

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 25

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Religion and International Morality

A RECENT contributor to *The Freethinker* has, rather surprisingly, produced in a new setting an old argument, perhaps "chestnut" would be the more exact description, of Christian apologetics. In brief, the argument amounts to this: the world in which we live is a very wicked world, cruel, heartless, and treacherous; this state of things is due to the fact that the world has turned its back on God, and to the absence or, at least, to the insufficient presence of religion. Such is the classic form of the argument, the form so amusingly satirised by Samuel Butler in his *Erewhon Revisited*, where Professors Hankey and Pankey of the Erewhonian "Sun-Child Evidence Society" indicate the indispensable connection between a confessedly fraudulent theology and the indispensable maintenance of public morals.

In its new form, however, as recently expounded in the columns of this journal, "the old, old story" is told from a slightly more precise angle. What is the result of a society turning its back on God is now indicated by the cynical amorality which plays so large a part in the international politics of the present day and century. From this point of view, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and their fellow adepts in Macchiavellian "Real-Politik," are the direct results of the loss of religion. This supposed sequence is actually not new: it was expressed in the decline of the Roman world by the Christian monk who described Attila, the most ferocious of the barbaric conquerors of Rome, as "The Scourge of God." That is, as the instrument of God's wrath at the falling away of the contemporary Christian world from its religious duties.

Unfortunately, it can hardly be disputed that much in the political and social life of the present era has been and still is characterised by cruelty, cunning, and in general, by that species of political ruthlessness which the world has, rather unfairly in the present writer's opinion, agreed to describe by the name of the most honest and logical exponent of political amorality, the Renaissance theoretician of "Real-Politik," Nicolo Macchiavelli—(actually "Old Nick," who posthumously gave his name to the Evil One, only said what all his contemporaries in the Age of the Borgias actually did!). Macchiavelli had, and still has, many faithful disciples in the present era of Fascism, the Gestapo, and the concentration camp. The fact is undeniable, but what is its current explanation? Is it really due to the also undeniable contemporary fact of the general decline of religion; of the equally demonstrable fact that society has "turned its back upon God"?

In our submission, there is not the slightest connection between these two contemporary phenomena. The study of Universal History, which is here extremely relevant in the first instance, renders such an explanation a priori improbable in the highest degree. Historically, extreme ruthlessness, of which our own age has furnished us with so many examples, is a regularly recurring phenomenon in certain phases of human history, conspicuous amongst

which are ages, such as is our own age, of social decay and of revolutionary changes within the framework of society. Thus, for example, both the decline of the world of antiquity and the consequent break-up of its slaveholding civilisation and, equally, the break-up of medieval feudalism in the era of the Reformation, represented ages of an incredibly ferocious character. Of the age of the Reformation, a German historian has actually written:—

"From the German 'peasants' War (1525) to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648—the end of the Thirty Years' War), Europe resembled a madhouse."

Whilst the horrors that accompanied "the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," as depicted by Edward Gibbon and by many subsequent authorities, are common knowledge.

It is in actually such sordid current phenomena as shortages of raw materials, lack of adequate living space, racial, social, and imperialist conflicts, that we must find the real causes of the present grim situation in world-politics and its tragic antecedents. Societies which are functioning healthily do not germinate armaments races nor produce malignant social abortions such as Hitler, Franco, or Malan.

What has religion, or the absence of religion, to do with all this? Actually, very little, since nothing can be more certain than that, in previous ages of social decay and of political amorality, religion, then at the height of its power and diffusion, was absolutely powerless to affect the current social atmosphere, even of the self-styled "Ages of Faith." For example, two of the most ruthless ages in world history were, as we remarked above, the age of the Fall of Rome and that of the Reformation. Yet, historically, nothing is more certain than that these were two of the most religious ages in history: the era of the Fall of Rome was the self-same epoch which saw Christianity itself triumph; whilst the Reformation was an era not only of wars but of, specifically, "the religious wars."

In point of fact, even in ages of less extreme social tensions, religion, to judge from the behaviour of its professed exponents in public life, has made no difference at all to the current lack of political morals. Any private citizen in any civilised society who behaved as virtually all Christian states have done, would spend his or her life behind prison bars or under the perpetual shadow of the gallows. And whilst, it is, no doubt, true that scoundrels in high places have not been exclusively Christians, yet there is no evidence available that the anti-Christian politicians were any worse than the Christians.

For example, Prince Metternich, pious Catholic Chancellor of the "Holy" Austrian Empire and Protector of the Papacy for a generation, had, in proportion to the technical resources at his command, as many spies, executioners, and dungeons at his disposal as any 20th-century Dictator, Christian or otherwise. Prince Bismarck, that pious Christian champion of the Protestant Reformation, who boasted that he would never "go to Canossa" to prostrate himself before the Papal "anti-Christ," yet

caused the Franco-German War of 1870 and the deaths of a million men by his unscrupulous forgery of the Ems telegram. Whilst the typical and repeated adjurations of the devout Protestant Hohenzollern Emperors to their "good old German God" were accurately, as well as neatly summarised in the famous greeting sent by Kaiser William I to his wife, in the inspired pages of *Punch*:—

"May Heaven be praised, my dear Augusta,
The foe has come an awful buster;
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below,
Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

