

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 23

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A Freethought Classic

IN the year 1913, in the now remote age that preceded the first World War and the Russian Revolution, academic circles and respectable society in general were startled and horrified by the appearance of a small but heavily documented book entitled accurately, *A History of Freedom of Thought*. That in itself need not have been of any particular significance; for in England, for all its alleged Democracy, perhaps the most Conservative country in the world, "Free" thought has never been taken very seriously, particularly in "Our Old Universities." It is true that two centuries earlier, a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, one Matthew Tindal, had been a Deist and had written an heretical book entitled, *Christianity as old as the Creation*. But since that distant day, the writing of heretical books which impugned orthodoxy in Church and State, had been practised exclusively by academic misfits like Gibbon or by self-taught proletarians like Thomas Paine.

It was, accordingly, something of a bombshell that was exploded in the camp of orthodoxy in the Year of Grace, 1913. For *A History of Freedom of Thought* was an iconoclastic work which struck at the very roots of orthodoxy, which was not deistic but openly atheistic; and which declared, *inter alia*, that to "distrust one's father and mother is the first commandment with promise." Whilst its author, J. B. Bury, was Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge and one of the most eminent living historians; quite possibly, the most scientific historian whom these islands have produced since Buckle.

For, in addition to his heretical book on *Freedom of Thought*, Prof. Bury had, *inter alia*, written a standard *History of Greece*, had revolutionised the study of the Byzantine Empire in a series of masterly works, had written a pioneer critical work "debunking" the legend of St. Patrick; and an admirable history of the modern Papacy; and was finally destined to crown his literary career with a great book on *The Idea of Progress* which ranks amongst the few authentic masterpieces that have so far appeared in the present century.

The survey of human history produced by such a man could not, obviously, be impugned on the score of lack of knowledge. Nor even, as so often in the case of earlier infidels since the days of "Tom" Paine, was it possible to invoke the snobbish test of lack of academic qualifications in order to disqualify the author from receiving the serious attention of the educated public. Consequently, Prof. Bury's devastating little volume was received in orthodox circles with embarrassed silence and, so far as we know, no Christian historian or "apologist" has ever made any serious attempt to refute its ruthless historical analysis of the social and historical record of Christianity: an indictment which, penned with incisive force and based on encyclopædic knowledge, represents an equally devastating and even more comprehensive analysis than that of Gibbon in the famous chapters of his *Decline and Fall* devoted to the rise and social influence of Christianity. (No doubt,

incidentally, Bury, who edited the definitive edition of Gibbon, owed a good deal to his illustrious predecessor.)

Prof. Bury's little work has already been reprinted twelve times since its first appearance forty years ago. Now, a Revised Second Edition has just appeared, edited by the Secretary of the Ethical Union, Mr. H. J. Blackham. Mr. Blackham has added a valuable epilogue which gives an illuminating account of the vicissitudes which have overtaken Bury's theme, the evolution of Freedom of Thought, during the forty years since his book first appeared. These changes, as Mr. Blackham forcibly urges, have been drastic and far reaching and would, on the whole, have saddened Bury had he survived to witness them (Prof. Bury died in 1927). For since his *Freedom of Thought* first saw the light, we have witnessed two world wars, the rise of Fascism and Communism, the horrors of the concentration camps, and the arrival of Totalitarianism and a secular apparatus of propaganda and repression such as even the Holy Inquisition, that mediæval "Gestapo," had never known.

Prof. Bury, writing in what was still pre-eminently an age of Liberal values, in the afterglow, as it were, of the Victorian Age, could not, and did not foresee these horrors. Though, one should in fairness add, that the great historian ended his later book, *The Idea of Progress*—a work which every philosophical student of history ought to read—with the significant prediction that this "Idea of Progress" which Bury demonstrated to be the central and distinctive "Idea" of our modern civilisation, might not dominate future civilisation as it has ours in recent centuries.

The theme of Prof. Bury's book is adequately indicated by its title. It is the age-long struggle for Freedom of Thought, conscience, and mental and moral progress in general, which the more civilised portion of humanity has now been waging for some 2,500 years, and which is still far from being won even within the confines of civilisation itself. Indeed, as Mr. Blackham does not fail to point out in his timely Epilogue, there has actually been a regression since Bury wrote. In 1912, evolution—at least in the social sphere of modern civilisation—seemed uninterrupted and likely to continue so; "broadening down from precedent to precedent," as that representative Victorian Liberal poet, Lord Tennyson, described it. It appeared to Bury and to his contemporaries to be only a matter of time for Liberal civilisation and its values, including toleration, to become universal.

He would be a bold man who could confidently hold such a super-optimistic view to-day, in our age of concentration camps, total war, and the hydrogen bomb. All these, as well as similar horrors, have developed since Bury's day and, whatever may be their precise cause, their very existence obviously presupposes the existence of social problems unforeseen by and deeper than those visualised by the optimistic era of Herbert Spencer and his fellow Victorian Liberals. The secular dictatorships of our own generation are no more favourable to freedom of thought than was the Holy Inquisition. Toleration is not a virtue encouraged or valued in a modern police-state. Nor is



intolerance and the systematic repression of opinion confined to the sphere of religion: "new foes arise threatening to bind our souls with secular chains" and "new presbyter (read, say, political police) is but old priest, writ large." Bury's own optimistic conclusion may be relevantly compared with a recent dictum of his former Cambridge colleague and fellow rationalist, Bertrand Russell, who told us a few weeks ago that it is quite possible that the Victorian Age, the hey-day of modern Liberalism, was only "an interlude between two ages of barbarism." Both the Nazi Reich and the present rearmament drive could be quoted as relevant evidence in support of this, at first sight, startling contention. Indeed, Mr. Blackham's epilogue derives its value precisely from the above considerations: Mr. Blackham has, indeed, done for Bury what Bury did for Gibbon in his great edition: related him to the needs of a new age.

