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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Atonement

IN his masterly study of *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, Grant Allen aptly described Christianity as "a mausoleum of dead religions." This title is, beyond doubt, a correct description of the elaborate system of theology that Christianity has constructed throughout nineteen centuries. In the hands of its most capable exponents, of an Augustine or a Thomas Aquinas, Christian theology assumed an encyclopædic character, rigidly logical in form, which applied the methods of Greek philosophy to the hotch-potch of primitive pre-Christian myths which the Christian cult inherited from its pagan predecessors.

Nowhere is the above state of things more evident than in what is, in many ways, the central dogma of orthodox Christianity; the Doctrine of the Atonement; the "Vicarious Sacrifice" by which Jesus Christ allegedly died upon the Cross for the redemption and spiritual restoration and regeneration of mankind. The long and dramatic evolution of this dogma indicates in a particular instance what have been the mutual relations between Christianity and both primitive religion and the current evolution of social culture.

As the distinguished author cited above has effectively demonstrated, belief in the value of what were, in effect, human sacrifices, offered up to appease the wrath of angry gods, was a common feature in earlier religions and still subsists to-day in the more primitive areas of the world. Indeed, the practice of, and consequent belief in the efficacy of human sacrifice, was not confined to savages. Amongst such semi-civilised races as the Aztecs of Mexico and the Negro regime in Dahomey (West Africa), the gods claimed their regular quota of victims, the sacrificial blood of whom "reconciled" the offended gods with their erring human worshippers.

The spiritual ancestry of Christianity in this as in other matters of belief can be traced through its Hebrew forerunners. Amongst the ancient Hebrews who lived prior to the Babylonian Exile and to the monotheistic cult of Judaism which succeeded it, there can be no reasonable doubt that human sacrifices were offered to Jahveh, the tribal god, as to the deities of adjacent tribes; it is probable that, in the primitive version of the now "edited" legend, Abraham offered up a human victim in lieu of his son, Isaac, whilst the "judge," Jephthah, sacrificed his daughter in fulfilment of his vow to Jahveh. Nor was it only the Hebrew Deity who was propitiated by the shedding of blood; the horrible story of Mesha, King of Moab, who is represented as actually defeating Israel as a result of sacrificing his son to his god, Chemosh, indicates that the early (pre-exilic) Hebrews believed not only in human sacrifice but, also, in the existence and power of other gods besides their own. For it is a Hebrew writer who records that "wrath came upon Israel" from the Moabite god, Chemosh, who came to the assistance of Moab after being propitiated by the immolation of the King's son.

Such was the legacy which Christianity inherited. However, the new religion actually started, and at this we can only guess, the idea that it was based upon a human sacrifice, that of Christ on Calvary, arose very early. In the Pauline *Epistle to the Hebrews*, an early document which may date from the end of the first century, we find it plainly stated that: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Elsewhere in the Pauline Epistles we read how mankind which had been lost by the Fall of "The First Adam," had been subsequently redeemed by the Death and Resurrection of the "Second Adam," viz., Christ. The Doctrine of the Atonement was fairly launched; the word now lay with theology to explain how, why, and to whom the atoning sacrifice of Christ was offered.

In our gospels which, it must be remembered, were written—or edited—after the Pauline Epistles and were deeply influenced by them, Jesus is represented as saying that he came as a "ransom," obviously, a ransom must be paid to somebody and for some thing, all theologians have always been agreed on *what* the "ransom" was paid for—the sins of mankind. But, at first, they were not so clear as to *who* the "ransom," the atoning blood, was paid to. To God the Father, is the unanimous opinion to-day amongst both Catholic and Protestant theologians. Their ancient predecessors held, however, a different and more startling view. For the first eleven centuries of the Christian Era—that is, for more than half the total duration of the Christian Church—the orthodox view, repeated by innumerable authorities, including most of the Church Fathers, was that Christ was sacrificed to *Satan, to the Devil*, whom he thus cheated of his prey, the "fallen" human race, who were otherwise doomed to everlasting perdition on account of the sin of our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

Christ cheated the Devil out of his prey: this is the recurring theme of theology from the days of Justin Martyr in the second century. The "ransom" was paid to Satan on behalf of the "fallen" human race. Out of a vast literature we will merely quote one quite representative authority—St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th century), writes:—

"Like a skilful fisherman God veiled the divine nature of His Son beneath human flesh, in order to catch Satan by the hook of His Divinity. The latter, like a greedy fish, swallowed both bait and hook. But his greediness proved fatal to himself, as Saturn of yore, he was obliged to give up those whom he had devoured." Such expressions were common amongst the Fathers of the Church. Though, to-day, this "Satanic" phase in theological evolution is slurred over by modern orthodoxy, it actually represented Christian orthodoxy during the major part of its existence.

The man who ended the role of the Devil in the tragedy of Calvary was, if not an Englishman, at least an Archbishop of Canterbury, St. Anselm, who wrote a book, *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became Man, 1094-8), which actually cast out the Devil more effectively than anyone else has ever done. Anselm, one of the most famous

Mediaeval doctors, propounded what is still, to-day, the orthodox view in both Catholic and Protestant circles: Christ was sacrificed to God the Father to give "satisfaction" for the sins of mankind to the outraged justice of an angry God. Actually, Anselm's theory was borrowed from contemporary legal theories of Feudal society, a striking example of the mutual inter-penetration of religion and the current social order. Anselm "proved" his doctrine by a dazzling display of metaphysical logic. As Joseph Turmel has aptly commented: "Archimedes measured the Universe with a foot-rule; Anselm went further, he measured eternity with a syllogism."

