

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Another Christian Liar

LET me confess that I was beginning to believe that no decent Christian would go out of his way, these days, to lie about Thomas Paine. I am by no means so sure now. It all depends. If a Christian can get away with the lie, I am fairly sure he will back it up with all his might; for he can always plead, in the ultimate, that, alas, he had gone to the wrong authorities. The main object is always to set the lie going—and God alone knows whether it can ever again be overtaken.

One of such lies is the myth of the "recantation" of Thomas Paine. Many Christians in the past brought this out as "Gospel truth" with unflinching regularity. For them it was a crushing reply to those blatant infidels who did not believe the Bible was God's precious Revelation and who insisted, instead, that it was a work full of Oriental myths and legends, certainly based in some measure on hopeless ignorance and superstition. Pointing out that Paine "recanted" was proof that in actual fact the Bible was true, that every letter and stop was Holy and Revealed. To their credit, be it said, the better-educated Christians were by no means convinced of this crushing logic—and that is why I thought most of them had long since given up the Christian lies surrounding one of the greatest men born in England. But the lies have bobbed up again, and will no doubt continue to do so as long as there are Christians to utter them. We Freethinkers can deal with the plague when it is active, but the malignity of some Christians is often quite beyond us.

The latest example of Christian liars is an "evangelical unit" in Bristol one of the speakers of which, utterly unable to answer Paine's *Age of Reason*, trotted out the age-old Christian lies about his death-bed "recantation." Even if he had recanted that would not, could not, make the Bible true; but few Christians can resist a good Christian lie.

One of his audience, Mr. J. E. Flowers, asked for evidence, and the reply by "Speaker" was given in the *Bristol Evening World* of July 17, his authority being "that eminent Quaker, Stephen Grellett," who takes good care, in any case, not to say that *he* heard Paine recant. Grellett's authority is a "Mary Roscoe," who looked after Paine in "his last hours."

Now, one of the great characteristics of these Christian evangelists, challenged about their lies, is that they cannot even spell Paine's name correctly. That prince of liars, the American Dr. Torrey, who came over to evangelise England and who was more or less kicked out when his lies were exposed, spelt it "Payne"; and so one is not surprised to find the Bristol evangelist, "Speaker," doing precisely the same thing. They also all share another characteristic—they quote "authorities" as if they knew all about them. I am fairly certain that "Speaker" knows nothing whatever about "that eminent Quaker, Stephen Grellett," except the quotation about Paine.

Seventy-five years ago, the *New York Observer* repeated the same old Christian lies about Paine's "recantation," and it was promptly challenged by Ingersoll, who offered 1,000 dollars in gold to anyone who could prove that Paine recanted.

Ingersoll's "Vindication of Thomas Paine" is one of his most trenchant pamphlets, and in it the reader will find just exactly how low the *Observer* had sunk, and how abjectedly it had to confess that Paine never recanted. It did its best to earn the money and dismally failed.

But the point to note is that if there had been the slightest truth in the Mary Roscoe yarn, the *Observer* would have triumphantly quoted it and claimed the 1,000 dollars. Instead, Ingersoll forced the pious journal to admit that Paine did *not* recant. To put it plainly, Mary Roscoe was an unmitigated Christian liar, and Dr. Moncure Conway, in his *Life of Thomas Paine*, points out regarding the stories of his "recantation": "Few souls are now so belated as to credit such stories; but my readers may form some conception of the mental condition of the community in which Paine died from the fact that such absurdities were printed, believed, spread throughout the world. . . . The controversy as to whether Mary was not a calumniator, whether orthodoxy was so irresistible that Paine must needs surrender at last to a servant girl; whether she was to be believed against her employer, who declared she never saw Paine at all . . . Such boiling up from the abysses, of vulgar credulity, grotesque superstition, such commanding illustrations of the Age of Unreason, disgusted thoughtful Christians." Disgusted thoughtful Christians? Did it?

Mary Roscoe was a Christian liar who never saw Paine at all, and many Quakers believed that "she indulged in opiates."

Ingersoll quotes eleven witnesses, including some well-known Quakers, all of whom testify that Paine did *not* recant. His biggest enemy was the lying and unscrupulous Cheetham, and even he knew nothing about the recantation, though he wrote a libellous biography of Paine. Neither did Dr. Manley, a Christian, who attended him on his last illness; nor did Amasa Woodsworth, who attended to Paine for six weeks before his death and was with him the last two days. The two Quakers, Willet Hicks and Elias Hicks, did their utmost to persuade the dying man to recant and utterly failed. But why go on? Does any Freethinker imagine such proof will have any effect on our good, pious "evangelists"? Their business is to do and lie, and when it comes to a good healthy lie, no one can beat a Christian. He will lie about the deathbed of Voltaire, or Bradlaugh, or Ingersoll, without a qualm. And when that is done, there are always the "elder statesmen" on *The Freethinker*. And it is all done for the glory of the Lord!