However, these additional considerations do not detract from Prof. Bury's masterly "outline of History" which retains its place and all its value as a classic of Freethought literature. With unrivalled conciseness equally with knowledge, our learned author presents his historical panorama: the dawn of secular thought amongst the ancient Greeks, the monstrous millennial regression with its persecuting dogmas, when Christianity came flooding in from the East; the long night of mediæval repression; the epic struggles and innumerable martyrs of the liberating epochs of the Renaissance and the Reformation; the story has often been told but never more lucidly and powerfully than by the author of *A History of Freedom of Thought*. It is at one and the same time a devastating exposure and a powerful plea; an exposure of the age-long terror exercised by "The Black International," with its dogma of exclusive salvation, and a plea for the fundamental Rationalist principle that freedom is the life-blood of progress.

A modern Pope once denounced the work of an earlier heretic as "small in size but immense in its perversity." From the point of view of orthodoxy, Prof. Bury's literary high explosive is a most dangerous compendium of "dangerous thoughts." We cannot urge our readers too strongly to see that this most timely revised edition of a Freethought classic is either on their bookshelves or, at least, in their public library. It is a *must* book for every genuine Freethinker.

F. A. RIDLEY.

[J. B. Bury—*A History of Freedom of Thought* with an Epilogue by H. J. Blackham—*Geoffrey Cumberlege—Oxford University Press—6s.—Home University Library—Second Edition.*]

## THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Concluded from page 171)

The still lingering belief that the sense of morality is intimately associated with religion, is not borne out by historical research. The savage, with no notion of God, has a strong sense of good and bad. With him, it is instinctive; that is to say, his sense of morality is not prompted by any inner voice, nor is it dictated by fear of God. Morality, therefore, is also essentially rational. *The fashionable expression—"law of the jungle"—only betrays human conceit.* [Our italics—EDITOR.] There are rules of conduct even among higher animals. Those rules go into the composition of human instincts. They are part of man's biological heritage—the constant of human nature. In man, they express themselves as the sense of morality. One knows from experience what is good for him and what is bad for him. Therefrom he

generalises that what is good for him is good for all like himself, and what is bad for him is also bad for all. That is the origin of morality.

Because of a multitude of definitions, or of the absence of rational ones, the concepts of freedom and truth are dismissed by practical men as objects of metaphysical speculation. Yet, the quest for freedom is the incentive which differentiates the human species from its biological background. It is the most basic human urge, though most of the time it remains buried deep under the surface of consciousness. Indeed, the incentive itself is a biological heritage. Of course, in the context of the pre-human process of organic evolution, the incentive for freedom has a physical connotation. It expresses itself in the struggle for existence. To live is to survive the deadly impacts of the forces of nature. To live, organisms must not only free themselves from the stranglehold of inanimate nature, but struggle also against other manifestations of life itself. Therefore, every success in the biological struggle for existence can be called a conquest of freedom.

It seems to be more difficult to trace the highly philosophical and ethical concept of truth in the biological essence of human nature. Is it not a purely metaphysical category? If it were, then it could have nothing to do with human nature, which is physically determined. biological evolution being a process embedded in the physical Universe. But before the appearance of *homo sapiens*, who could philosophise, populate nature with supernatural beings, imagine a metaphysical cosmic force of will, and conceive of ethical values, it was not all a spiritual void. The psyche is said to be the repository of residues antedating *homo sapiens*. The psyche, however, is not a mystic entity serving as the link between the mortal man and the immortal world-spirit. It is the sub-conscious part of the mind—a biological heritage, the storehouse of experiences of the primitive man as well as of his vertebrate animal ancestors. The psyche is not a mystic entity, because, as the subject of the science of psychology, it can be reduced to physico-chemical constituents, with which philosophy can build the bridge across the gulf between physics and psychology. The psyche, in other words, is the umbilical cord which binds man, with all his spiritual attributes, to Mother Nature—the physical world. *All metaphysical concepts and ethical values, conceived and created by "homo sapiens," are physically determined; the psyche is a daughter of the Mother Earth.* [Our italics—EDITOR.]

Truth, therefore, is not a metaphysical concept. It is a matter of human experience. It is a matter of fact. Truth is correspondence with objective reality—the relation between two objects of experience. Therefore, it is the content of knowledge. The old saying, "knowledge is power," is not an empty phrase. It summarises the lesson of the entire human experience. The biological struggle for existence was a blind urge; man's struggle for freedom from the tyranny of the forces of nature was guided by his knowledge of nature. The one became successful in proportion to the increase of the latter. The biological heritage of the quest of freedom created already in the savage the urge for knowledge which gave him power to carry on the struggle against the forces of nature. The search for truth, therefore, is intimately associated with the quest of freedom as the essence of human nature.

Modern historical research has revealed that philosophy is older than religion, if superstitions of the savage, such as fetichism, magic and animism, and also the spurious piety of the barbarian, who propitiates the Gods of natural



religion for selfish motives, are not counted as religion. This fact proves that human nature is essentially rational, because rationalism is the guiding principle of philosophical thought. The earliest philosophies were the first attempts of human intelligence to explain natural phenomena in physical terms without assuming supernatural agencies to cause them. The point of departure of those attempts was the belief that nature was a rational, law-governed system. That belief was possible because the human mind, not yet confused by metaphysical speculations, nor lured by religious imaginations, could function in its native posture—in tune with nature.