Anselm's theory reached its climax amongst the Reformers who made the Atonement the central dogma of Protestantism where it often assumed the revolting forms still celebrated in Salvation Army hymns. However, the doctrine of St. Anselm has now given way amongst liberal Christians to the "ethical theory," the idea that Christ's sacrifice was one of moral not metaphysical regeneration; a view which critics of Christianity may reject as unhistorical, but which can hardly be described as immoral, like its predecessors.

The dogma of the Atonement is of special interest to students of anthropology and of comparative religion, for it presents in a clearly-defined sequence both the evolution of a mythology and its successive modifications by the impact of civilised forces. Apart from its probably entirely unhistorical character, its roots are obviously pre-civilised and pre-moral, for it is only in the lore of savages that the innocent can and ought to redeem the guilty by his death.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE RELIGION OF SOMERSET MAUGHAM

THE most distinguished English writer alive who professes agnosticism is rarely mentioned as such: he is Mr. Somerset Maugham. He is a genuine freethinker, in the best sense of the abused term.

Mr. Maugham has clearly and plainly classified himself. "I remain an agnostic," he has said. "And the practical outcome of agnosticism is that you act as though God did not exist. . . ." And he adds: "I cannot penetrate the mystery." Well, in this he is not singular. None of us can.

Now Somerset Maugham is an honest, courageous and patently sincere writer. His plays, stories and essays are widely read because they are sophisticated, modern, and intensely readable. He is the more trusted, and unobtrusively influential, perhaps, because in public life he is content to devote himself to his business of creative writing and nothing else. When a man of his calibre in the evening of his days chooses to speak of his personal religion, the English-speaking world will listen. For after much study and experience of life as it is actually lived—not to speak of a wide acquaintance with the best amongst books—a man who thinks for himself, may well make the intellectual position of "I know not" interesting and convincing even to those who flatter themselves they do know.

Mr. Maugham began—as most of us do—by taking our current Westernised and conventionalised Christianity quite seriously. Brought up by a clergyman-uncle who boasted that he was the only man in his parish who worked a seven-day week but who was, in truth, "incredibly idle" like most Anglican parsons, the boy tried to cure his personal affliction of a stammer by prayer to Almighty God. The failure of the Almighty was a shock as it frequently is to children taught about "ask-and-ye-shall-receive" and of "faith-removing-mountains." The boy

met other clergy. One starved his cows. Another got drunk. The boy could not help seeing that such men did not practise what they preached. Along with his uncle, he believed that dissenters were damned and Heaven reserved for Anglicans.

Leaving England for Heidelberg, Maugham's views progressed. Life in that German town made the young Maugham realise that if born there he would have been a Roman Catholic like other such German students—and damned therefore by the fortuitous accident of mere birth-place! His ingenuous boyish mind revolted at such Divine injustice. The structure of his implanted faith "based not on love of God but on fear of Hell" tumbled.

This happening, *mutatis mutandis*, is of course the story of very many freethinkers. Hell begins by making, or fortifying, believers and ends by making, or confirming, unbelievers.

As a medical student reading scientific and ethical books, and seeing men die in hospital, the youthful Maugham was strengthened in his doubts. In desperate attempts to wrest from human discoverers the secret of the significance of life, he turned to philosophy. He read Bergson, Croce, William James, Bradley, Fichte, Kant, Bertrand Russell and the rest. Like most of us, he wanted to know what life meant, how he should live, and what sense (if any) can be ascribed to the Universe.

He attacked, as those who think must, the ancient problem of Evil. He considered the explanations of the theologians, that evil is for our good or for our training and retorted: "But I have seen a child dying of meningitis." The comforting doctrine of an after-life transmigration of souls seemed to be the only answer satisfying his sensibility and his imagination. Unfortunately he found it—impossible to believe!

He read the physicists—and then was constrained to blame an All-Powerful who was not All-Good. Fulsome praise of the Deity, flattering and flowery compliments, struck a friend of his who was a gentleman as vulgar and ungentlemanly so he deleted all such praises from his copy of the Prayer Book. Maugham later approved. Further to subject passionate, weak and stupid mankind to the "Wrath of God" the anger of Omnipotence seemed to Maugham inept. Reflective men easily excuse other's faults. Then is God inferior? Men ascribe to their God imperfections intolerable and deplorable in men.

Maugham found that he could not accept a God less tolerant than himself, a Being destitute of humour and common sense, who could be so low as to be angry (unlike Plutarch) with those who do not believe in him. He has carefully considered all the stock arguments used in Divinity to prove God's existence and rejects them all as incontinently as Kant did "the argument from design."

Maugham does not fail to face the fact that most people do not require proof of God's existence. They take him, like political promises, on trust. People, too, have every right to believe what cannot be proved: I, for my part, am content to take such things as Algebra, Euclid and Astronomy on trust, amongst other matters. Indeed we all do, and have to, take many things for truth which are unproven. Religious mysticism demands no proof beyond itself. Nor does it disprove the existence of God because you cannot prove it.

In spite of a personal mystical experience in a deserted mosque near Cairo of the St. Ignatius kind, Maugham knew that such experiences are only valid by results and that they can be occasioned by other than supernatural agencies. He remains an agnostic, unconvinced of God or future life.