It is said that once one begins lying, even with a tiny lie, it requires many big ones to back it up. Is not that the case with Christianity?

H. CUTNER.

### PREHISTORIC ITALY

SCIENTIFIC studies have revealed that in Italy the human race has advanced much as it did in other so-called civilised countries. Dr. H. C. Scullard, in his very scholarly survey of the early Roman World (Methuen, 1951), observes that: "As the last great Glacial Period advanced, the mammoth and cave bear wrested the lordship of creation from elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, so the long-headed primitive hunters of the Old Stone Age appeared upon the stage which Nature was setting for them in Western Europe." But with the subsequent retreat of the ice-cap, and the return of temperate conditions, new tribes appeared who had progressed beyond the hunting and food-gathering peoples. These round-headed intruders cultivated the soil, domesticated animals, and their sickles and other rude agricultural implements, their pottery and other products ushered in the Neolithic or New Stone Age, whose polished artifices proved far more efficient than the coarse flint implements of their Palaeolithic predecessors. Then dawned the discovery of the malleability of metals, and copper largely superseded stone. Then this metal in its turn lost its pre-eminence when it was alloyed with tin and was thus converted into bronze, with its many advantages. Still, the art of metallurgy appears to have arisen in the nearer East, as the Bronze Age cultures of Crete and other Oriental regions suggest.

About 2,000 B.C., another race reached Italy who were also users of bronze, which they forged, whereas their predecessors had smelted it. Apparently they were a pastoral stock, who cremated their dead and used Indo-European dialects. Iron was becoming common soon after 1,000 B.C., and the horse was then employed. These invaders came from the north who initiated an orderly system more conspicuous in Italy than elsewhere.

Fragmentary as our knowledge is of prehistoric times in Italy, traces of Old Stone Age periods have been discovered in cave shelters in Liguria, in the environs of Rome, and in the Apennine area. The earliest settlement in the peninsula of any moment appears to have been that of a people who polished their stone implements and produced pottery. This Neolithic race seemingly arrived from North Africa, probably over the straits of Gibraltar, while others from Tunis settled in Sicily. Their culture appears to have been similar to that of the Maoris of New Zealand. Originally cave dwellers, they later lived in huts standing two or three feet below the level of the surface in forest clearings. The remains of these ancient habitations, or those of a kindred character, have been discovered in several Italian areas. Their inmates combined the chase with the breeding of livestock, including horses, sheep, pigs, asses, goats and cattle, but were apparently unacquainted with canine creatures. Their dead they buried in a contractual posture. Also, they possessed needles with an eyelet, which were obviously adapted for sewing garments.

In the Alpine regions were numerous lake dwellings reposing on wooden piles rising above water level. It is evident that prior to 2,000 B.C. lake dwellings existed "on the Italian lakes from Maggiore to Garda and even in the swampy districts of Venetia." Whether their inhabitants were members of the Mediterranean, or of the Alpine race, is problematical. But it seems fairly certain that by 2,000 B.C. they had been reinforced by immigrants from Central Europe as well as from Spain, probably across Sardinia, while others had settled in the valley of the Po. Excavations of a later date disclose pronounced improvements in the shaping and polishing of

stone artifices, while the use of metal appliances materially increased. Also, megalithic erections in Sardinia display remarkable skill, while rock-cut tombs, painted pottery and other memorials in Sicily arouse the wonder and admiration of the modern observer.

Much remains undiscovered, and aerial photography is constantly increasing our knowledge of prehistoric civilisations. We now know that from 1800 B.C. onwards there were further invasions from the region of the Danube which were apparently stimulated by, if they did not initiate, the Age of Bronze. But be this as it may, this period was one of primary importance. The newcomers were chiefly agricultural, but in all probability fishing and hunting were combined with farming. Our learned historian assures us that "the remains of flax, beans and two kinds of wheat have been discovered; cart-wheels have been found; the horse was widely used; and the dog, fowl and duck now shared the life of the farmyards. These peoples worked in wood, bone and horn and carried on textile and ceramic industries, while their advances in metallurgy were even more important. The northerners kept up a close connection with their original home and formed a channel between the Danube and Italy by which the culture of the Bronze Age spread southwards; thus they became an important link in the trade routes of Europe. But they were manufacturers as well as importers, and their products spread into central and even southern Italy."

The evolution of the Iron Age from that of Bronze can at present be outlined only. Still, an iron-using community was established at Villanova, near modern Bologna, at about 1,000 B.C., by a tribe that incinerated its dead. These Villanovians penetrated as far as Rimini, where their further extension was impeded by rival tribes. They were thus driven from Italy's eastern areas into Tuscany and Latium. But the northern Villanovians remained near Bologna for some 500 years, while those who had wandered southwards left their remains at the Forum at Rome at dates surmised, of the eleventh and twelfth century B.C.