Liberated from time-honoured spiritual bondage, thanks to the advance of modern science, man can rediscover the essence of his nature. It is not to believe, but to question and inquire. The biological heritage of rationality enables man to penetrate deeper and deeper into the secrets of nature and discover truth. It is also the only foundation of a voluntary morality. Reason is not a metaphysical category. It is the consciousness of the harmony of nature, and as such an empirical reality. Rationality is a biological function, which is a microcosmic echo of the rhythm of the cosmos.

M. N. ROY.

### "THE WITCH"

Herewith is one of Mr. Bayard Simmons's best poems—  
Perhaps his own favourite:—

(For V.C.B.)

Poor, poor, Pierronne,  
Alas, she is gone,  
They burned her in the end;  
They thought it was most odd  
That she said she spoke to God  
As friend with friend.

All clemency past,  
Avowing to the last  
Her friendship with the Lord,  
She described His grand apparel  
In fullness and in detail,  
His golden chain and sword.

Described His kingly face,  
His carriage and His grace—  
She could make no mistake;  
But they called her "Silly Bitch,"  
And tried her as a witch,  
And burned her at the stake.

Her chain was not of gold,  
But rusty iron cold,  
Which soon would be red hot;  
And when she felt the flame  
She called upon His Name—  
He would forsake her not.

Poor, poor, Pierronne,  
Alas, she is gone,  
In the market-place she died;  
They led her out to die,  
But never told her why  
His friendship they denied.

But Holy Church is wise,  
It knew the girl told lies,  
Or was at least mistaken;  
For were the Lord her friend  
He would save her in the end,  
She would not be forsaken.

Oh, Holy Church is wise,  
God's friendship it denies,  
He is no friend of Man;  
He acts more like a devil,  
For all around is evil,  
Yea, since the world began.

He is cruel and contrary,  
And His Mother, that is Mary,  
Is often asked to plead  
With Him her callous Son,  
Content to hear men groan,  
To let His children bleed.

The Christian's jealous God,  
Who smites men with His rod,  
Is an Almighty Fiend;  
And His propitiation  
The duty of the nation  
From normal friendship weaned.

For this the Church knows well,  
That Heaven is really Hell,  
In which there reigns a devil;  
Its priests must sacrifice  
By every known device  
To save mankind from evil.

This simple country lass,  
Raised in a lowly class,  
Whose head a book had turned,  
She thought her God a Lamb;  
But He didn't care a damn,  
He let the girl be burned.

The Holy Church is wise,  
It does not deal in lies,  
Is not imposed upon;  
The clergy know their Lord,  
With His Fire, and Chain and Sword:  
Poor, Poor, Pierronne.

(1942)

### THEATRE

"Dragon's Mouth." By J. B. Priestley and Jacquetta Hawkes. Winter Garden Theatre.

THIS is called a Dramatic Quartet, and in a note in the programme Mr. Priestley refers to a new dramatic form. It is as well, for by no stretch of imagination could this be regarded as a play. I suspect that Mr. Priestley has taken the lead in its formation and has used the characters as his mouthpieces. This gives him the advantage of four voices instead of one.

This situation of four people, finding themselves on a small ship or yacht where a deadly disease has broken out, is certainly dramatic. They are made to talk as normal people would not, and the first part is devoted to that side of their characters which they wish to show to the world. But for the second part it becomes known that one of them (and they do not know whom) is stricken with the disease, so each one prepares to meet death by an exposition of their innermost selves as honestly as it can be given. A certain amount of characterisation is brought out, but I could never quite accept the dramatic situation and the people did not come to life. On the other hand, regarded as a philosophical treatise by the two collaborators, it is of some value, but I would rather see it as a book on my shelf than as a theatre piece for an evening's entertainment.

The four performers, consisting of Dulcie Gray, Michael Denison, Rosamund John and Norman Wooland, could not fail to extract every particle of entertainment value from this material.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

### PLAYING OUT THE WAR

San Marino—Sunday.

"San Marino asked £432,000 compensation for Allied bombing and to-day rejected Britain's offer of £26,000. Said State Secretary Giacomini: 'Our Republic has only 13,000 people and an army of 170, including the band, but we have our dignity'."—*The Times*.



## ACID DROPS

One can always depend on some Roman Catholic in the name of the Church showing a "cloven hoof." The latest example is the protest made in a recent number of the *Sunday Dispatch* against the picture painted by the distinguished Royal Academician, Mr. F. Cadogan Cowper, in this year's Exhibition. It represents a deceived husband disguised as a priest listening to his wife's "confession." How dare any artist, cries a former M.P., Mr. G. L. Reakes, "caricature or falsify" a Roman Catholic sacrament; and Canon Collingwood of Westminster Cathedral calls it "an abomination." They want the picture "banned."

In the heyday of its power the Church would not have called for a mere banning. It would have burnt the picture and the artist—and probably his family as well. The Church has been compelled, in this Protestant country at least, to confine itself to merely protesting—but we feel it a good thing that somewhere and sometimes the precious things it calls "sacraments" should be joked about. And the precious feelings of Catholics as well.

Whether people know it or not the real reason why mourners wear black at funerals (especially at Christian funerals) is to frighten evil spirits away; so it is quite intriguing to find the Rev. W. Robinson advising people to wear white and make them a little "brighter." He added that many of the funerals at which he officiated "appeared to be really pagan"—the reason being that "there was no feeling of confidence for the future," that is, the mourners were not at all sure they would meet their dear departed again as promised by the Church. But would dressing in white make them quite sure they all would meet again "in Jesus"?