So he reached the unpalatable conclusion—so dreadful that only the few dare face it—that “There is no reason for life and life has no meaning” (I would add, and possibly, he would: “beyond itself”). It is to escape from this appalling truth that many fine minds embrace Christianity or a similar set belief which affects to give an answer to the riddle and to afford comfort to human vanity and human fears.

This was no “dead-end” for Maugham. In such circumstances he recognised we have to impose our own reason upon life and make life full of our own meanings—making the best use of it and getting the utmost out of it. By self-realisation we can wring from our existence all the pleasure, beauty, emotion and interest which it is capable of yielding.

This gospel of Mr. Maugham's is a long way from the Christian ethic, either as given in the Bible or as prostituted by the Christian churches. It is not a religion for everyone in the herd. It is too stark. Most people get a religion for what they want out of it: comfort, assuaged vanity, soothed egoism, hope, support, consolation, personal salvation or some other real or supposed benefit. Or if they are sadists or masochists to scourge themselves or others withal! But Mr. Maugham has not given himself this religion as a benefit: he has achieved it by active meditation upon life and from living itself. That is the best way of getting religion or irreligion after all.

It can fairly be claimed that Mr. Maugham's religion—if religion it may be called—has stood the test of his life. The pattern of his life he has desired to make, he has succeeded in making and the fruits of it are these: fame, wealth, self-realisation, the admiration, respect and affection of a world-wide circle of readers—not to speak of his own very proper admiration, respect and affection for himself. For Mr. Maugham's religion is really Mr. Maugham.

And this perhaps is as it should be, notwithstanding what conventional religionists of the Orthodox Churches may say to the contrary. He has quoted Fray Luis de Leon as a last word on this subject: “The beauty of life is that each should act in accordance with his nature and business.” Mr. Maugham seems to have done exactly that—a most excellent thing. In that, all may imitate him.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Continued from page 159)

AN insight into the biological substrata of the mental and emotional life of *homo sapiens* compels rejection of the time-honoured dictum that human nature is to believe. The scientific basis of this tendentious doctrine, which served the purpose of bolstering up the irrationalism of revealed religion at the cost of reason, is an uncritical acceptance of the evidence of the superstitions of the savage, which survived the infancy and adolescence of the race, and are found still lingering in civilised society. The venerable doctrine about the constant of human nature can be differently stated: Man is naturally superstitious. Superstition being the result of ignorance, the corollary to the doctrine would be that ignorance is the natural state of man. Differently formulated, we have the traditional saying: “Ignorance is bliss.”

Anthropology and the critical history of culture have traced the superstitions of the savage to his instinctive

rationality—nothing comes out of nothing, everything is caused by something else. The idea was far from being as clear as that in the mind of the savage. Therefore, it must be called instinctive; it was still a matter of biological mechanism, determined by the latter's causal connection with the cosmos of the physical Universe. In other words, instinctive rationality was a vague feeling on the part of the primitive man; elemental feelings are automatic biological reactions. Instinctive rationality rules out belief in anything supernatural. Man being a part of nature, as long as he clings to the mother's breast, his mind cannot possibly conceive of anything outside nature. The idea of God as well as of anything supernatural is entirely absent in the mind of the savage. Researches into the origin of civilisation led Lubboch, for instance, to the conclusion that “atheism” was the characteristic feature of the mentality of the primitive man, “understanding by this term not a denial of the existence of a deity, but an absence of any definite idea on the subject.” The same authority is more explicit in another place. “The lowest races have no religion; when what may perhaps be in a sense called religion first appears, it differs essentially from ours; it is an affair of this world, not of the next; the deities are mortal, not immortal, a part, not authors, of nature.” Again: “Even among the higher races we find that the words now denoting supernatural things betray in almost all, if not all cases, an earlier physical meaning.” This opinion, endorsed by other authorities like Tylor and Frazer, is based on data gathered in course of extensive and painstaking scientific researches among primitive tribes in different parts of the world.

The residue of humanness, therefore, is the biological heritage of reason. To put the same thing differently human nature is not to believe, but to struggle for freedom and search for truth, the latter aspect manifesting itself in *homo sapiens*. The distinction is fundamental. Belief in supernatural beings or mysterious metaphysical forces would make submission to the object of belief the essence of human nature. If that was the case, man would have never emerged from the state of savagery. Because, as soon as the biological form belong to the human species became a thinking being, mind and thought entered into the process of organic evolution as its determining factors. Having grown out of the background of the law-governed physical Universe, they are rational categories; therefore, the entire subsequent process of man's intellectual and emotional development is also rational.

Before man's imagination populated nature with gods and hit upon the practice of propitiating them with prayers and sacrifices, the savage believed that he could obtain similar results by magic. “Magic rose before religion in the evolution of our race, and man essayed to bend nature to his wishes by the sheer force of spells and enchantments before he strove to coax and mollify a coy, capricious or irascible deity by the soft insinuation of prayer and sacrifice,” says Frazer. *He has shown that there is a close analogy between the magical and the scientific conceptions of the world.* [Our italics—EDITOR.]

M. N. ROY.

(To be continued)

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 9d., paper 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

ACID DROPS

We have always contended that the Roman Church need learn very little from business advertising men in the realm of publicity, and the spate of pamphlets in defence of their Faith put out by the Paulist Press of New York would surprise some of our Rationalist friends who think that the fight is over. These pamphlets are extremely well done—for one of the tragedies of the matter is that so many clever people can be enlisted on the side of what is, after all, an outworn creed.