The suggestion that the present unhappy state of the world is due to the current decline of religious belief is, consequently, pure delusion. It is, of course, true that the collapse of organised religion in and by itself will not entirely cure the inherent amorality and opportunism which are endemic in and to political, as well as to physical struggles for existence. For that, we shall have to wait for a much wider extension of the application of Rationalism to society at large than any merely negative criticism can apply. But in one respect, at least, even politics will benefit from the final exit of religion. For such an exit will diminish the grounds of hypocrisy. No longer will the dark deeds of evil men be publicly represented as the final fulfilment of an eternal moral order, as the terrestrial justification of the inscrutable purposes of an allegedly All-Wise and All-Merciful God.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A CELEBRATED STATESMAN, ORATOR AND WRITER

DESPITE his inconsistencies, prejudices and erratic career, Edmund Burke still ranks as a political thinker. Various are the estimates of his achievements, but perhaps the best-balanced study of this Irish publicist is Sir Philip Magnus' *Edmund Burke* (John Murray, 15s.). This discriminating biography has an important advantage over its predecessors, in its author's privilege of being granted access to the Burke papers preserved at Wentworth Woodhouse which no previous biographer had been permitted to consult. Also, Sir Philip was furnished with invaluable information preserved in unpublished MSS relating to Burke stored in the Pierpont Morgan Library in America and, he has utilised documents in the Fitzwilliam archives at Milton.

Magnus opines that Burke broke the trammels imposed by party discipline, much as Wesley's passion urged him beyond the boundaries of the Anglican Establishment. Thus, Burke grew more and more independent in his outlook. As his biographer avers: "Burke's character during his lifetime was a subject of controversy, and for many years he was the victim of a Press campaign of almost incredible scurrility. His friends, the Rockingham Whigs, loved to represent their idol as a model of immaculate perfection; his enemies did not scruple to accuse him of political adventurism, financial corruption, religious hypocrisy, sexual perversion and mental disorder."

Burke, apparently, towered over his political contemporaries, but there were serious flaws in his character. His judgment was usually decided by his emotions and when his financial affairs were closely related to those whom he loved or esteemed, they lacked prudence and, some suspected, even common honesty.

Burke like Bernard Shaw was a Dubliner but, unlike G.B.S., of pure Irish descent. He entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1744. His home life was uncongenial; his college studies irregular, although he was intended for the

Bar. His early essays proved abortive. He courted a Catholic maiden, but after their marriage she conformed to the Church of England.

When Burke refused to enter the legal profession his infuriated father stopped his allowance. He then tried secretarial work and strove to earn a living with his pen. His *Vindication of Natural Society* aroused interest, but little else. Then, in 1757, his famous work, *The Sublime and the Beautiful*, made his reputation and endeared him to many influential friends. But there were two children to support and he remained dependent on the bounty of his wife's father. Several attempts were made to secure independence and he signed an agreement with Dodsley to edit the Annual Register. This proved a signal success, many editions of the first issue being sold. Burke also became secretary to Single Speech Hamilton then Commissioner of the Board of Trade and retained this post for six years.

Burke's association with Hamilton necessitated his residence in Ireland where he aspired to reconcile the differences between Catholic and Protestant, but with Hamilton's dismissal he returned to London and joined the literary group which embraced Goldsmith, Dr. Johnson and the painter, Reynolds. As a Whig, Burke was appointed secretary to Lord Rockingham who became First Lord of the Treasury in 1765. A seat in Parliament was provided for Burke in the pocket borough of Wendover, and his maiden speech in the Commons in denunciation of the Stamp Act which had antagonised the Americans, greatly impressed the House.

After successive administrative changes, Lord North became the nominal head of the Government. In him, notes Magnus, "the King found a compliant tool, and for the next twelve years King George remained in effect his own Prime Minister." During this trying time Burke and Rockingham by keeping their party together just saved it from dissolution. Burke fiercely resented the attempt of George III to restore the earlier prerogatives of the Crown, while his opposition to royal corruption of Government coincided with the fight conducted by John Wilkes in defence of England's hard won liberties.

At this time the freedom of the Press, limited as it was, was endangered by Lord Mansfield's judgment which repeated "an old maxim that it was for the judge and not the jury to decide on the facts of printing and publication. . . . Chatham and Camden denounced Mansfield's decision in the Lords, and in March, 1771, Burke helped in the Commons to move a Bill empowering juries to decide on questions of libel. This motion was lost by 218 votes to 72 and Mansfield's decision remained law until Fox's Libel Act of 1792" (Magnus, p. 64).

Another question concerning the freedom of the Press was the right of printing reports of Parliamentary debates. Publication was forbidden by a Standing Order of the House, but this Order was constantly ignored. Several reports of debates in the George III-controlled Parliament had appeared, and their printers and publishers were summoned to attend at the Bar of the Commons. Burke opposed this Order; divided the House more than 20 times and prolonged the sitting until five in the morning. The printers who obeyed the Order were reprimanded. One of these, however, named Miller, refused to appear and was arrested within the City by the Commons' Messenger. As our biographer observes, Miller "promptly gave the Messenger in charge for assault on the ground that the Speaker's writ had no currency within the chartered boundaries of the City. The case was heard at the Mansion House before the Mayor's Court; Miller was formally discharged and the Messenger of the House was ordered

to find a surety for his good behaviour: the House of Commons and the City of London had come into collision."