A ten-year-old pupil of a Roman Catholic school, called as a witness, appears to have had no idea whatever as to what is an "oath," he had never heard of the Bible or of God, and he didn't know anything about Jesus Christ. We must acclaim the Roman Church on at least doing something with which we heartily agree. We wish all boys were as ignorant as this boy on things divine and holy. The joke is that the boy's evidence was taken from the Atheist standpoint—that is, it was a purely secular affirmation, but it must have been heartbreaking for a Christian court to do this.

According to the Vicar of Old Hunstanton, the Rev. D. Smith, everybody should give a tenth of his income to his parish church. The Welfare State gets its whack, the income tax and many other taxes get their share, and, from what is left, we ought to be only too glad to give to the Church—or to the parish church—for they do their best to put us right with God; otherwise, we shudder at what the Almighty would do to us. But perhaps the Vicar wants the money for himself—with the Lord left out in the cold? All the same, we have an idea that most people will say, to put it bluntly, "to Hell with the parish church, or the Church—or even the Vicar!"

This journal appears to be about the only one in the country which dares to make a frontal attack on Spiritualistic assumptions—so we were pleased to note that a former president of the Society for Psychical Research, Prof. C. D. Broad, speaking at a dinner the other day, said that he "did not think any of their members had had any experience of psychical phenomena"! And this after 70 years "investigation." Shades of Hannen Swaffer, G. N. M. Tyrrell, Shaw Desmond, and many other convinced believers (like the editor of *Psychic*

*News*)—what have they to say? In any case, is there much difference between belief in levitation, apporrs, direct voice, ectoplasm, and Devils, Angels and Miracles, which form part and parcel of Christianity?

## SNIPPETS FOR SINNERS

### RETIREMENT

Stupid persons are bored when they have nothing to do. Work with the majority is their only refuge from ennui. It requires many talents and much cultivation to be idle, or a peculiarly constituted mind (Somerset Maugham—"A Writer's Notebook.")

### WAR AND PEACE

The world has always been a place of turmoil. There have been short periods of peace and plenty, but they are exceptional, and because some of us have lived in such a period—the latter years of the 19th century, the first decade of the 20th—we have no right to look upon such a state as normal. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward: that is normal, and we may just as well accept the fact. If we do, we can regard it with that mingling of resignation and humour which is probably our best defence. —(Somerset Maugham—*ibid.*)

### CONDOLENCES

Jane Welsh Carlyle, in a letter: I offer no idle condolences for I never found such of any comfort to myself, and my regard for . . . . . is well enough known to you to make any assurances of sympathy from me superfluous . . . . . He is gone from us all, but the memory of his worth and kindness will abide with some of us while we live.

### DOUBTING CARDINAL

Starting with the being of a God . . . I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth of which my whole being is so full . . . If I looked into a mirror and did not see my face I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflection of its Creator. Again, the denials and disappointments of human life, the ill success of the good and the triumphs of sinful men, the pains and suffering of innocent creatures . . . all this is a vision to dizzy and appal; and inflicts upon the mind a sense of profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution. (Newman—"Apologia.")

### SECURITY?

In civilised society most educated people are not even aware of the extent to which millions of savages survive at their very doors, or that the majority of people in every civilised state are still living in a state of intellectual savagery. The smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition. Only those whose studies have led them to investigation are aware of the depth to which the ground beneath our feet is honeycombed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire to spread ruin and devastation.—(Sir J. G. Fraser.)

### WORSHIP

Why should we not look on the Universe with piety? It is the dispenser of all our joys. It is not wicked. It is the source of all our energies, the home of all our happiness, and shall we not cling to it and praise it, seeing that it vegetates so grandly and so sadly, and that it is not for us to blame it for what, doubtless, it never knew it did.

—(Santayana.)

Compiled by E. A. MACDONALD.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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.

ROBERT DAVIES.—The complete *Histoire des Dogmes* of Joseph Turmel is in six volumes but has not, unfortunately, been translated into English. Under the pseudonym of "Louis Coulanges," Messrs. Watts have published his *History of the Devil* and his *Evolution of the Mass*, but we do not know if they are still obtainable.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The N.S.S. Conference, held last Sunday in Leicester, was a great success. Delegates and members shared the great welcome and generous hospitality of the Leicester Secular Society and the whole proceedings reflect great credit on our Leicester friends. A full report will appear in our next issue.

The National Secular Society is, as our readers presumably know, affiliated to *The World-Union of Freethinkers*. As such, we endeavour to establish as many contacts as possible with other sections of the world-wide Freethought Movement. We have been regularly represented at International Freethought Congresses in the past. For example, the late President, R. H. Rosetti, N.S.S., represented us at the Rome Congress in 1949; whilst the present Acting-President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, will go to Brussels this August as our representative, and is scheduled to address the International Conference there. At present, *The Freethinker* is publishing serially the remarkable address on "The Rhythm of the Cosmos," delivered by the distinguished Indian Humanist, M. N. Roy, at the last Annual Convention of the *Indian Rationalist Association*.

Last week, the N.S.S. office was favoured with a visit from a leading Continental Freethinker, Prof. Gerhard von Frankenburg, President of the *Federation of German Freethinkers*. Prof. Frankenburg gave us much valuable information regarding the organisation and outlook of the German Movement. He stressed, in particular, the powerful influence exercised still by the Monist Movement founded by Ernst Haeckel and, expounded in his famous classic, *The Riddle of the Universe*. Prof. Frankenburg promised to keep *The Freethinker* informed on German affairs. He emphasised the hard fight which German Freethought was having against political Catholicism under the Adenauer regime.