“Why not Share the Faith?” is the title of one of these pamphlets—a passionate exhortation to go out as a lay apostle, to abandon a “passive attitude of reticence,” and throw oneself “fearlessly into the mighty task of winning the world for Christ.” The Church has, in particular, great hopes of winning the 80 millions of Americans who are not Catholics if only because America “is the most powerful nation in the world to-day.”

What can be done in the way of gaining converts is shown by some of the statistics given out by other “Faiths.” The Mormons, for example, have increased from about 678,000 in 1936 to about 1,042,000 in 1948. Or take the Witnesses of Jehovah—in 1940, they had fewer than 44,000 members in America; but in 1946 they numbered 500,000! And, in most cases, this has been done by “lay apostles” going out and preaching the Word. We deliberately give these figures in the hope that at least some of our readers will also be lay apostles for the Gospel of Freethought. If only we could even double the circulation of *The Freethinker*!

One point the Publicity Campaign on behalf of Roman Catholicism in the U.S.A. does insist upon is that Catholics must not be allowed to read “anything.” In a pamphlet on the subject of reading, a Fr. Lord, S.J., tries his utmost to vindicate that contemptible organ of reaction, the R.C. *Index*, and explains why so many books are forbidden—and some of his reasons are quite amusing even if they are quite untrue. As an instance, he says, “Catholic books on any important subject will give you both sides of the question with admirable fairness. Anti-religious books give you only the difficulties; and, knowingly or unknowingly, when they do try to state the Catholic position, they state it unfairly and falsely.”

Needless to add, of course, that Fr. Lord omits to say that when the Catholic Church captured Europe, it initiated the Dark Ages, and ruthlessly put down with fire and sword, with mutilation and imprisonment and torture, every “heretic” it could lay its religious hand on. And for anyone to refer to this is always “unfair and untrue.” At the end of his pamphlet, he does what the Church has always done when in power—he burns an “offending” book. That invariably used to be the Church’s method, burning—burning books and buildings, and burning people alive.

Even Methodists cannot resist writing drivel when they imagine that they are giving rapturous religious advice. How can you get “God’s peace”—whatever that is? All you have to remember are the words, “in Christ Jesus,” says the Rev. F. J. Woods. “Accept his transforming friendship and begin each day with Him—reach up and clasp the hand of the Friend Divine and you will find the promise true.” How anyone can soberly write this kind of utterly meaningless tosh is beyond us—but there it is.

And some people, no doubt, like it and are “uplifted” with it!

We are quite sure that Miss Dorothy M. Sayers must have enjoyed her *school* broadcast talk on Dante for “Religion and Philosophy.” The children will have learnt to abhor “unfaithfulness” in married life, and also revelled in her exposition of the meaning of “substance,” “accidents” and “modes.” Shades of Spinoza—and Dante! Anyway, the great Italian was also a great Christian and like Miss Sayers, believed in Christ Jesus as God and Man. Great minds so often think alike.

FRANZ KAFKA

MOST thoughtful people are aware of the subtle distortion peculiar to every atmosphere tinged with religion. Christianity, from the very earliest times, has always had a reputation for deceit and misrepresentation. Even so, however, how often are even the most critical led astray in their judgments by this prevailing atmosphere?

A case in point, Franz Kafka, a most intriguing and significant writer, has been generally accepted as a religious author, a “wrestler with God,” a modern mystic. Conventional thought, taking its cue from secondhand opinions, regards Kafka as a newer Job. Such views owe but little to the study of the author’s own works, they are rather based upon the opinions of Kafka’s friends and relations!

Nevertheless, a careful examination of these writings reveal very little interest in problems of religion. It would not even require a very detailed study of “The Trial,” “The Castle,” the “Diaries,” to prove that Kafka was more engrossed in personal neurotic tendencies than in any God. Luckily, however, Charles Neider’s book “Kafka: His Mind and Art,” fully investigates the problem.

Mr. Reider shows how Kafka, a person fully conscious of his own emotional shortcomings, utilised the findings of psycho-analysis, dramatised the symbols provided by Freud’s study of the unconscious, to create his art. Being an enemy of cant, Mr. Reider is at pains to prove that a secularist exploration of Kafka covers more facts than a religious interpretation.

Born of Jewish parents in Prague on July 3, 1883, Franz Kafka was ever dominated by the influence of his father. His mother came from a long line of scholars and eccentrics. The father, on the other hand, came from stock noted for its great physical strength. There can be no doubt that this immensely strong, intensely overbearing man, a man who had built up a flourishing business, paralysed with awe and fear his frail and sensitive son.

Franz Kafka’s writings, from his short stories, including the horrifying “The Transformation,” “Amenicka,” “The Trial,” and concluding with “The Castle,” and a few minor pieces, symbolise their author’s anguished attempts to shake off the influence of his father, an influence which inhibited his most natural desires. We actually witness a man struggling to find himself, to gain normality, seeking to uproot his neurosis!

It is my opinion that all who seek after truth should be acquainted with the strange and haunting art of Kafka. Our conception of life in general is broadened by knowledge such as Kafka seeks to convey. In fact, and in spite of Kafka’s pessimism, I consider his work an act of liberation, a further attempt of the human spirit to broaden its field of vision! He died on June 3, 1924.

