order of the universe, which is strife and murder, the blind interplay of hostile forces. She destroys herself, and the more I think of things, the more convinced I am that the universe is mad. Theologians and philosophers, who make God the author of Nature and the architect of the universe, show Him to us as illogical and ill-conditioned. They declare Him benevolent, because they are afraid of Him, but they are forced to admit that His acts are atrocious. They attribute a malignity to Him seldom to be found even in mankind. And that is how they get human beings to adore Him. For our miserable race would never lavish worship on just and benevolent deities from which they have nothing to fear; they would feel only a barren gratitude for their benefits. Without purgatory and hell, your good God would be a mighty poor creature."—(Anatole France: *The Gods Are Athirst*.)

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

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

J. CLAYTON's Engagements: Friday, June 1, Haslingden, 7-45 p.m.; Saturday, June 2, Great Harwood (Town Centre), 6 p.m.; Sunday, June 3, Ramsbottom, 7 p.m.; Tuesday, June 5, Newchurch-in-Pendle, 7-45 p.m.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.

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

Also Lectures at Platt Fields. Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday 12 noon: F. A. RIDLEY. Sunday Evening, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY (Highbury Corner). Friday Evening, June 8, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park), J. M. ALEXANDER and L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

### INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 3, J. HUTTON HYND, "Religious Conflict in the U.S.A."

FOR SALE.—Two volume edition in sound condition of *Warfare of Science with Theology* by Andrew D. White. Price £1 1s. Apply Box 102, Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1.

## THE BONDS OF SOCIETY

THE frontispiece to Edith Finch's biography of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt is a photograph of that champion of lost causes, who was, according to Miss Finch, regarded as an unmitigated nuisance by those who directed Great Britain's policy toward the end of the last century and at the beginning of this. It seems to confirm his biographer's judgment of him as a handsome man of the world, vain, proud, a squire of dames, as well as of acres, and a gentleman with the habits and standards of his class. His beard helps him to look romantic. Because of his romanticism, caught from the glamour of Shelley's and Byron's, some thought him frivolous and self-absorbed. His hands seem beautiful, and he was, no doubt, proud of them. Why should he not be? He was, after all, an artist, as well as a poet.

His political activities were honourable, for in periods of much jingoism, he spoke out in criticism of our imperialistic policy in Egypt and elsewhere. He even underwent imprisonment for his actions in regard to evictions in Ireland. He was very courageous and a great traveller.

I have made several of these statements merely as a description, for I am here interested more in the question of his religion. His views are shown as rather shifting, but I judge him more basically to have been an atheist, although he may have called himself an agnostic. The problem arises as to the origin of his religious beliefs, and why friends of his could call him as having been really always a Roman Catholic. On his death-bed he did receive Extreme Unction, but whether only at the pressure of his relatives is unknown.

His mother is described as a woman forever seeking vainly for a heaven no longer to be found upon the earth she loved. She was a converted Protestant. Cardinal Manning once said she was the wittiest woman he ever knew. She suffered from tuberculosis, and this disease later attacked her son. I wish her wit had been employed against her Church's dogmas, but her disease and the weariness of a widow would help her towards religious belief. Christianity promises such a lot to the sick and the solitary. Besides Roman Catholicism was becoming a fashion in her time, and it fosters a feeling in devotees that they are superior to the herd.

The conversion of her children quickly followed, in about 1852. Wilfrid soon found happiness in swinging a censer. I myself was once an acolyte, but mine was a better age, as I used, as a lad, to feel shame at being a pawn of the priests. Wilfrid was, however, then only twelve, so he could hardly resist his conversion, but he is said never to have become a devout Catholic, although he is described as having contracted a life-long sympathy for that sect. He later said in verse that it was no small matter to have lived in Rome, "in the Church's very bosom and abode, cloistered and cradled there, a child of God."

This recalls to me an old friend who said that poetry was only hot air. Being more poetic I did not agree with him, but I do think that Blunt's words are poetry, not religion.

Blunt went to the Jesuit school of Stonyhurst. Miss Finch says the choice of the school was wise, for Blunt himself pointed out that only among the Jesuits is the doctrine of the Church's infallibility pushed to its logical limits and placed on a basis of obedience to those who expound it. The system, he said, has a strict rule of

conduct and of belief which subjugates the soul to the Church. For Wilfrid, handsome and self-willed, idle, and with no zeal like his brother's piety, it provided the discipline essential to strengthen his character. One doesn't find much evidence of what strength the Jesuits gave him. He, while but a lad, struck and drew blood from a bullying peasant at Lausanne, who threatened him and others with a spade; but that was natural courage. He seemed sexually quite a blade; but the Jesuits should not be blamed; nor should they, I think, be praised for Blunt's courage in his travels. This seemed the natural development of his more basic quality and the experience gained in the travels themselves.

He came under a Father Porter, a man of wit, imagination and kindness, who soon gained control over Wilfrid himself, caning him when needful, and then encouraging him with a word of praise. One needs praise after being whipped. Blunt, himself, said that he vividly felt God's presence as a reality in his daily occupations, and did his best to please Him; but he did not remember any special token of God's presence. Perhaps the canes of Father Porter were too thin. Blunt thought that in certain circumstances he might have become a Jesuit. He longed for the simplification of life enforced by such an Order. The Jesuit noviciate he regarded as the most mentally crushing process ever invented, but it would, he considered, have freed him from his most troublesome doubts and responsibilities, and brought him peace.

He developed a bit in the next few years. His mother died when he was thirteen, and his guardians soon effectually ended the Roman Catholic control of her children's education. He went to Oscott, where, in 1856, Charles Meynell, newly appointed professor of the highest class, encouraged the reading and discussion of the poets, unorthodox though they might be. He was taught to reason, think and argue. The Jesuits had been afraid of reason, and Blunt thought they had been right. They had forbidden him to read a little book sent him by his mother, in which was the motto, "Through the contemplation of created things, by steps we ascend to God." Blunt now implicitly believed that not only were the doctrines of religion reducible to mathematical certainty, but that true reason could not do otherwise than fortify and illuminate our belief in them. The reliance on reason he regarded as the source of his restlessness and spiritual misery. I would, he wrote (probably later), give everything I possess for a reasonable excuse to abandon reason, or to find a cure for my madness in reason itself, the hair of the dog by which I was bitten. He was obviously then no profound thinker, and he never became that.

He was gazetted (1858) in the diplomatic service, and in 1860, on his way to Berlin, he stopped at Constantinople, where he found the only ugly elements were the modern Christian ones.

He was soon neglecting the duties of religion, which frightened him! he was afraid for a whole winter to ride across country. This seems no recommendation of Jesuit schooling. He must then have feared a hot eternal gridiron.

He recovered, and never seemed to have much further religious trouble. Even Mohammedanism, which he might have liked, showed him much fanaticism.

When near to death part of the book of Job comforted him, of man who lieth down, and riseth not again.

In view of that reading, Extreme Unction seems but a quack's trick.

J. G. LUPTON.