Re the *Brussels International Congress of Freethinkers*, August 22-26, it is hoped to form a party to cross over to Brussels on August 21, leaving Victoria at 10 a.m. and arriving Brussels 18-58 hours. The ordinary second class fare including reserved seats outward is £9 10s. 9d., but if fifteen or more travel together, the fare would be £8 16s. 1d. As some may wish to take advantage of the arrangement with the Hotel Astoria, Blankenberghe (special rate for Congress members, 150 francs a day) for a week or more, the return journey will be left for individual ordering.

Please inform Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, 4, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4, if you wish to join the party.

## ON BECOMING A SPIRITUALIST

### II.

THOSE who have consistently read the two journals we have devoted to Spiritualism, *Two Worlds* and *Psychic News*, will have noticed that stress has these days been laid more on "spiritual" healing than, say, on materialisations or on apports or on the other miracles which have in the past done so much to foster belief in spirits. A woman comes on a public platform completely crippled with arthritis and unable to walk for twenty years. The "healer," working often under "spirit" guidance, passes his hand a few times over the affected parts and, hey presto! the lady gets up completely cured, and walks away as well as she did when she was twelve. Multiply this story thousands of times with a few different illnesses and you get more than half the contents of any spiritualistic journal.

On a few occasions, especially when a doctor was referred to as vouching for the illness, efforts have been made to contact him—or her. As far as I have been able to judge, doctors who vouch for the cancer and other cases before the healer gets to work mysteriously disappear, or cannot be contacted after the miraculous cure. And it is not altogether surprising that many, many people are not cured in spite of the spirits.

Needless to say, one of the first seances attended by Mr. R. M. Lester in his search for the truth about Spiritualism was a "Group healing centre"—though he was still very "sceptical." I find this rather difficult to believe for anybody who had had a talk with such a complete believer as Lord Dowding *must* have been impressed. In any case, no sooner had he got in touch with a medium at a private sitting than he had "a very strong feeling" that his wife was there. Why, of course she was. He wouldn't have gone to the medium at all if he hadn't expected his wife to be there. When Sir A. C. Doyle died, a big Memorial Meeting was held at the Albert Hall, and an empty chair was on the platform. No sooner had the medium—I think it was Mrs. Estelle Roberts—mounted the platform than she pointed to the chair and solemnly declared he was sitting in it in full evening dress. Nobody else saw the famous novelist, but what of that? Everybody, that is, every Spiritualist, went to the meeting quite sure that Doyle would turn up. They *sensed* he was there, and of course he was there. Mrs. Roberts vouched for that, and had Mr. Lester been there, even his unconscious Agnosticism would not have prevented him from feeling that Doyle was there.

The medium had no difficulty in explaining to Mr. Lester at their private meeting that his wife's "etheric" body had survived, and could be seen by anybody who had "clairvoyant" powers. I am sure she was right. The dear old Christian saints, fortified with as few roots for their meals as possible, used to see innumerable demons, devils, and evil spirits, who were quite as real as Mrs. Roberts' Conan Doyle. Even Luther was quite certain he saw the Devil (capital D, please) and threw an inkpot at him. It may well have been the Devil's "etheric" body.

At this particular seance, the bold originality of the medium came out when she said the etheric body of poor Mrs. Lester told her that she was "building up" her wedding ring and the figures "1922" stood out within the circle. This was wonderful proof, for Mr. Lester was married in 1922. Unfortunately, he was still sceptical. It reminds me of the late Will Goldston who, in one of his books, gave a description of a medium lying on a table with a dozen people kicking his face in with their boots—the table at the same time "levitating" to the ceiling and gently floating back to earth afterwards. The medium



was quite unharmed. Did this convert Mr. Goldston to Spiritualism? Not on your life. He wanted better and stronger proofs. It would, however, have converted me.

"Running Water," the medium's guide, always spoke perfect English—just as Jesus and the rabbis who help to write Miss Geraldine Cummins' work always speak in the English of the Authorised Version of the Bible. It simply would not do to let Jesus speak in Hollywood American.

Of course, in his quest for his wife, Mr. Lester admits that all was not always absolutely genuine. His articles (or his book) would have been too quickly finished had he fallen at once. So he gives instances of "dubious" sittings and how difficult his "scepticism" was to overcome.

All the same, every now and then, his wife did come through. If it was not "Running Water" that did the trick, it was "Starbeam," and naturally when Starbeam was asked whether Mrs. Lester was "happy" in Summerland (or whatever it is called) the answer was—of course—"As happy as possible." As this was the almost invariable reply inquirers get, on this occasion there was a slight variation. The poor lady "didn't want to go"—she "struggled so hard to stay." In other words, she really wasn't happy at all in spite of Summerland and the company of similar congenial spirits.

Mr. Lester was also bluntly told to go on "investigating," so he soon got in touch with what is called a "direct voice," that is, the "spirit" with a spirit voice talking as if it were a real voice. Would Mr. Lester recognise his wife's voice? I should have been surprised if he had not. It didn't sound right at first but eventually she came through all right, and two other voices also spoke at the same time. It was all "completely convincing."

So was Mr. Lester's experience with "automatic writing." I have personally sat a number of times with people who claimed that a planchette would always answer any difficult query put to it, but it never did in my presence. My obstinate scepticism baffled the spirits. But when Mr. Lester investigated the matter, he always commenced with a short prayer, and that no doubt did the trick. It also helped the spirit to touch him. In fact, on one occasion, the spirit actually entered the body of the medium and was thus able to say so. "I'm inside her!" she excitedly declared. The marvels followed each other more and more as Mr. Lester continued his wonderful investigations. But it is only fair to say that although many of his fellow believers got marvellous results in materialisations, his wife only materialised once and that not very clearly.