By the eighth century B.C. Bologna had become a flourishing centre of industry and commerce, while the Villanovians resident in small rude southern villages appear to have been overthrown and exterminated or, possibly to some extent, intermixed, as a result of the Etruscan invasion. In any case, the Villanovians disappeared from view.

At the opening of the Iron Age, other kindred stocks settled in Italy whose metal work rivalled that of the Villanovians. So numerous are the names of these migrants that a map of ancient Italy would appear a medley. Interments, tools, weapons and inscriptions are about all that survive to guide the archaeologist in his researches. Thus, much remains conjectural. Yet it is certain that civilisations superior to that of prehistoric Rome—that of the Greek colonies in Sicily and Southern Italy and Etruscan culture itself—preceded the genius of Rome, that later established a world-wide dominion.

T. F. PALMER.

### HINDU MODERNISM

IF rational, scientific and critical study of history brought about the modernistic crisis in the Catholic Church, it was the onslaught of western ideals of political freedom, the discovery of the essential traits of India's cultural heritage and a close comparative study of other religions and cultures that brought about the Indian Renaissance which

was first heralded by Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833), that great Humanist and Rationalist, rightly called "The Father of Modern India." Whereas the Catholic Church fought against the modernistic ideas, excommunicated the leaders of Modernism, men like Alfred Loisy, George Tyrell and Earnesto Buonaiuti, imposed an anti-modernistic oath on all the clergy and office-bearers of the Church and drove the modernism-infected laity underground, the Hindu intelligentsia accepted the radical reforms advocated by the pioneers of the Indian Renaissance, which found its political expression in the Indian National Congress, its cultural and revivalist expression in the Brahmo and Arya Samajes, its esoteric shadow in the Theosophical Society and its social expression in various reformist organisations throughout the country.

Whereas the Modernistic Movement in the West, especially in the Roman Church, was crippled by the theologians of the medieval-minded Pope Pius X, in whose name was issued the encyclical: "Pascendi Dominici gregis," of 1907, followed by the propositions condemned in the decree, "Lamentabili sane exitu," and the all-sided tightening of screws and nuts of the organisational machinery of the Church, proof against further spreading of Modernism within the Church, in India Modernism went ahead, not underground, but fighting out in the open, leavening the thoughtful and intellectual members of the Hindu fold. This is because in Hinduism doctrinal difference ranging from the idealistic Monism of Vedanta down to the gross idolatry of the masses, undiluted materialistic Atheism of the *Charvakas* and Agnosticism of the Buddhists and Jains are accepted as part and parcel of Indian culture as a whole. Hindus lose caste and religion not because of their intellectual persuasions and propaganda but by transgressing certain social inhibitions and rules. In the broad Hindu tradition mind has remained free. In fact there is no heresy or heresiarch in the history of Indian religions in the sense that the Inquisition and Congregation of the Sacred Office in Rome understood it. None is persecuted, discredited or ostracised because of the honest conclusions one has arrived at as a result of study, thought or experience. But there is caste, sub-caste, out-caste and other social cancers, violation of which is considered serious. A Hindu may be an Atheist, but he should marry one within his own caste. Such is the intellectual broadness of Hindu thought and fetters of the Hindu society in which context we have to scrutinise the genesis and growth of Modernism in India.

The Hindu leviathan was asleep for centuries. Even the Muslim conquest and the subsequent political slavery and conversion of about one fourth of Hindus to the faith of the fanatical conquerors did not give the needed shock for the Hindu society to wake up from its slumber. But during the British period, the gradual process of degeneration of the Hindu society, brought about as a result of its slumber and treading the beaten track of castism and priestcraft and idolatry and self-conceited isolation, reached its climax when the intellectual and the representative Indians were confronted with the tremendous alternative: "to be or not to be." Survival of the basic essentials of Indian civilisation meant energetic action and radical reforms in religion, social adjustments, philosophy, political science and economic reforms. England, with her criminal non-intervention policy and subtle methods of consolidating the empire for the sole purpose of economic vantage, through her sins of commission and omission, contributed so much to the disintegration of Indian society. The disintegration was already there due to the inherent weakness and defects of the Indian society; but the British policy accelerated that downward trend of India. Prophetically

enough, and with uncanny acumen Karl Marx wrote in 1853:—

"All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests . . . in Hindustan did not go deeper than its surface. England had broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. The loss of his old world with no gain of a new one imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu and separates Hindustan ruled by Britain from its ancient traditions and from the whole of its past history."