Of the three Aldermen who heard the case, two were M.P.s, one of them Wilkes himself who, like Charles Bradlaugh at a later time, had been illegally deprived of his seat in Parliament. The two members were directed to attend the House, but Wilkes as an expelled member, was to stand at the Bar. But he ignored this Order, while agreeing to occupy his seat as the duly elected Member for Middlesex. Popular feeling became intense, but George III warned Lord North that he would have nothing to do with "that devil Wilkes." Thus both Wilkes and Miller were unmolested, while the two other offending Aldermen appeared and were sent to the Tower for a time, where they were visited by Rockingham and Burke. These arbitrary proceedings of the Crown recalled the bad days of the Stuarts. Unpopular politicians were mobbed and thrown into the mire and, when the prisoners were released six weeks later, they were hailed as heroes. If, however, the Commons had shown its authority, the Government never again attempted the enforcement of the Order of the House against the report and publication of Parliamentary proceedings.

Burke's advocacy of the American cause gained him the salaried Agency in London for the Colony of New York. Also, his support of the privileges of the East India Company led to the offer of an income of £10,000 yearly as chief supervisor of a Commission which the Directors desired to despatch to India. This, however, he declined after consultation with his friends and political associates. Unfortunately, Burke's conduct was frequently determined by his theological vagaries and, as early as 1772, his obscurantist attitude foreshadowed the reactionary passion he displayed at the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. For in the earlier year, a petition was presented to Parliament urging the repeal of an Act which compelled undergraduates, the clergy and others to subscribe to the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church. The Unitarians had prepared this petition to preclude an open rupture with the Establishment. The majority of Burke's friends and colleagues supported this appeal, but he voted with the High Churchmen and Tories against it. Indeed, he contended that some definite standard of authority within the Church was absolutely indispensable. But even in his best days, Burke was never more than a Whig whose permanent ideal was the bloodless Revolution of 1688 which to him attained political perfection. Thus, in his declining days, he became in several respects more conservative than any publicist, save the most inveterate diehards of to-day.

T. F. PALMER.

THE WARFARE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION

IN the last issue of my article entitled "The Miracle of the Assumption" which was dated February 11, I gave certain reasons for not agreeing with the proposition that the warfare between science and religion is now all over, but unfortunately, I had not the space to give those reasons except very briefly. I now propose, however, to deal with this subject in considerably greater detail than I did then.

The concluding words in connection with this subject which I then used were: "As long as the Roman Church continues to exist there must always be a warfare between science and religion." In proving those words to be true I had started by showing that the present Pope in his recent

encyclical, namely, *Humani Generis*, given on August 12, 1950, had affirmed, as, indeed, he had to affirm, what the Tridentine and Vatican Councils had decreed concerning the inerrancy of the scriptures. That encyclical has been published in English by the Catholic Truth Society.

In paragraph 22 on page 12 of the translation under the heading "Mistakes about the interpretation of the scriptures" the Pope, *inter alia*, says: "There are those who boldly pervert the sense of the definition laid down by the Vatican Council as to its divine authorship" (i.e., the authorship of the "sacred scripture"); "they bring up again the old argument, so often censured, which contends that the inerrancy of scripture only extends to what it tells us about God, about morals and about religion."

The relevant decree of that council has been translated by Dr. J. W. Draper in his work "History of the Conflict between Religion and Science (Watts and Co., 1927) at p. 289 as follows: "Of Revelation . . . The Holy Mother Church holds that God can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason, but that it has also pleased him to reveal himself and the eternal decrees of his will in a supernatural way. This supernatural revelation as declared by the Holy Council of Trent, is contained in the books of the Old and New Testament, as enumerated in the decrees of that Council, and as are to be had in the old Vulgate Latin edition. These are sacred because they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. They have God for their author, and as such have been delivered to the Church."

It will be noticed that the Vatican Council expressly refers to and embodies the decree of the Council of Trent on the subject; therefore, when the present Pope expressly referred to the decree of the first mentioned Council in the way which I have just now shown he also impliedly adopted the findings of the secondly mentioned council on the same subject.

The first decree of the fourth session of the Council of Trent as translated by the Rev. T. A. Buckley in his work entitled *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, at pp. 17-19 is, *inter alia*, as follows: "The sacred and holy œcumenical and general Synod of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, . . . following the examples of the orthodox fathers, receives and venerates with equal affection of piety, and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament; . . . seeing that one God is the author of both . . . And it has thought it meet that a catalogue of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest doubt arise in anyone's mind as to which are the books that are received by this synod. They are set down here below; of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit Genesis . . ." There then followed the names of the remaining books of the Pentateuch and then all the remaining books of the Hebrew canon and the other portions of the Old Testament recognised by the Roman Church, and then the names of all the canonical gospels, epistles, etc., which form the Roman Catholic New Testament. The decree then proceeds as follows: "But if anyone receive not, as sacred and canonical, these same books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin edition . . . let him be anathema."

J. H. G. BULLER, LL.B.

(To be continued)

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

ACID DROPS

After the recent general election in West Africa, which resulted in a sensational victory for the Nationalist "Convention People's Party" on the Gold Coast, the leader of the victorious party, Kwame Nkrumah, one of the successful candidates, was released from gaol, where he had been serving a sentence for sedition. A huge crowd of his supporters welcomed Nkrumah and "a fetish-priest cut the throat of a black lamb and bathed the ex-convict's feet in blood. The crowd sang 'Lead, Kindly Light.'" But surely, "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb" would have been the appropriate hymn for this, shall we say, sanguinary occasion?