Mr. Lester is quite convinced now of the reality of "survival" and his book will shortly be published giving, no doubt, additional proofs. But although I have tried hard to be as impartial as I can be, and have carefully read and studied his "evidence," I can see little in it but a hopeless credulity. He admits that some of the things offered to him by mediums could easily have been duplicated by the Magic Circle of conjurors—but like so many other spiritualists, if he could not find an explanation of some of the marvels he witnessed then the answer must be "spirits."

The truth is, of course, that the average person can be much more easily bamboozled by a medium, especially in the dark, or when suffering under some great emotion, than can even a scientist by a good illusionist. The inquirer *wants* to be bamboozled, and would be very disgruntled if he went regularly to a medium or to a public seance or a home circle if he wasn't. He expects results, and very often, if nothing happens to come his way, he is satisfied if his neighbour admits genuine "contact."

I am not suggesting for a moment that I know how some "phenomena" happen or are produced. I expect that I

could also be bamboozled by a wily medium. But whatever happened in my presence which I could not explain, I certainly would not claim it must be done by spirits. For indeed, there are no spirits.

H. CUTNER.

### CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT?

THE tendency to-day is toward democratic institutions. On the whole, it seems to work fairly well in politics. I wonder whether, some day, we might try it in religion.

The present god was not elected by popular vote. He is a relict (or perhaps I mean relic) of despotic days in the childhood of our race. He started his career among the ancestors of the Babylonians at a time when probably they were at a stage of culture approximating to that of the Australian aborigine. It was, at all events, in their nomadic days since pastoral gods look more kindly on womanhood of whom the present incumbent does not think highly.

Starting as a boy, or at least as one of many minor gods he speedily worked his way up to a position of importance if not of supremacy. This was mainly on account of a novel idea which he, probably, was the first to try. He decided to be a jealous god and whenever he got a few of the devout on one side he would whisper to them nasty things about his colleagues. Suggesting that it might be a sound scheme to overturn them and smash up their images (this god was always an iconoclast) and when possible to put as many as possible of their followers to the sword. This tended to produce a certain amount of dissension among tribes which had him on the pay-roll but at least it helped to simplify the celestial hierarchy.

The Babylonians do not seem to have let him have his own way entirely but his real chance came when they were so misguided as to include the Jewish people in a displaced persons slave-labour scheme they were operating. It had seemed a good idea at the time and it was not long before it seemed a much better idea to let them go home again. And missing—possibly among other things—when the Jews went was this pushing young god, Jehovah.

Jehovah took to the Jews like a—well, we mustn't be irreverent. And the Jews were not ill-pleased with the acquisition of Jehovah. A proud race of strongly nationalistic tendencies, the jealous God all to themselves, seemed just what they had always wanted. So they promoted him to the first rank (actually they amalgamated him with one of the old local deities). And it was but a short while before he had eliminated all his native rivals. Some, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua and the like, he demoted to heroes. Others he eliminated altogether. With another, Baal, for whom as a fellow alien he had special antipathy, he was even more successful. He turned him into the Devil.

For a long time his solitary rule was unchallenged. The first threat came to it with the rise of Christianity beginning some time during the first century, B.C. This (the rise of Christianity not the birth of Christ, which had a different and unique causation, so I am told) was caused by one of those revulsions from organised religion which occasionally (and very naturally) sweeps the world.

The Judaic religion was not designed to give Man any false ideas as to his own importance. Its intentions, nicely blended, were designed to bolster up the importance of the priestly or kingly faction according to which achieved the ascendancy of the moment. It was based on a feeling that Man, once he had been scared into supporting the ruling faction, was of no possible importance whatsoever.

Thus, the revulsion which inspired the Christian religion (it would be tempting, on other evidence, to place this nearer the eighth than the first century, but religious commentators insist that Christianity began before Christ) was



aimed at the soullessness of the old system. It called for a human religion, a religion in which Man had a place and was wanted as an individual. And so successful was this revolution that it came near overthrowing the old ideas of deity altogether.

It set up a new god, Christ, with a new creed that, at its inception was humanistic, communistic, and completely revolutionary. But for a supreme effort Jehovah would have been overthrown. Exhibiting an adaptability he now seems to have lost, he got himself adopted (as father rather than as son) by the new divinity and, bringing in a new spiritual force, the Holy Ghost, of an intangible rather than an anthropomorphic nature set up a triumvirate whose pre-eminence, at least, has never since been disputed.

But he has ruled long enough. Gods are made, God wot, in man-like image, but this one is an outmoded style. An election, a general election, should be made without any further delay.

I. de LOYOLA.

## CORRESPONDENCE

MR. BAYARD SIMMONS

SIR,—May I join with "H. C." in the well-earned tribute which *The Freethinker* has paid its Blondel of Freethought, Bayard Simmons?

Simmons is a true poet, whose verse possesses, besides intrinsic beauty, the element of sincerity; lacking nothing but the *engagée* quality our enemies would love to detect.

May he long continue to enliven and inspire us!—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

## CHRISTIANITY

SIR,—When Mr. McKeown was 19, he tells us, his views were the same as those now held by your youthful correspondent, Miss Peckman. He implies that he is now much older (which is probably true) and therefore much wiser (which is open to doubt).