RICHARD KEAN.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

P. E. NEWELL.—We are sending your letter on to our reviewer, Mr. J. S. Barwell.

W. SPENS.—Thanks for your appreciation of the Editor's book, *The Jesuits*. We will look into the new edition of Dr. Salmon's *Infallibility of the Church*.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

A number of delegates and members attending the N.S.S. Conference have stated their intention of travelling by the 2-15 p.m. train from St. Pancras on Saturday, May 31. Timed to reach Leicester at 4-13 p.m., it allows comfortable time for settling in at the Bell Hotel and proceeding later to the Secular Hall for the reception at 7 p.m., given by the Leicester Secular Society. This is the train to get, therefore, in order to have free-thinking company on the journey.

The Birmingham Branch of the N.S.S. to-day (May 25) has, as its lecturer, Mr. H. Cutner whose subject "Marx or Malthus?" will no doubt prove as provocative as some of his articles in these columns have been. We wish him an excellent audience and much discussion. It will take place at the Satis Cafe, 40, Canon Street, off New Street, at 7 p.m.

Our readers who have followed with much interest, as our correspondence column demonstrates, the theological evolution of our former contributor, Mr. J. Rowland, will now be pleased to learn that his long-awaited spiritual autobiography has just appeared. It is entitled *One Man's Mind*, and it is published by the Student Christian Movement at 7s. 6d. In this short book of a little over a hundred pages, Mr. Rowland gives us, successively, a "potted" biography of himself written with admirable clarity, which we found as vivid and interesting as Mr. Rowland usually contrives to be. In the latter part, our author moves into the more dubious realms of theology and "spiritual" experience, where we confess to finding him much less convincing. We shall probably have more to say about this in the editorial column in future issues. Meanwhile, a review by Mr. Bayard Simmons will appear in an early issue. Incidentally, we understand that the Religious Book Club has adopted *One Man's Mind* as its "Book of the Month" choice.

ON BECOMING A SPIRITUALIST

I.

IT can be said with fairness, I think, that few, if any at all, of our national dailies or weeklies would now accept an article *attacking* Spiritualism. A very cautiously worded letter might have a chance of getting in but, so long as Spiritualism is in the news, no frontal attack will be allowed. When the late Sir A. Conan Doyle began spreading the good news after the close of World War I, very little was allowed to pass our alert editors which attacked him. Though it was obvious that he was again and again thoroughly bamboozled, this was as much as possible carefully hidden by nearly every editor in the country. Now and then a medium was caught—like Mrs. Duncan—in the most unblushing fraud; or a "spirit" photographer, like the late William Hope, or John Myers, was completely unmasked as an impudent cheat—but to very little purpose. Mrs. Duncan is still considered in Spiritualistic circles as a martyr, while our Spirit journals always confidently refer to Hope and Myers as if they were as sinless as newly born babes.

Only the other day, one of the South African journals referred to Florrie Cook, the "medium" who so thoroughly bamboozled Sir William Crookes, as having been caught cheating. This is, of course, quite true, but the indignant editor of *Psychic News* immediately wrote a hot denial and referred to the shameless hussy as if such a thing as sheer fraud was quite unknown to her. It is doubtful if in Johannesburg the relevant literature can be seen and studied; but I can assert that even in the annals of Spiritualism nothing more blatantly fraudulent can be found than the ease with which the ineffable Florrie deceived the innocent Sir William. Even Jerome K. Jerome in his *Three Men in a Boat* never wrote anything funnier than the description Crookes left to posterity of the way in which he fondled and kissed a "spirit" on his knees; but we should not be surprised. After all, whole nations have swallowed for centuries a packet of Oriental myths and legends as historically true. Sir William Crookes himself probably looked upon the Virgin Birth as being quite true; we should not be astonished then that the artful Florrie found him easy meat.

This leads me to some articles recently published by *John Bull* with the usual flourishes of "good faith," etc. We were naturally told that Spiritualists "can be found in all branches of life; in the nobility and learned professions; in business, journalism and even the Established Church." (We like here the "even.") One need only point out that almost all these people accepted without a demur the "miracles" of Christianity; and no doubt they would have been horrified at such a mild heretical work as the *Age of Reason*. They were always ready to "believe," and would have swallowed far bigger marvels without a tremor.

The writer of these Spiritualistic articles, Mr. R. M. Lester, is described as a Fleet Street journalist, the author of many books on "the popular sciences" (which are these?) and of course "many hundreds of articles." He spent three years of "painstaking research" into Spiritualism and emerged, as could be expected, an out-and-out believer.

What were Mr. Lester's qualifications for this investigation? He tells us that, although brought up very devoutly in a pious and Christian home, he was "not a religious man." In fact, he "drifted almost unconsciously into agnosticism." So strong must this agnosticism have been that when his wife became seriously ill, he immediately telephoned to all his close friends to join him

in prayer for her recovery! The poor lady unfortunately died.

Now, not for worlds do I want it to be thought that I cannot understand a man's grief when his wife becomes seriously ill and dies; nor do I want anything I may say now to be misconstrued. I am sure that Mr. Lester was heartbroken—but some of us will find it difficult to understand how, even under the stress of a great grief, anybody who had become an Agnostic, even unconsciously, could ask people to join him in prayer. Whatever else Mr. Lester may have been, it is obvious that he never was an Agnostic. I am sure that he would be quite unable to give us a single Agnostic argument and then proceed to overthrow it from a Christian standpoint. In other words, the very fact that he claimed to have "drifted" into Agnosticism, and then wanted people to join him in prayer, shows a muddleheadedness quite typical of the average Spiritualist. No one in such a frame of mind could possibly "investigate" the claims of Spiritualism, particularly through the usual wily medium.