A presumably Catholic correspondent in the *London Observer* (June 10, 1951) objects to a recent reference to "Catholic terrorism" by the editor of that journal, Mr. Ivor Brown. Mr. Brown alleged that a Catholic woman who proposed to become a Methodist in order to marry a member of that Church, was threatened with ever-lasting Hell-fire by a Catholic priest. To which assertion, the correspondent protested that no Catholic was permitted by the Church to state definitely that anyone was in Hell. But is not the Catholic dogma that Hell-fire exists and that its agonies are everlasting, in itself the supreme example of "religious terrorism"?

It is still uncertain whether, as a result of the recent inconclusive general election in Eire, Mr. De Valera or Mr. Costello will "govern" the Irish Republic. However, whatever Government is in office, we may be sure that it will be the Catholic hierarchy which will remain in power. Robert Ingersoll's prediction that "Home Rule would mean Rome Rule" has long since passed from the domain of prophecy into that of history.

In the "Daily Graphic," the Rev. Bryan Green tells us that to look at Marx and Lenin is to look at leaders who believe in "fear, intimidation, ruthless force, and dictatorship"; but to look at Christ is to "turn to one who leads us along the pathway of love." That is, it is Marx and Lenin who "intimidate," but never Jesus. Yet Jesus actually said, "He that believeth not shall be damned," and by damning Jesus meant a perpetual Hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. If this is not intimidation, we are prepared to eat any old hat.

It is always amusing to find one crowd of Christians solemnly rebuking another for "intolerance" when, as even a cursory glance at the history of the Christian Church would prove, the word Christianity is merely another synonym for intolerance. The *Church Times* rebukes the S.P.C.K. for publishing the brochure, *The Church and the Festival*, and the *Church of England Newspaper* comments, "Has any such naively egotistical display of bigotry ever been set down on paper before? We, and nobody else, they virtually say, are the body of Christ." As both journals are "Church of England," we have here a pretty example of "unity"—all, all are one in Christ! And tolerance, of course.

It is hard to believe it, but there are actually lots of Christians who do not believe in the Devil. This is a sad and sorry state of affairs, and we are delighted to find a Mr. James Mackay writing in the *Christian World* putting all these blatant heretics right. Of course he does not himself believe in the Devil of Folklore, "a little, black,

cloven-hoofed Devil with horns and a tail"—he was, says Mr. Mackay, too much of a gentleman ever to have lived. No, the real Devil is the one who tempted Jesus, "a dull, slimy, ugly Devil, far more black than he has ever been painted." And while the Devil of Folklore undoubtedly never lived, the Devil who tempted Jesus is still living, "whatever philosophers may have to say," adds an exultant Mr. Mackay.

The only way to fight this real Devil is to be "in Jesus" whatever that is; to put all our faith in Christ, and to turn the Devil "down flat" as Jesus did. We have a better plan. All Christians should wear a cross-hilted sword, and directly the Devil comes along, draw a circle with it and stand inside. No Devil could possibly tempt anybody with a cross-hilted sword, and he would be obliged to vanish amid the now rare sulphurous fumes. And this applies especially to "dull, slimy, and ugly Devils."

According to Mr. B. S. Rowntree's *English Life and Leisure*, the latest investigations on the part religion is playing in our daily life shows that the Anglican Church "has lost ground sadly, both relatively and absolutely." While the Roman Church "is more than maintaining its position to-day," and in all probability "will continue to attract a steadily increasing proportion of the nation's total diminishing Church membership." The operative word is "diminishing," and the diminishers either become indifferentists or go bodily over to Freethought. Mr. Rowntree does, however, notice one other point—he says that the "prevailing atmosphere" in the R.C. Church is "is one of spiritual totalitarianism." Isn't the word "spiritual" here rather superfluous?

Unity at last! Or perhaps we ought to say "partial unity," for "mutual help" is so far promised by only two Churches, the Congregational Union of England and the Presbyterian Church of England. As they "share the Christian tradition," their joint assembly "declared before God that the two Churches would consult on all matters of common concern and learn from one another." We wonder whether they agree on the Immaculate Conception, on the Virgin Birth, and on a literal Devil tempting Jesus and carrying him through the sky to be put on a pinnacle of the Temple? Or do they?

Field-Marshal Slim—like nearly all military gentlemen—is obviously intensely religious. He praised our young soldiers "as the best we ever had in peacetime" as a prelude to the usual religious exhortation to the Church to help these young men to "things spiritual." This was the cry, says the *Newcastle Journal*, in 1914 and 1939; but is it now the cry? Have not the two wars sickened our intelligent young men of the idea that religion means anything whatever? And no slim tactics about our fine young men will ever bring back this discredited Christianity.

The Rev. F. Taylor (Rector of Stanwick) makes a plea for the "English Sunday." Now what is the "English Sunday?" and in what way does it differ from a Zulu Sunday, or any other Sunday? What the tolerant Rector has in mind is a miserable Sunday, and he makes that quite clear when he states that Sunday sports, excursions, and amusements unsettle the minds of the young. One day it may dawn upon the Rector that forcing religion into the young in school helps to create the preference for cricket instead of Christ on Sundays later on.

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.
Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

We are very sorry that it is impossible for us in these days of paper shortage to print every letter sent in, and we hope that those correspondents whose letters do not appear or are curtailed will understand our difficulties. We can only beg again that their contributions should be *short* and we will do our best to insert all that is possible in our very limited space. We hope that contributors will also understand why we cannot print their articles as often as we and our readers would like.

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, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

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.