Perhaps it may interest him to know that when I was 14 my views coincided exactly with those he holds now. That is what interested me in his letter. Then I believed in God with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my mind. I would join the Church. I would work in the slums, or perhaps in Heathen Lands afar, winning souls for Jesus. And when I became really old, say 50 or 55, I would retire to a comfortable country Vicarage, to work among the village folk, and to prepare my soul for the Eternal Bliss to which God, in His own good time, would call me.

The first step in the achievement of this ambition was to secure the School Certificate for Proficiency in Scriptural Knowledge. Not only would I do that, I would excel in the subject, to show that I could become a fit and worthy candidate for the Ministry.

But I did exactly what Mr. McKeown asks Miss Peckman to do. I endeavoured to read the Bible honestly. Doubts arose, small at first, which my pastors and masters could not remove. The more I studied the book, the more convinced I became that no God worthy of adoration had any part in the production of it. Before I was 19 I had completely renounced the Christian Faith and its Bible. Perhaps, if I ever reach a sufficiently advanced stage of senility, I may again proclaim it. If so, I hope that those who know me will discount my words accordingly.

Yes, I am a materialist. If I am typical, I must be in goodly company. Rationalism is not a bitter pill to swallow, although Christians endeavour to impress on their dupes that it is. Free-thinkers fear neither god nor devil. For them, Hell has no terrors. "The Bible says that the love of money is the root of all evil. So get rid of it! Cast it from you! Give it unto God! Collection boxes will be found at all exits."

Does it not occur to Mr. McKeown that men who are in the Christian racket for what they can get out of it here and now, would proclaim just that?

"A wicked, evil god does not produce saints." Well, who is responsible for the dirty, verminous creatures? And who produced the germs of cancer, consumption, cholera, typhoid, leprosy, V.D., and all the other microbes which attack human and other flesh? And the vermin which carry these divine masterpieces far and wide? Did God, who is Love, really create all creatures great and small? If so, was he drunk at the time?

Mr. McKeown freely admits that Christians have to take a lot for granted, and thereby, I submit that he surrenders his whole case. Freethinkers do not. They accept only what Reason approves.

I am not interested to know what particular brand of Christianity Mr. McKeown favours. Perhaps the majority of those who profess

the faith would deny his right to be called a Christian at all. It would seem that he has felt it necessary to reform the faith to his own liking, and to reshape his god nearer to his own image.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. HUXLEY.

[Several other replies to Mr. McKeown have been received, among them one from Miss Peckman, whose contribution must be the last.—EDITOR.]

## "SAY WHAT YOU MEAN"

SIR,—The article in your issue of May 18 was interesting. It is always good to find people trying to improve the standard of our language—either written or spoken. But alas, "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" (Who will censor the censors?). These are my criticisms:—

(1) "The gallant hound the wolf had slain. . . ." "Who got slain?" It should be "which," "who" is certainly incorrect. Also please note that even if reference were to human beings, "which" would still be necessary.

(2) The last word of all: "with." A redundant proposition; the sentence requires remodelling. "It is *with* abstention . . . that the Catholic conscience is concerned."

(3) Minor points:

"Search me." Not suitable in a serious article such as this. It is, I consider, slang.

"Fearful blunder." Dictionary: "exciting," intense fear; terrible." Quite inappropriate; "blunder" alone is much better.

"There are thousands of Catholics who never eat fish." I never met one, and I should be surprised if there is one Catholic in the British Isles who never ate fish. "Many Catholics do not habitually eat fish" might be good enough, but the sentence could be omitted without any loss of clearness.

Admittedly these last are minor points, but regrettable, though harmless enough in casual conversation.—Yours, etc.,

R. G. DAY.

## WORLD POPULATION

SIR,—As I always deprecate extravagant statements, perhaps Mr. Humphris will give us his authority that "Human Beings can double their numbers every *few* years." Does he mean that in a *few* years, world population will increase from 2,500 millions to 5,000 millions, and in another *few* years from 5,000 millions to 10,000 millions?—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S.—J. CLAYTON, Friday, June 6, 7-30 p.m., Loveclough (Rossendale); Sunday, June 8, 6-45 p.m., Blackburn Market; June 8, 8 p.m.: A debate. Monday, June 9, 7-30 p.m., Hancoat; Tuesday, June 10, 7-30 p.m., Hapton.

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

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER. A public debate will be held on June 10 between the Rev. T. L. Livermore and another, Robert Sinclair and J. W. Barker, at the Small Public Hall, Hill Street, Sutton, Surrey, at 8 p.m.: "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?"

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

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

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

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.

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park).—7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

### INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, June 8, 11 a.m.: Dr. HELEN ROSENAU, "The Humanism of Leonardo da Vinci."

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

**SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS.** By G. W. Foote. Price, cloth 3s. 9d.; postage 3d.



### ST. PETER AND PAGANISM

THE POPE'S recent claim that the genuine tomb of St. Peter has been found could as well be laid had his task been to find the bones of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of the "Holy City"; like these, the mythical founder of the "Holy See" is, together with St. Paul, a typical "Heavenly Twin" (see my articles, *The Freethinker*, June 25 and July 9, 1950).

Trying to explain in these articles the intricate system of conceptions connected with the idea of the heavenly twins, I made the following points:—

(1) They represent opposites, foremost Sun and Moon as the two aspects of heaven: the "fiery" and the "watery" principle of light and rain as the twin force that guarantees fertility and life. Frequently they are joined by a female principle, representing Venus, the third heavenly body that is conspicuous in the skies.

(2) Most important for the understanding of mythology is the Law of Reciprocity: anything on earth must have its counterpart in heaven, or since the religious mind is topsy-turvy: what there is in heaven must be imitated on earth. All "holy" scripture is holy in that it had been copied from the starred skies, read in the "Book of Heavens" or the "Heavenly Script."