And then he came, through his war experiences, in contact with Lord Dowding, who is, as most readers know, a thoroughly convinced Spiritualist. I have heard him speak, and I am sure that he believes in "spirits" as sincerely as the average Christian believes in the reality of Devils and Angels. If a distinguished physicist like Sir Oliver Lodge or a great story teller like Sir A. C. Doyle, or a famous woman poet like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "falls" for Spiritualism, no one need be astonished that a famous soldier like Lord Dowding also fell for Spiritualism. My own impression of Lord Dowding was that he knew nothing whatever of the nature of evidence, and that he was as gullible as Sir William Crookes. If the well known stage illusion of sawing a woman in half had been performed by a medium for him, I am quite certain he would have believed it really took place as seen. Had "Dr." Slade performed his notorious slate-writing phenomena before Lord Dowding, Slade would have had a champion for life. Even Hannen Swaffer never showed more childish credulity.

When his wife died, Mr. Lester simply could not believe that it was "total annihilation." And so, after a talk with Lord Dowding, "the whole course of his life and actions" was changed. It seems to me at least, that from that moment there was no need of further investigation. He was already a believer, and all he subsequently did was to confirm his belief.

But to fall at once for Spiritualism would have been no use for writing a book. It was necessary to show plenty of healthy scepticism, to attend plenty of "circles," to join in heartily with plenty of hymn singing—for how can a "reverent" atmosphere be obtained without hymns? Here is a specimen of the kind of thing which helped Mr. Lester to believe in "survival":—

Gracious Spirit, of Thy goodness,
Hear our anxious prayer:
Take our loved ones who are suffering,
'Neath Thy tender care.

Strengthened with this, it did not take him long to swallow the usual Spirit jargon. He soon realised that all mediums had "spirit guides," generally Indians, happily endowed with such names as "Running Water" or "Sitting Bull" (never "Sitting Cow") or "Precious Stream," or similar silly names. These always impress the "investigator," who is told that the reason why the guides are Indian is because "some of the Indians were so highly evolved, in a spiritual sense, that they have been chosen to give help and guidance to people in their earth-life in this way."

Anyone who can believe this hopeless twaddle—for which there is literally no evidence—can believe anything.

H. CUTNER.

FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

IT would prove interesting to know how many readers of this journal remember the first poem contributed to this journal by Bayard Simmons twenty-five years ago? The year 1927 seems a long way back, and possibly there will be comparatively few who can go back so far and remember that first modest contribution of our own poet whose work has captivated all those of us who love artistry in words, and thought deftly and subtly expressed.

Next week we shall print from Bayard Simmons his 200th poem contributed to these columns—an honour both to the poet and to this journal. We are sure that our readers will welcome it not only for its own intrinsic merit, but also because, in his ever-unassuming way, he has again given us of his best.

The other day we asked him which out of his 200 poems he felt represented him, in his opinion, at his highest level? It was not an easy question to answer, but here below are two selected by him:—

TO A CHOSEN PEOPLE

Where now the Teuton beast in fury strides,
Where now he blindly follows evil guides,
Where now his hapless victim he derides,
Shall come a peace:
Be sure of this,
That Justice in the heart of man abides.

Be sure of this, that there shall come a day
When Justice armed will hold the beast at bay;
If she be blind, she has a sword to slay;
It shall bring peace:
Be sure of this,
The reign of violence will pass away.

The jackals that around the wild beast pressed,
The Bonnets, Chamberlains and all the rest
Who sing the praise of Hitler with such zest,
Will hold their peace:
Be sure of this,
Justice shall reign and all our world be blessed.

The time will come, indeed is coming now,
When all the nations of the earth will bow
Before the Rule of Law, and men will vow
To live in peace:
Be sure of this,
That Justice bears this promise on her brow.

(1938)

ICHABOD

The widow's cottage is more bright and tidy
Because her man is gone;
Her sister says: "There's none to lie beside thee";
Her face looks pinched and wan,
And sometimes she feels faint,
But she makes no complaint.

Her children too, grown up, come home no more,
Nor with their muddy feet
Leave cow-dung on her nicely polished floor;
Now all is clean and neat:
"They make the place a mess,"
She often would confess.

Her man is dead, her children are all scattered,
Her cottage is more bright;
But was their dirt a thing that really mattered?
A husband sometimes tight?
The widow knows she's cleaning
A house that's lost its meaning.

(1939)

CORRESPONDENCE

DETERMINISM

SIR,—May I thank "H.C." for interesting letter in issue 11th inst. re above.

Being a Determinist and a Materialist, I reject the Christian dogma of "Freewill." I also am unable to believe in the existence of Spirit entities.

If any advocate of Dialectical Materialism thinks I am off the track of Truth, I'll be glad to be put right.—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

CHRISTIANITY

SIR,—In his patriarchal sermon Mr. McKeown tells us, with a warning finger pointed at young Miss Peckman, that he, too, was something of an unbeliever when nineteen, but since then the Lord has gracefully hammered back his wicked faith and led him to the "sunny uplands of an optimistic, etc."

In the main, the old champions of Freethought who deliberately chose the "barrenness" of Rationalism took the opposite road and started as believers. Age doesn't do the same thing to all men: some people become mature—others go childish.

If anything is barren it is not our ever-widening outlook and the great variety of subjects we deal with, but the religiously conditioned one-track mind of people whose thought is limited to a stereotyped jabbering. It's definitely no use arguing with them. Reason is unable to pierce the biblical cocoon they have spun round themselves. Clinically they suffer from split personality and hearken only to the "Voice Within," whilst slavering the same old, threadbare quotations from Caveman's time.—Yours, etc.,

TOM HILL.