This was a correct diagnosis of the disease which Indian society had fallen a victim to. The Indian intellectuals, who were largely the product of the educational policy advocated by Lord Macaulay, far from being clerks and "yes-men" to the British authorities, began to think out for themselves the reasons of their downfall, their weakness. European Rationalism and Freethought had already invaded the select groups of students in Indian universities. They found that it was difficult to turn the clock back. Mere revivalism of the old had no meaning to them, nor that senseless defence of rituals, ceremonials and priestcraft, and the age-old social canker, the caste system. They realised they had to move forward, if Hinduism is to survive as a people with a distinct culture of their own, with a unique contribution to the world fair of cultures.

ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM.

(To be concluded)

#### MRS. HARRIET LAW.—A NOTED BAPTIST WHO BECAME A FREETHINKER

THERE are few Freethinkers living to-day who remember Mrs. Harriet Law in the flesh and her activities on the Freethought platform. Formerly a leading Baptist of London, she was induced to attend a course of lectures on Freethought by Charles Watts at the Hall of Science. She did so and offered some opposition to the lecturer. After reading and studying Freethought literature and the arguments advanced she became convinced that the Bible was not true, and the Garden of Eden faded away, Adam and Eve fell back to dust, the snake crawled into the grass and Jehovah became a mythical character unworthy of the adoration of mankind. She joined the N.S.S. and became a lecturer. As she was well acquainted with the Bible and its teachings on the Christian side and this proved her a great asset anent the philosophy of Secularism.

In the North of England, especially in Newcastle, Hebburn, Jarrow and Tyneside, Sunderland, Chester-le-Street and mining districts of the County Durham she was a great favourite in the 70's of last century. To show her popularity a publican of Jarrow had a horse entered in a race at Newcastle, the Northumberland Plate (known as the Pitman's Derby), and named his horse "Harriet Law." On that great event being run amid thousands of spectators and great rejoicing "Harriet Law" won the Northumberland Plate.

Yes, Mrs. Harriet Law was a great worker for the cause of Freethought. When she passed away she was greatly missed. And after life's fitful fever she met the night of death as tranquil as a star meets morning.

"Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom  
In their dust."

JOSEPH CLOSE.

THOMAS PAINE AND THETFORD. Six postcards illustrating Paine's birth-town, including a portrait of the great reformer. Price 9d.; postage 1½d.

### ACID DROPS

The B.B.C. really must look out and not give Bible believers heart-rending shocks. The other day, one of its items of news was that a French expedition to Mt. Ararat failed to find the remains, intact or otherwise, of Noah's Ark—which had been definitely seen there by some Russian airmen as far back as 1917. Ever since, all true Christians and Jews have been urging expeditions not only for the purpose of confounding blatant infidelity, but also to prove conclusively that God's Precious Word is all Truth. Well, the Lord has been given his chance and failed on the two counts and blatant infidelity can now hold up its jeering head—and laugh!

All the same, what can be said of the mentality of people who believed the Russian airmen—that is, if they are not a myth—and who actually thought that the remains of Noah's Ark existed at all? No Bible story has been so much laughed at as the story of the Flood which has, of course, been riddled with criticism and the Ark and its inhabitants are now only real in children's toyshops. The solemn way in which the B.B.C. announced the failure of the Expedition almost showed it also regretted such a chance of confounding the Atheist—and that, anyway, even if the corpse had disappeared the story was true in every particular.

It was, we believe, a Christian who wrathfully exclaimed: "How these Christians love one another." The other day this was shown when four men were "ejected"—a polite way of saying kicked out—from a service at St. Paul's Church, Deptford, for objecting to the way in which God Almighty was being literally eaten as prescribed by Jesus Christ. The people who were thus "celebrating the Eucharist" as the ceremony is called and the people who do not believe that "our Lord" meant it literally, are all Christians and therefore all oppose that famous Christian injunction, "Love ye one another." It is astonishing how much hatred a simple pagan custom of eating one's God can divide true hearts.

Once again our psychic contemporary, *Psychic News*, has hit the headlines. It devotes its front page to an account of a ghost called Lord Henley who was chained up for 400 years and who couldn't communicate through a medium because, having been deprived of a tongue, he couldn't speak at first. However, he eventually managed to get a message through though speaking in medieval English; and the ghost found the medium's American accent also very trying. The ghost appeared rather uncertain that he had departed from this life but was very grateful to the medium for having freed him from his chains and given him his freedom to roam all over the spirit world in company with other spirits. It is an inspiring story, every word literally true—at least as true as Gospel!