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 meetings are feeling the benefit of the spell of fine weather and reports of good audiences and sustained interest are coming in. We take this opportunity of asking branch secretaries to send details of their work and items of local importance to the General Secretary, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, for inclusion in *The Freethinker* under a suitable heading.

A more-or-less religious journalist, Mr. Douglas Warth, writing in the *Sunday Pictorial*, wants to know why Dr. Barnes, who does not believe in the Virgin Birth, and "discredits the Resurrection," holds "his high office in the Christian Church?" He sadly admits that the Bishop of Birmingham cannot be sacked, that he is a scholar, that he wrote a book about Christianity with which even Agnostics might agree, that he has had "angry clashes" with two Archbishops, and that a Canon denounced him as a heretic. But has he the right to preach from the pulpit of a Christian Church? And to that neither Mr. Warth nor the Archbishops can give a decided answer. Which is all very sad. . . .

The truth is that the only way in which any Church can maintain its integrity is with the aid of "totalitarianism" as practised by the Church of Rome. To allow an almost complete unbeliever like Dr. Barnes to preach, to say nothing of such a whole-hearted believer in Communism like the Red Dean, must mean in the ultimate that the Anglican pulpit would allow a priest turned Buddhist or a Mormon or a Mahomedan to continue preaching and taking the "emoluments." No wonder the Vatican insists on absolute surrender of all reason.

THE OTHER BOSWELL

OF Johnson Boswell knew much. But what did Johnson know of Boswell, the Scotch strutter by his side?

Not many people to-day read Dr. Johnson's works; most people would be at a loss to name more than one of them, with the exception of the famous Dictionary. Had it not been for Boswell, would Sam Johnson have survived so forcibly in literary history? The fact that no one can think of Johnson without automatically thinking of Boswell suggests the negative.

Boswell was a born gossip, a man with no real dignity, the forerunner of the species who chatter in the lavatory parts of our present-day Press. But the one great virtue of Boswell was his recognition of the greatness of Samuel Johnson. True, that greatness had already been recognised and proclaimed by others before Boswell left his native heath; but it was Boswell who did the brilliant reporting of the sage's battles, who waited hat in hand on the grotesque scholar's pleasure, and who wrote the *Life*. No mere snobbish chatterer could have done that, nor done it a hundredth part as well. For, as is not usually appreciated, the *Life* is a marvellous example of the art of selection and arrangement, as anyone who has attempted biography must admit.

To the greatness of others of that literary age Boswell was astigmatic—except for the "greatness" of titles. The ugly little man in the bloom-coloured coat and sky-blue silk breeches, the Citizen of the World with the milesian accent, was a vain little nobody to Boswell. Yet there is hardly a bookshop to-day without a copy of the "Vicar of Wakefield"; there is barely a decade without a revival of "She Stoops To Conquer." (Perhaps only Johnson alone, however, in his day saw the true worth of Oliver Goldsmith, that most felicitous and perennial of writers.) Boswell saw only an ape, and the thought insinuates itself: did Boswell deride the over-dressed little man because therein he caught an uneasy glimpse of himself?

No real matter. It was an age of spleen and written malice was that age where the majority of writers sold themselves to political overlords. The day of patrons was ending, and authors were at the mercy of the booksellers. Literally they wrote for bread, and for a sup of wine they would damn anyone in a paragraph, and for bed-money eject a poisonous epigram at any head. Men of letters were regarded as on the level of players, the users of tradesmen's entrances, the eaters in servants' halls.

Many a night in his first London years did Sam Johnson roam the streets, penniless and homeless, often with the ill-fated Savage, whose life he later wrote. He had been down on the ribs of life, had dossed in doorways in company with prostitutes and half-naked starving children, who were commonplaces of Georgian England just as they were commonplaces of the glorious reign of Victoria. Even when he had reached the fifties, Johnson was not always certain of his next shilling. Once he had to be hidden behind a screen by an employer for fear his ragged appearance should offend visitors. Through all this, Johnson kept an aggressive independence of spirit truly remarkable in an age of corruption where the chief use of the pen was to defame.

It was to this uncouth hulk of a man that the son of a Scottish laird gravitated on his second visit to London (he had made an earlier visit in order, it would seem, to become a Catholic convert, conversion to Catholicism being then, as now, a pastime of the voluptuary). The story of the first meeting at Davies's bookshop is too well-known to repeat; but after Johnson's devastating report,

any other man but Boswell would have retreated, shattered. Not so the bold Jamie.

From then on, he was to be found dining with the Doctor at the Mitre—(*en passant*, did Johnson ever visit the Cheshire Cheese?)—elbowing his way to the scholar's side in Gerrard-street, being honoured with a dish of tea with Sam's Mrs. Williams, taking the sage on a tour of the Hebrides, and being the recipient of many snorted "Sirs!" All this, and so much more, the world has long known through the immortal Life.

And now by the grace of America! (Johnson, art thou sleeping there below?), after nearly two centuries we are permitted to see the other Boswell. Here he is, writ as large as life by his own fertile hand in his "London, Journal 1762-1763," naked and unashamed, in all his financial meanness, his whorings, his dose of clap, his writings of pamphlets and squibs, his drawing-room posturings and hopes of a high-born mistress, his fruitless attempts to get a commission in the Footguards, his inordinate self-satisfaction, his cheek, and his occasional twinges of doubt.