BOREDOM AND WAR

SIR,—I did not say that boredom is "the true cause of war" but that it is "one of the chief reasons why people can be led into the insanity of war." Has Mr. Renton never thought that "wars will cease when men refuse to fight?" Does he really believe that if people had fulfilled lives they would surrender reason and humanity, on the political word "Go," to the barbarism of modern warfare which even our generals and politicians are cynical enough to tell us in peace-time solves no problems?

Here is another bright idea for Mr. Renton—to take out a subscription to *Peace News* and to study the bored masses in offices and factories. A psycho-analytical study of boredom, irrationality and the death-wish would also be helpful, but not obligatory.—Yours, etc.,

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S.—Friday, May 23 (Worsthorne), 7-30 p.m. Sunday, May 25 (Blackburn Market), 7 p.m. Monday, May 26 (Clitheroe), 7-30 p.m. Tuesday, May 27 (Chatburn), 7-30 p.m.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

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. Speaker: G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: MESSRS. STEED and EBURY. Highbury Corner, 7-30 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, May 24, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: MESSRS. WOOD and O'NEILL.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, May 25, 7 p.m.: H. CUTNER (London), "Marx or Malthus?"

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: E. ROYSTON PIKE, "The Religion of an Agnostic."

To a Chosen People explains itself. It is a partly fulfilled prophecy. It has pleased Jewish readers naturally. *Ichabod* also touches the melancholy cords, pleasantly, and with pity for suffering humanity.

We are sure that all our readers will join with us in congratulating Bayard Simmons on his remarkable achievement, and hope that for many years to come his poetic vision and fancy will be at the service of Free-
H. C.

THEATRE

"*The Voyage Inheritance*." By Harley Granville Barker. The Arts Theatre.

ALTHOUGH we may question the purpose of reviving this play, there is much to be said in its favour and for John Fernald's excellent production in elaborate Edwardian settings by Paul Mayo.

The Voyseys are a family of solicitors, the business passing from father to son generation after generation. It seems that this inheritance has brought to every heir the unpleasant fact that the firm's clients have been robbed by the Voysey's embezzling their money. Instead of investing it they turn it to their own use, and the unsuspecting client raises no question as he receives his dividends or interest. But at last Edward Voysey, on his father's death and feeling the responsibility, resolves to do the right thing. Then he discovers that there are family and other considerations that make it very difficult, but finally his hand is forced by a client and friend who wants to withdraw all his money.

This is a play of morals and ethics, and it has some excellent dramatic situations. The characterisation is patchy, and Eileen Thorndike did very well in a part which—as Mrs. Voysey—has little character. Tony Britton gave the right note of strength to Edward, and other good performances were by Desmond Llewelyn, Noël Iliff, Thelma Finn and Alec McCowen.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

ROMAN CATHOLIC STATISTICS IN ENGLAND

According to the *Catholic Directory*, 1952 Edition (the official handbook of the Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain), the Roman Catholic population in England increased by 25,100 in 1951; the number of converts was 11,010. There are now in England 2,867 churches and chapels open to the public and the number of private chapels where Mass is offered at least once a week is 911. The number of "secular" (non-monastic) priests is 4,237, 126 less than in the previous year. Members of religious orders (Monks) totalled 2,447, an increase of 82. There are 1,570 Diocesan students. Voluntary schools numbered 1,488 with 424,985 pupils. There are 592 independent and direct grant schools, with 100,452 pupils; and 39 special schools have 4,375 pupils.

THE WONDER OF FATIMA

Doubt about the authenticity of the Fatima photographs has been raised in several European countries. Surely no matter could be so easily resolved! If the sun really plunged across the sky and span on itself in Portugal in 1917 the miraculous spectacle would have been witnessed elsewhere. Why not secure a report from astronomers in various nations? No accounts of the incident were published in the English daily press of the those days.

Another extraordinary feature of the Fatima story concerns Mary. She is said to have made her appearance to the three Portuguese children on no fewer than six occasions during 1917. As the sun is about 92,000,000 miles from the earth, it is probab'y a similar distance from heaven, or a total of 184,000,000 miles. If the virgin travelled 50 miles an hour when she first ascended into heaven that trip would have occupied more than 400 years. Now, how could she make half a dozen excursions in one year? Of course, there may be stopping places suspended like Mahomet's coffin between heaven and earth, and Mary may have remained on one of them. This Fatima stunt seems to be one of the most fatuous of the many conducted in the interests of Roman Catholic superstition, but what a magnificent tour the priest had in escorting the hideous statue to many lands.

FREETHOUGHT IN THE MODERN WORLD

MANY people are perplexed at the remarkable change of fortunes of the inveterate foes of reason, tolerance and freethought. Half a century after mighty progressive intellectual forces had challenged countless centuries of prejudice and superstition—the hydra-headed monster of black reaction has taken its revenge.

History seems to be retrogressive. The film of progress appears to be winding *backwards*. Where, in the period immediately following the Renaissance, Roman Catholicism fought a losing battle against the mounting Protestant Reformation—to-day, Roman Catholicism is now emerging as the dominant Christian denomination. Undoubtedly, the cold war has enabled Roman Catholicism to capitalise on the present anti-Russian hysteria. In this connection, the Cominform has rendered great service to the Vatican by directing the main brunt of its anti-religious campaign against the Roman Church—thus fostering the illusion that the Papacy is the undisputed prime upholder of Western civilisation.