On the other hand, Mr. Percy Wilson who is the President of the S.N.U., attacked as "eyewash" an instrument supposed to apply "electronics" to psychic phenomena which used "Zwaan rays." With these rays it was supposed to be a much easier task to get into touch with spooks—or ghosts whichever word is preferred. He once found that at a public demonstration when the apparatus was supposed to be giving out these electric Zwaan rays, it was not even attached to the electric mains. And it is we who are so often rebuked for declaring that ordinary believers are so easy to bamboozle.

Mr. Wilson even went so far as to criticise "the lack of scientific knowledge amongst Spiritualist speakers as being deplorable." He added, "Youngsters still at school could confound most of our exponents on the simplest matter of science." And to think that we have said something like this hundreds of times in this journal and from our platforms and have been sternly admonished.

He made one other observation which is worth reproducing. "He questioned the value of evidence produced in a dark seance; under those conditions it could never be satisfactory." The truth is, of course, in a dark seance anything can happen, and it generally does. But the "phenomena" has no more to do with "spirits" than it has with green cheese. Mr. Wilson believes in "spirits," but what he said at this meeting will not endear him to most other believers. Obviously, spirits must exist, otherwise what becomes of Spiritualism?

### MISCELLANEOUS THOUGHTS AND RECOLLECTIONS

IT is said—the source being the Bible—that the Prince of Darkness rules the world. Where then is God's Omnipotence?

People say that they would not want to live if they lost their religious beliefs. This is a fallacy. After quite a short time they would find themselves absorbed in the business of living as usual, and a lot of things which puzzled and worried them before would fall into place. Only neurotics or people who are overwhelmed by some tragedy kill themselves.

I am often extremely annoyed by the power of the stomach! Even if one's life is running in fairly smooth channels, no particularly knotty problems confront one in the immediate future, no keenly gnawing anxieties; in fact there is a no doubt brief, but pleasant, hiatus in the struggle of life, then the stomach frequently seems to say: "Ah ha! Now's my opportunity—I'll soon take that cheerful grin off her face." Why should the stomach have so much power over the spirits? And what do I mean when I say "the spirits"?

We are always taught that we can't be happy if we don't believe in the Christian religion. Would you say that a Christian woman who lost both her sons in the war, and whose little daughter was raped and murdered by a sex-maniac would be happier than an agnostic with plenty of the world's goods, and her family happily around her? Being a Christian saves you from none of the tragedies of life. Those who think otherwise are self-deceived.

I attended a wedding the other day. The clergyman said, in his sermon to the young pair: "There are those who believe that everything happens by chance, that these two young people just happened to meet during their war service, just happened to fall in love, and that they are standing before us now as man and wife purely, as it were, by accident. But Christians will know that the hand of God has been guiding them from the start, bringing them nearer and nearer together. . . ." etc., etc., *ad lib.*, *ad nauseum!* Then God has made a shocking lot of terrific blunders in his "bringings together," hasn't he?

D. CLISSOLD (Mrs.).

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

W. H. PARKE (author of *Salvation Without Saviours*).—Will you please let us have your address as soon as possible?

J. EFFEL.—Always pleased to hear from you. Please, however, note the last sentence in your last published article.

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

Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this 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

On Monday, September 1, Mr. Chapman Cohen celebrated his eighty-fourth birthday. We are sure our readers will echo the sentiments of a greetings telegram sent to him from this office, worded as follows: "Birthday greetings to a leader remembered with admiration and affection. *National Secular Society, The Secular Society Ltd., The Freethinker.*"

Next week's issue will contain a full report of the recent Brussels Congress of *The World Union of Freethinkers* by the Editor, who was present and participated in its discussions. Representatives of several English-speaking countries were present, besides a number of British visitors. The president of *The World Union*, Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, presided and also represented the R.P.A. Mr. F. A. Ridley represented the N.S.S., and the president of the Leicester Secular Society, Mr. G. A. Kirk, was also present as a visitor.

## THE BOOK OF SUPERSTITIONS

### I.

A BOOK on superstitions is needed, comprehensive if not exhaustive. The former would make it a large volume; the latter is unlikely if not impossible. Whoever compiles it will have an arduous task, long, of immense detail. The material is ample but scattered and often not easy of access. Its arrangement is a problem; the deductions to be drawn puzzling, requiring courage to follow out to their conclusions.

First the matter has to be collected, with the knowledge that superstitions lie about us thick as leaves in autumn. They may be half-forgotten or only half-believed, taken seriously or treated as jest, but they exist, awaiting examination.

Dead or extinct superstitions, multifarious to the extent of uncountability raise a problem in themselves. Perhaps it will be better to leave them, maybe for a future separate volume, a *History of Superstition*, and concentrate on the live ones.

Yet it is nearly impossible to say where and when a superstition ceases to be active or credited. Superstitious minds are so receptive as to be capable of accepting most

absurd or decayed beliefs. A further complexity is that pious people are apt to regard all religions except their own as superstitions. Some go further and dub all inside variants of their own religious belief as superstitions—or heresy.