This is indeed a revelation. On paper, Boswell is no hypocrite. He is a reporter par excellence. When he speaks of the whore who remarks on the size of his genital organ, there is satisfaction but no embarrassment. Egad, he's proud of it! Just as he's proud of his skill in inducing the two sisters he met on the Piazza to give him their favours without payment, only a bottle of wine. There's not a blush when he asks Louisa, the light o' love who gave him venereal disease, to send him his money back. He grasses wenches in the Park and engages them in "armour" (his term for a prophylactic) on Westminster Bridge at midnight, with the sibilant murmur of the Thames against the piers adding to his sensual enjoyment. In face of this lucid record, Lawrence and even Joyce are but undergraduates.

Yet it was Boswell who was on Johnson's arm when the Doctor gravely put aside a soliciting street-walker with the gentle remonstrance, "No, no, my girl! This won't do." It was Boswell who went to Clement Danes in the lee of his great companion, who concurred so readily with the sage's strict views on female morality, and added his own head-shaking to the melancholy spectacle of sexual vice. Verily was James Boswell a man of parts, each of which he played exceeding well.

There are scraps of coffee-house dialogue in the Journal, unimportant in themselves but fascinating as a true whisper from another age. There are passing descriptions, a word here and a sentence there, which make that vanished London leap alive from the page. That was an unlighted London, unpoliced, where bullies and pimps roved freely through the darkness, where drunkenness raved in gutters, where most dawns found starved dead in the streets, where the contents of chamber-pots emptied from windows were a perpetual hazard to the pedestrian (did not Dean Swift receive a deluge of urine on his head one night!), where a starving woman with two starving children could be hanged for picking up—and putting down again—a piece of calico from a draper's counter. It was a London of great lords, great riches, great wit, great conversation, and some of the greatest artists in our history. It was Boswell's London.

To one reader at least there is great regret that this English literary masterpiece should come to us from America. The discovery of the papers in Malahide Castle, near Dublin, and the manner in which they eventually became the property of Americans is told in the preface. To this reader that is a bigger offence than mere political subjugation.

"Sir," said Doctor Johnson, "I am willing to love all mankind, except an American."

What would he have said now? And what would he have thought of the other Boswell?

"Sir," said the Doctor, "there is something noble in publishing truth, though it condemns oneself."

Ah, but what pious dolt would condemn this!

JOHN O'HARE.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—We shall from now on publish a regular feature entitled "Facts for Freethinkers." This will consist of a purely factual column, with nothing speculative or by way of commentary. The subject chosen may be of use to secularist propaganda or of general interest to Freethinkers.]

The Anglican Hierarchy

Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England, Geoffrey Francis Fisher (two Suffragan Bishops of Dover and Croydon). Archbishop of York and Primate of England, Cyril Forster Garbett (three assistant or Suffragan Bishops, Hull, Selby, and Whitby). Bishop of London, J. W. C. Wand (four Suffragan Bishops of Stepney, Kensington, Fulham, and Willesden). Bishop of Durham, Dr. A. P. T. Williams (Suffragan Bishop of Jarrow). Bishop of Winchester, Dr. M. G. H. Haigh. Bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. H. W. B. Bradfield (Suffragan Bishop of Taunton). Bishop of Birmingham, Dr. E. W. Barnes. Bishop of Blackburn, Dr. W. M. Askwith (Suffragan Bishops of Lancaster and Burnley). Bishop of Bradford, Dr. A. W. F. Blunt. Bishop of Bristol, Dr. F. A. Cockin (Suffragan Bishop of Malmesbury). Bishop of Carlisle, Dr. Thomas Bloomer (Suffragan Bishop of Penrith). Bishop of Chelmsford, Dr. G. F. Allison (Suffragan Bishops of Colchester and Barking). Bishop of Chester, Dr. D. H. Crick (Suffragan Bishop of Stockport). Bishop of Chichester, Dr. G. K. D. Bell (Suffragan Bishop of Lewes). Bishop of Coventry, Dr. N. V. Gorton. Bishop of Derby, Dr. A. E. J. Rawlinson. Bishop of Ely, Dr. H. E. Wynn. Bishop of Exeter, Dr. R. C. Mortimer (Suffragan Bishops of Plymouth and Crediton). Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. C. S. Woodward (Suffragan Bishop of Tewkesbury). Bishop of Guildford, Dr. H. C. Montgomery-Campbell. Bishop of Hereford, Dr. T. Longworth. Bishop of Leicester, Dr. G. V. Smith. Bishop of Lichfield, Dr. E. G. Woods (Suffragan Bishops of Stafford and Shrewsbury). Bishop of Lincoln, Dr. M. H. H. Harland (Suffragan Bishops of Grimsby and Grantham). Bishop of Liverpool, Dr. C. A. Martin (Suffragan Bishop of Warrington). Bishop of Manchester, Dr. W. D. L. Green (Suffragan Bishops of Middleton and Hulme). Bishop of Newcastle, Dr. N. B. Hudson. Bishop of Norwich, Dr. P. H. Herbert (Suffragan Bishop of Thetford). Bishop of Oxford, Dr. K. E. G. Kirk (Suffragan Bishops of Reading, Dorchester and Buckingham). Bishop of Peterborough, Dr. G. Leeson. Bishop of Portsmouth, Dr. W. L. S. Fleming. Bishop of Ripon, Dr. G. A. Chase (Suffragan Bishop of Knaresborough). Bishop of Rochester, Dr. C. M. Chavasse. Bishop of St. Albans, Dr. E. M. G. Jones (Suffragan Bishop of Bedford). Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Dr. R. Brook (Suffragan Bishop of Dunwich). Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. W. L. Anderson (Suffragan Bishop of Sherborne). Bishop of Sheffield, Dr. L. G. Hunter. Bishop of Sodor and (Isle of) Man, Dr. J. R. S. Taylor. Bishop of Southwark, Dr. B. F. Simpson (Suffragan Bishops of Kingston and Woolwich).