At the beginning of this century there were five giant intellects threatening the old order—whether in flesh or spirit. They were Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ernest Rutherford, Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud. Each of these men in their own field undermined the classical foundations of economics, philosophy, physics, biology and psychology. The challenge which they threw down has yet to be met.

Great efforts are being made to choke out the revolutionary spirit which animated these explorers of the human mind and discoverers of the mysteries of nature. Professional theologians are now discovering that science is compatible with age-old traditions and hoary superstitions—after all in the U.S.A. we have the spectacle of Monsignor Sheen “shaking hands” with the new reactionary schools of psycho-analysis. Even the Third Programme makes brave attempts at muting the message of Friedrich Nietzsche—the man who tore to shreds the hypocritical morality of respectable religion and philosophy. Moreover, the Pope has now pontifically blessed the efforts of biologists and geologists who, half a century ago, proclaimed the theory of Evolution. Finally, Moscow has mummified Marx along with Lenin in order the better to subdue the spirit of free inquiry.

It is at this point that I would like to deal with the problem facing the twentieth-century Freethinker in the year 1952. Just as the classical world appears to have reached its zenith, the reactionary drag has insinuated itself into new modern forms. We have the spectacle of primitive reaction clothing itself in the borrowed clothes of progressive thought.

It is thus no use fighting religion and superstition on the old Victorian basis. Religion learns from its “mistaken” rigidity, and attempts to absorb the latest quasi-developments in modern science in order to protect its feeble intellectual constructions. By allying itself with reactionary political and social forces it establishes for itself a solid base.

The implicit credo of the nineteenth-century Atheist was “There is no God but anti-God, and Bradlaugh is his prophet.” This credo is outworn. To make a fetish of anti-God is as stupid as to make a god of a humanly-conceived God. Freethought must extend its line of action to all fields where science and rational inquiry is being undermined by religion, in old or new garb. In literature, art, music, politics, science, economics and sociology—religion has gained a “foothold.”

All these vast subjects are the products of man's collective social evolution since the times of the Renaissance. There is a world “conspiracy” to subject all these secular fields of human endeavour to mental bondage. In the Middle Ages, science was the handmaiden of the Church. Science revolted from its subject position. It is now seriously threatened with a recession to its slave-status. Rationalism must combat this great danger.

A brave attempt was made during the years 1928 and 1935 to carry out a Five-Year Plan for the elimination of religious prejudices in the U.S.S.R. This attempt was organised by Emelyan Yaroslavsky, the founder of the League of Militant Atheists. It failed dismally for the reason that Lunacharsky, the Commissar for Education under Lenin, correctly observed: “The more you hit it (religion—that is), the deeper it goes in.”

A frontal attack on religion is thus bound to fail. Only a concerted flanking manoeuvre on the whole social and political front, as well as the purely ideological front, can demolish the jerry-built edifice of centuries' superstition. This means that Freethinkers should concentrate not only on exposing the logical incongruities of the Athanasian Creed (c. A.D. 400), but also the far more devilish pseudo-intellectualism of the “modern” God-intoxicated (forgive me, Spinoza!), philosophers, scientists and literary pretenders to the title of “great.”

The phoney profundity of a Martin Buber, the neurotic outpourings of a Simone Weill, the unintelligible jabberwocky of a T. S. Eliot, the empty sophistry of C. E. M. Joad, all pass for good coin to-day. This is the great tragedy.

The modern Freethinker has to use modern weapons. The intellectual blunderbuss is out of date. The quicker we find new weapons the better. For the sands of time are running low.

“AKIBA.”

INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE—ELECTED ON FEBRUARY 2, 1952

Patron, Dr. R. P. Paranjpye. *President*, Dr. S. Chandrasekhar. *Vice-Presidents*, M. N. Roy and S. Ramanathan. *Secretaries*, S. Ghosh and T. S. Selvaraj. *Treasurer*, E. Laurent. *Members*: A. Bahuleyan, J. T. Cornelius, S. K. G. Rajen, M. Ziaddin, P. Kannan, M. V. V. K. Rangachari, G. Ramachandra Rao, A. Gopalakrishnamurthy, N. Venkat Rao, R. Radhakrishnamurthy, G. Narachari, T. Asirvadh Rao, P. A. Varkey, W. P. Ignatius, M. C. Joseph, R. B. Lotwala, J. B. Barreto, S. N. Roy, D. K. Karve, Dr. J. P. Parera, A. T. Kovoof, Shanti Tangri.

IN AUSTRALIA

The Australian Labour Party is being dominated by the Roman Catholic Church. When the next Federal elections take place the present Liberal-Country Party Government will be defeated. To quote Gilbert in “The King of Barataria”:—

Of that there is no manner of doubt—

No probable, possible shadow of doubt—

No possible doubt whatever.

That will mean a Labour Administration will take office, and in that case at least the deputy Prime Minister, and some of his colleagues, will give satisfaction to Rome. The Labour Premiers of Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania are Roman Catholics. In Queensland, the deputy Premier is also a member of that church, as are about 50 per cent. of the New South Wales ministers, and as are several of the Tasmanians. The N.S.W. Premier set out to found a R.C. university, but the proposal has been postponed on account of strong opposition from other churches. In both N.S.W. and Tasmania, Labour Party conferences have approved of payment of Government grants to denominational schools. In Victoria the present leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, a Protestant, may lose his post as a result of Roman Catholic efforts.