The material will be collected from official and unofficial sources. The former are learned societies, like the Anthropological, and existing books bearing on the topic, beside periodicals such as "Folklore" and "Notes and Queries." Unofficially there are Women's Institutes, local historians and archeologists.

Invitations to the public to supply examples could be printed in the press, both in popular papers and intellectual ones. This publicity should bring thousands of responses, for superstitions abound, needing to be examined and exposed.

The compiler will have to classify them. There are those of infancy, as taking a new-born babe upstairs before down; not cutting his fingernails but biting them off. Similar ones are found concerning all ages till the child is grown up.

Other superstitions are plentiful. Most likely it will be from women more than men that the majority of examples are received. Homely medicaments and treatments are often more superstitious than practically efficacious.

Many superstitions turn on colours; also on numbers, from the simple one of thirteen being unlucky to the elaborate calculations of Pyramid measurements to establish prophecies. Linked with them are superstitions about days and other calendar features, as Friday being unlucky.

From the country the collector of superstitions may expect to reap a rich harvest. Those about weather and planting lore, as doing new operations in the waxing moon, are numerous.

Astronomical superstitions need a long chapter to themselves. For Astrology is far from being a spent force among simple credulous people. Charms, spells, amulets, mascots and belief in good and bad luck may be considered at the same time.

This brings up the whole field of fortune telling. By cards, tea leaves, palms of the hands, bumps on the cranium, gazing into crystal balls, horoscopes; many others will be recorded. The author at work on this will not be surprised to find lingering traces of witchcraft, wizardry, demonology and other medieval relics.

Superstitions about animals will loom large; cats, owls, horses, shrews, howling dogs; few domestic or wild creatures escape featuring in popular superstitions. Also the sea, shipping, fishing and other industries have their peculiar superstitions.

It may be necessary to analyse a vast list of reports of apparitions, wraiths, ghosts, vampires, supernatural warnings and events.

### II.

So far the majority may be classified as non-religious superstitions. Biggest problem will be the search for and possible discovery of their origins. Many have their roots thousands of years back, in irrational and unscientific communities. In short, most of our superstitions are vestigial. Others are more recent, some humorously so, as the gremlins of aviation.

Dryads, oreads, undines, all the paraphernalia of mythology, and possibly fairies and pixies, may have disappeared from popular belief, but much as little credible remains. Saints for every day in the year and dozens over; devotion to sacred relics; angels, cherubim and seraphim; devils; expecting answers to prayers; Sabbatarianism; spiritualism and miraculous occurrences linked with religion recur regularly.

All this the compiler of the book of superstitions will have to face boldly. Because superstition is the essence of religion he must investigate religions, Christian and other, as examples of large scale superstition in practice, often profitable practice for its professional advocates.

One of his surprises will be to find superstition not only established and endowed, but compulsory in governmentally-controlled institutions. In rate and state supported schools periods of religious instruction are officially ordered every week, with a daily act of public worship!

Thus, as through the B.B.C. and many other channels the churches hope to condition the minds of the people for receiving increasing doses of superstition.

Be it remembered the Bible is largely, mainly, a collection of superstitions.

Having disposed of the legendary figures of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and his Apostles, the final chapter will deal with the basis of modern superstition—the supposititious existence of God.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

### FREETHOUGHT AND TELEVISION

“STEAM RADIO,” to use the disparaging term now current for sound broadcasting, is becoming obsolete. In perhaps five years’ time it is reasonable to suppose that no more ordinary radio sets will be made, and the new TV sets, or at least their cabinets, will serve both sound and sight purposes. Objections will be raised and banished just as they were when talkies superseded movies.

The present objections to television are: (1) it rivets the viewer to one place, whereas sound radio allows the listener to move about the house; (2) it monopolises the attention so that nothing else can be done; (3) it hurts the eyes of some, and (4) chiefly, the programmes are bad. As regards (1) ordinary radio purposes will be provided for; (2) it is easy to switch off if something else is better worth doing; (3) only a very small percentage have eye trouble and it is remediable at the opticians; (4) the programmes are certainly worse than bad, comparing the actual with the possible, but in three years’ time there will be choice of wavelength. There may also be competition by private stations, but I am not hopeful for its quality.

The B.B.C. efforts at humour and entertainment are most lamentable, and devised, one would imagine, by teen-agers of the poorest quality. It gets by, of course, for many people remain teen-agers mentally all their lives.

The approaching obsolescence of exclusively sound broadcasting opens up a new problem for the Freethinker. How are we to meet up to the new developing situation? For many years Freethinkers have been protesting to the B.B.C. about the unfair privileges enjoyed by religion, and requesting a fair balance of time for our own point of view.