Bishop of Southwell, Dr. F. R. Barry. Bishop of Truro, (vacant, late Dr. J. W. Hunkin). Bishop of Wakefield, Dr. R. P. Wilson (Suffragan Bishop of Pontefract). Bishop of Worcester, Dr. W. W. Cash.

N.B.—The two Archbishops, and the Bishops of London, Durham, and Winchester, sit *ex officio* in the House of Lords. Of the remaining Bishops, 21 sit in the Lords by virtue of seniority, with full speaking and voting rights. Total hierarchy consists of two Archbishops, 41 Bishops, and 40 Suffragans.

F. A. R.

THE NEVER-NEVER LAND

Not every day, nor all the day,
But sometimes, think of me,
Lone mariner who makes his way
Across uncharted sea:
The Sea of Life, beyond which lies
A distant unknown shore,
That we shall reach when daylight dies,
To travel nevermore.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE N.S.S. AND POLITICS

SIR,—As one of the members responsible for the Conway Hall Freethought Demonstration, may I be allowed to protest against the letter by Mr. S. H. Smith as being quite untrue. Apparently this was the first N.S.S. Demonstration he has attended, and it is clear he knows little either of the speakers or the N.S.S. We have no "party line" and speakers are allowed to choose their own subjects. While Mr. Smith has every right as a Freethinker to express his disapproval, at the same time he should refrain from making allegations he cannot support by evidence.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. BARKER.

SIR,—The letter from Mr. Sidney H. J. Smith in your issue of June 3, 1951, in which he affirms, "so obvious was the torrent of Communist propaganda produced by half the speakers" at the Annual Freethought demonstration calls for comment.

Writing as one who attended the meeting, Mr. Smith's description of it appears to me as a distortion of the proceedings.

If Mr. Smith's letter is an example of his lack of critical capacity, the movement will certainly be better without his active participation.—Yours, etc.,

THOS. A. ROSTRON.

"THE DIVINITY OF BLUNDERS"

SIR,—Two verses of the "Divinity of Blunders," a suppressed poem of Robert Burns, which appeared in last week's *Freethinker*, 3rd June, 1951, are omitted. They are:—

This damn'd an' wily serpent Nick,
Wis promised lang a mighty kick,
But turned the chase, and played the trick,
Wi' God's first-born,
He got him scourg'd, nailed on a stick,
An' crowned wi' thorn.

The sovereign leaders o' each faction,
Join hand in hand in close compaction,
Tae set God's kingdom up for auction—
A lumpin' bargain!

Drive silly mortals to distraction,
Wi' their damn'd jargon.

—Yours, etc.,

J. HUMPHREY.

TWO REPLIES

SIR,—In answer to Mr. D. Bear, I regret that I cannot agree with him when he says that in 1735 "disbelief in witchcraft was widespread." The great John Wesley declared in 1768 that "giving up witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible," and Lecky notes that "the immense majority of the clergy firmly believed in the reality of the crime." There is nothing in the Witchcraft Act of 1735

which says that witchcraft, as such, was a myth, but only that it was an offence to *pretend* "to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft." The modern Spiritualist movement is the old witchcraft," only "familiar" are now called "controls."

As for Mrs. Trask, I can only say that if anybody comes to me and says that so-and-so is "Gospel" truth, I have every right to reply, if I want to, that "the real truth" is something quite different. Language is an instrument not bound by exact logic, thank heaven! And people these days say "registry" or "register" as they like; they mean the same, just as we have Kinema or Cinema, margerine or marjerine.—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

FREEMASONRY

SIR,—You and *The Freethinker* readers will remember the letters about Mr. Everden being dubbed a "stupid atheist" when speaking in Hyde Park of clergymen against each other regarding Freemasonry and quibbling over Christianity?

Mr. Everden was then told he knew nothing of Freemasonry, and I stated he had published a book, *Freemasonry and its Etiquette*. Mr. W. E. Richardson wrote that a publisher was not likely to print a book of that kind because Mr. E. had not the qualification; yet, when I gave particulars for purchase and Mr. R. procured a copy, he wrote I had given the title wrongly, and it should be *Etiquette of Freemasonry*, and the author, "old Past Master." This book description adds, "with which is corporated," as a foot-note to the true title in full: *Freemasonry and its Etiquette*, by William Preston Campbell-Everden; P.M., 19; P.Z., 19; L.R." The P.M. means Past Master, a higher official degree than M.M., Master Mason, which Mr. R. said I had stated wrongly.

In brief, quoting Mr. R.'s phrase, who is the oily Christian dodger, "guilty of confusing the issue by giving false and suppressing vital information," I or Mr. Richardson, who declares "every Mason must be a true Lodgeman to God and the Holy Ghost, and use no error"?—Yours, etc.,

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Market Place.—Sunday, June 24, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

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: L. EBURY. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): L. EBURY. Friday Evening, June 29, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park), J. M. ALEXANDER and F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, June 23, 7 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).—6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

West Ham and District Branch (Wanstead House, The Green, E.11).—Thursday, June 28, 7-45 p.m.: Open Discussion.