(3) The Law of Reciprocity is applied to have congruency even in the "upper" and "lower" parts of the heavens, i.e., the Northern or Summer half of the Zodiac and its Southern or Winter half; or between Zodiacal signs and planets: *gemini*, the Twins, Symbol II, is ruled by Mercury, the planetary twin, whilst Venus is represented in the Zodiac by *virgo*, the Virgin. Sun and Moon are each conceived in two opposite aspects through the signs *aries-leo* (Lamb and Lion) and *taurus-aquarius* respectively.

(4) The Twin-Skygod is the father, leader or master of 12 sons, disciples, etc., representing the 12 Zodiacal signs. Mediæval scholastics and artists were fully aware of the correspondence and took great pains to depict them together with their appropriate attributes or symbols, and wearing their appropriately coloured attire (e.g., Juda: red; virgin: blue, etc.).

Twins too have a double aspect: they are a "doubled" force, sticking faithfully together and utterly grieved when—as a seasonal reoccurrence—one part is removed to the netherworld (Orpheus-Eurydice, Castor-Pollux); or their unity is "halved," they are depicted as eternally quarrelling partners (Peter-Paul) or hostile brothers (Jacob-Esau).

Peter is, therefore, of irresolute character, rash alike in word and act, intimidated by difficulties; and yet, his primacy of jurisdiction is an article of faith in the Roman Church. For being a blind follower of his Master—himself a Heavenly Twin—who never questions his leader's word, he is the model believer and declared Prince of the Apostles (Matthew x, 2), "Duodecim autem Apostolorum nomina haec: Primus Simon qui dicitur Petrus . . ." This is quite natural, since he is, essentially, *identical* with his Master.

His name is given as "Simon, called Petrus"; according to The Acts xv, 14; 2. Peter i, 1; his original name was *Simeon bar Jonah* = Simon, the son of the Dove, and he has a brother named Andrew = Man. Similarly Paulus (St. Paul) is renamed as many twins are, in order to stress their twofold personality (Jacob becomes "Israel," Esau—Edom). Among Jacob's "sons" Simeon and Levi

share the II-sign of *gemini* if the list contains the name of Dinah, the only sister<sup>1</sup>; if she is left out—as she generally is—II is allotted to Levi, the sacerdotal tribe, whilst her sign of *virgo* or *spica* (spicula, ear of corn)<sup>2</sup> goes to Simeon. On the good authority of Clement (Stromata, III, VI) we have it that St. Peter, first Pope and bishop of Rome, was married and had children!

II-Jesus is identical with his "father," but the Venus or *virgo* has artificially been replaced by her symbol, the dove, called by the Gospel writers the Holy Ghost or Spirit, in the double aspects of the begetter and the still virginal mother. Paul's connection with *virgo* goes via the fiery tongues of the Spirit; his name was changed from Saul, a name given not only to the (mythical) first king of Israel, but also to the son of—Simeon.

Thus, Paul represents the "fiery" principle in the twins, whilst Peter, the fisherman, is connected with water; their chief day is kept on June 29th, and June 24th/July 23rd is the II-month. Another II feast is that of Simon-Juda (or Taddaeus), and on December 29th the Roman Church celebrates Jacob-John. John (the Baptist) has water as his appropriate medium, whilst "he that cometh (six months) after me" shall baptize with "the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew iii, 11).

The Zodiac, the apparent path of the Sun, Moon and major planets, is divided into 12 parts of 30 degrees each. In consequence of the slow conical motion of the earth's axis, called Precession, the position of the Equator is continually changing by about 50" a year. The Vernal Equinox is still called the First Point of Aries, although the sign of *aries* now lies in the constellation of *pisces* (fish-twin), some 30° to the west. These changes take place every ca. 170 years; hence prior to *aries*-Redeemers (such as Jesus, the lamb), the saviour's symbol was *taurus*, the bull. The Golden Age of Saturn, therefore, must have preceded the *taurus* period, when, about 5,800 years ago, the Vernal Equinox fell in the constellation *gemini*: then the world had been created and mankind sprang from twins such as Adam (Kadmus)-Eva, Janus-Camese, Romulus-Remus, etc.<sup>3</sup>).

The constellations of the "upper" or Northern half culminate when it is warm and bright, whilst the signs of the "Southern" half "reign" during Winter time: they "carry" darkness and water, since in the places whence our religious notions originated, Winter is the rainy period and the constellations culminating then were thought of as aquatic animals. This whole region is referred to as "the waters above," the sluices of heaven where the rains are stored whilst the winds are, in a similar way, kept under lock in the "northern" or "upper" half. Hence, *pneuma*=wind, breath, spirit, broods "upon the face of the waters."

PERCY G. ROY

(To be concluded)

(1) This is not the proper place for a linguistic controversy, so I simply assert that Shimeon is connected with "Fame" or "Message" and Levi—commonly translated "adherer"—denoted the aquatic snake (from North Semitic "lawju," to wriggle, cf. Levi-âthân). Cf. Tanchuma "wajhi" 16, and Gen. 49 where Shimeon-Levi, the avengers of their sisters virginity (Gen. 34, 25ff.), are singled out as the "brothers who slew a man"; for this "I will divide them." The "man" will be explained later.

(2) At Wingrave, nr. Aylesbury, *hay* is brought in on the Sunday following St. Peter's day from a field bequeathed by a woman who once lost her way at night and was saved by hearing the peal of the church bells.

(3) According to Talm. (Berakhôth, fol. 19, col. 2) the planetary list commences with Mercury, the twin.