The Churches have already made use of the new TV medium, though not as yet on any great scale. When they have perfected their technique we shall see more of them. They have obviously an important initial advantage over us, in that a religious service, ornamented and embellished in its various ways, lends itself more readily to visual effect than just one Atheist talking.

In fact the straight lecture is never tried on television. Why should it be? It could add little to the sound medium, except the speaker’s face. A surgeon’s lecture, for instance, sees him with endless material at his disposal, perhaps a team of helpers, a subject, charts, diagrams, X-Ray photos and so on. Prof. Leakey, talking about his anthropological work in Kenya, produced, handled and used various primitive implements: this retains the interest of those who

might tire of mere academic discussion. Nothing merely abstract could be attempted successfully on television. Therefore a speaker propagating secularism, however effective he might have been on sound, could scarcely hope to compete on TV, at least in the estimation of the producer, and it is the latter powerful being we have to consider.

Thus, in a few years’ time, when we begin peppering the B.B.C. television authorities about adequate time for anti-religious programmes, we must have something acceptable to offer or to suggest.

What is it to be? I will make one or two suggestions in the hope that they may stimulate some interest in the matter among Freethinkers. My proposals are tentative and will serve their purpose if they give rise to better ones.

It seems to me, then, that our cause will best be served in the new broadcasting medium in three fields, namely, (a) Science, (b) Drama and (c) Discussion.

#### (a) SCIENCE.

A lecture series on evolution, for instance, with reconstructed missing links, pictures, specimens, film shots, and some questions and answers, would strike a blow at fundamentalism, which is still fairly widespread. And it would dissolve religious prejudices all the better for not being a specifically anti-religious programme. An avowed Atheist propagandist might lead the ignorant to suppose that evolution was no more than the personal opinion of Atheists. A series on the evolution of religious practices, showing pre-Christian parallels to contemporary ritual, would be a real eye-opener to many, and it is perhaps too sanguine to suppose it would be permitted, short of some radical social upheaval in advance of it. A little astronomy, too, would be a timely corrective for the religious conceit of an anthropocentric universe, with man the central figure of an ethically governed cosmos.

#### (b) DRAMA.

In this realm Salvationist propaganda has been put over already in *Cry Aloud Salvation!* It occurs to me that a most effective “screenworthy” play could be woven round the persecutions of Richard Carlile and his friends, taking only a few years’ time span. The lives of Paine and Bradlaugh would be more difficult to put over, being presumably fragmentary and episodic. On the other hand a fiction based on the general idea of the Bowman case offers most fascinating possibilities. However, these would be better not done at all than done badly, for there is nothing more dissatisfying than a good theme badly carried out. It seems that almost anyone can write a play and hardly anyone can write a good one. As a general criticism of TV plays I would say that all the good ones are old and all the new ones are bad. There are exceptions, of course, notably the brilliant Christopher Fry, whose *Lady’s not for Burning, etc.*, have aroused the most exciting speculations.

#### (c) DISCUSSION.

In the matter of debate and discussion it has been well established already that, without physical material of any sort, a small number of people of divergent views make a first-rate attraction. A political foursome, two Right versus two Left, in the programme *In the News*, is still immensely popular after several long spells. I see no reason why Christians versus Freethinkers should not also prove a success. And I believe most N.S.S. speakers would agree with me that the secularist speaker is at his best under fire. The same cannot be said of the average Christian.

These, then, are one or two avenues which I think we should now be probing, and I think they have far more

chance of acceptance than the requests for Freethought speakers on sound radio.

The B.B.C. sound monopoly will remain intact by the renewal of the charter on 1st July, but it is anticipated that there will eventually be some form of TV competition by private stations. It is decreed, however, that these latter should not include political or religious broadcasts, against which there will be a most effective "safeguard against abuse" in the form of a powerful controlling body. Their decisions as to what is religious propaganda would be arbitrary and final, and we may expect their ruling to be "elastic;" that is, they will stretch so as to favour religion and cut out Freethought. From the Freethought point of view, therefore, the B.B.C. itself, bad as it is, would seem to be the more pregnant source for exploring.

G. H. TAYLOR.

CORRESPONDENCE

THOMAS PAINE

SIR.—Recently I was on holiday in Norfolk and visited Thetford. I was delighted to find the high regard in which Thomas Paine was regarded. In the museum were seven portraits, with the following caption:—

"One of the most remarkable characters of the end of the 19th century. Quaker, staymaker, pamphleteer, philosopher, and philanthropist—a man who spent his life in an endeavour to help his fellow men and who died in poverty almost universally execrated and alone. Carlyle described him as 'Distinguished Paine, the rebellious Needleman.'"