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 24, S. K. RATCLIFFE: "The Private Life of John Stuart Mill."

The Freethinker Fund

Cheques and Postal Orders should be addressed to

THE FREETHINKER
41 Gray's Inn Rd., London, W.C.1.

To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

is now open

UNSUPERSTITIOUS MAN

i

SAID the hostess: "I'm expecting Brunehard. He may arrive any minute; will do for certain soon."

"Yes," corroborated a guest. "Brunehard's nearly always punctual, and never disappoints one without good reason."

"Dear Brunehard," murmured a woman loud enough to be heard by all present, whose varying expressions were unanimous in indicating pleasure at expecting Brunehard's company.

Looking slowly around at the assembly almost as if counting their number, their hostess said with a laugh, "I was wondering if we're exactly a dozen."

Several of them laughed too or nodded knowingly, others glancing puzzled at the woman. A man raised inquiring eyebrows.

Explained the hostess: "Brunehard's so free of superstition himself and scornful of it in others, he's capable of making the thirteenth guest, to defy superstition and to—how can I put it?"

"Nark the others," concluded someone for her.

"The very word," smiled the lady. "Because Brunehard regards superstition as vulgar; its believers ignorant."

"All superstitions?"

"Yes. He's compiling a list, to write a book demolishing them, and he wants it to be comprehensive."

"He'll have a busy time."

"In which, the collecting or the abolition?"

"Both. His quest'll bring him up against some queer practices and beliefs."

"That's so. He says he finds it amusing, if occasionally irritating."

Further conversation about the man was stopped by his entrance. Big built, dark of hair and complexion, his dour features lightened attractively as he smiled. In a firm voice he greeted hostess and other guests after a general introduction by the former saying "This is Brunehard."

ii

As he took sherry people closed round for conversation, a lady asking: "Is it true you have no superstitions?"

"Is there anything remarkable in that?"

"Yes," said several voices, one adding, "You're in a minority."

"Of one?"

"No. But a minority."

"So I'm aware. It makes me wonder."

"What at?"

"The vain crowd wandering blindly, led by lies: as Lucretius puts it."

"Perhaps some of them get a thrill out of it."

"How?"

"By expecting, or hoping the misfortune will happen."

"Disappointed if it doesn't."

"Yes."

"To be truly superstitious they must say the ill luck really arrived."

"Many do."

"If all superstitions operated we should most of us be wrecks, or penniless; in some way suffering, very likely dead."

Amid ensuing laughter the hostess said "True enough. If we name only a few of the many superstitions we know their fulfilment would bring widespread disaster."

For the next few minutes the group of people entertained themselves by naming popular superstitions; as spilling salt, passing a white horse, dogs howling, standing a

poker against a grate to make the fire draw, starting journeys on Friday, the number thirteen, fortune telling, charms, mascots, amulets, the evil eye, ghosts, spirits, witchcraft, astrology, moon lore and many more.

"Those're mainly trifles," declared Brunehard. "Men taking off hats in churches, making the sign of the cross, cursing, swearing, oathing, Sabbatarianism—"

Interposed a man: "You'd count religion as superstition."

"Certainly. Why not? Each religion condemns all other religions as superstitions, so by implication includes its own."

"Therefore you have no religion."

"Because of that I've no superstitions."

"Is that logical?"

"The only position which is unassailable."

"Therefore to you God's a superstition."

"That's why I've no superstition. All those you've named and thousands more I have in my notes all spring from two great causes, ignorance and fear, which are personified by the ignorant and timid as God. All superstitions have one feature in common: the expectation that harm will happen to individuals if they don't propitiate evil forces they've aroused by some course of action displeasing to them. That in short is God. By ridding myself of that supreme superstition I'm able to live without the minor superstitions; have no fear of any unhuman or non-material influence."

"And the ignorance?"

Brunehard smiled gaily, saying, "Fear of the Lord is the beginning, not of wisdom but of superstition. Without God we begin to find out for ourselves; to discover how natural processes operate, because we've no expectation of irrational procedure or dread of releasing malevolent consequences."

Announced the butler: "Dinner is served."

Offering his arm to the hostess Brunehard led her into the dining-room.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

THEATRICAL NOTES

ALEC GUINNESS'S bearded Hamlet at the New Theatre took many critics unawares, and he was mercilessly condemned. I saw the play after it had run for a few nights, and I have no hesitation in approving of Mr. Guinness's lucid and tangible interpretation of the part. Of course Hamlet was bearded, but to my horror I have learned that Mr. Guinness—no doubt influenced by adverse remarks—has shaved off his beard. I pray that he may wear a false one and so break with the tradition that Hamlet was a beardless youth. What is to be deplored, in practically every production of this play, is the youthful appearance of Queen Gertrude, his mother. We know that Hamlet could not have been under thirty, yet this is the age that would appear to belong to his mother. When will a producer have the courage to do something about it?

The Old Vic, in a luscious, restored new building, is giving a repertory of Shakespeare, Shaw and Ben Jonson. All round the best of these is *Twelfth Night*, but notable as a production is *Bartholomew Fair*. Shaw's *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* is not the happiest choice, but Shaws' wit saves it.

The Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park has presented that delightful spectacle *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The standard of performance is not so good as usual, but the bright lights are Robert Atkins as Bottom and Leslie French as Puck.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.