In the same thoroughfare as this Museum (White Hart Street) there is the following tablet:—

"Journalist, patriot and champion of the rights of the common man, Thomas Paine, son of a humble Thetford staymaker was born near this house. From his talented brain came the voice for the democratic aspirations of the American republic through such splendid writings as 'Common Sense,' 'Crisis' and 'The Age of Reason.' Buried in New York, this simple son of England lives on through the ideals and principles of the democratic world for which we fight to-day.

In tribute to his memory and to the everlasting love for freedom embodied in his works, this plaque is gratefully dedicated through the voluntary contributions of soldiers of the American Air Force Group. October 21, 1943."

It is remarkable that "The Age of Reason" is mentioned and not "The Rights of Man" as the former is often repugnant to those to whom the latter is welcome.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KENT.

DOGMATISM AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR.—Re Mr. P. Turner's letter in July 6 issue, I have not said I disagree with his statement that "Life is idiotic—stupid." I suggested that his assertion indicated his *Belief*; but added that he could not *know* whether his thought was in conformity with Reality. Much the same may be said re Whence? Why? and Whither? We only know what people *think* about Origin, Purpose and Destiny. While opinions are so confused and contradictory, conclusive and truthful answers seem unattainable.—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

DON'T FORGET HE TOLD YOU SO

SIR.—Mr. Cutner's review of "The Next Million Years" recalls an amusing character in one of the full length cartoon films shown several years ago. This character, "Hoppity" by name, every time his friends were wrong and he right, drove home the point with the remark "Don't forget I told you so."

Thomas Robert Malthus' *Essay on the Principles of Population* has been in existence for one hundred and fifty-four years; Mr. Cutner's support for the Principles somewhat less, but in relation to *The Freethinker* at least thirty years. If we date the commencement of the next million years back to the date of Malthus' *Essay* quite a lengthy portion has still to run.

It would seem, therefore, that contrary to Mr. Cutner's opinion the Principles of Population have not yet been substantiated.

However, Mr. Cutner's jibes at "surplus value" and "the commodity" indicate the type of blinkers he wears when looking at the world with 999,846 years to go. Nevertheless, in certain "obscured" areas of the world, where "surplus value" and "the commodity" have been treated seriously, theory and practice have already fundamentally changed established conceptions of agriculture, horticulture, animal breeding and soil fertility.

Despite the weight of authority which accompanies the name of Darwin, it is not correct to assume that man's requirements are going to be the same in a thousand years, let alone a million, as they are to-day.

In proudly "telling us so" Mr. Cutner, I'm sure unwittingly, is providing justification for those who so recently were exhibiting their superiority in the gas chambers and incinerators of the German concentration camps. The principles of pessimism and woe restrain human progress as do those of *The Freethinker's* foe—religion.

Perhaps readers will be interested in the book "Land in Bloom" by A. V. Safonov, from Collets Bookshop, which gives some insight into that part of the world hidden by the blinkers.—Yours, etc.,

L. J. KEITH.

LUCRETIOUS

SIR.—Elderly, a war veteran, I pass the time now and then reading several languages, among them Latin. Now Lucretius is worth perusal by a freethinker seeing he was secular, and, to all intents and purposes, a freethinker; hence the Romans eyed him askance. The book I am translating at present is No. V *Inter alia*; I find in it humour and jocularly. I'll jot down a few lines in the Latin. Even if a person knows it not, he or she may take a glance at it and its translation—*esip*, as it were—quasi—of the house in ancient Rome.

Here is a line tipping off the citizens of that city at that time: "Motibus astrorum nunc qual si causa canamus." ("Now, we will sing what is the cause for the movements of the stars.")

Before going to the fun-making part, one cannot refrain from expressing surprise in regard to one thing. Some ancient Greeks and Romans thought that the sun and moon were only as large as they look to be to us mortals on the earth—the size of a round platter. Lucretius, in some lines, says so! Now, the basis for Latin words beginning with "Luc"—and they are many—is "Lun," which means "light." Well, Lucretius had no light—as seen in his poem, "The Nature of Things"—in regard to the size of the sun, and our satellite the moon, of course, "Luna," is small. Well, to look at the joke Lucretius made about her; I'll just give the translation as it seems to me: "And whether the make-believe moon lighting things up with her bastard beams" (My! That is rough on Mrs. Moon!) "she throws from her own carcass" (Good heavens! What language for a bard to utter!) "her own light" (which, of course, she does not, but those old-timers didn't know that) "in whatever way it is, she goes on her journey with a form no larger than it looks to be, the one we see with our eyes." It did not seem to occur to Lucretius that his 5 feet 10 inches, or 6 feet, of stature would not look to be 6 inches high a few hundred feet away from any onlooker.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE F. LAWS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- MR. J. CLAYTON'S Lectures. — Friday, September 5, 7-30 p.m.: Worsthorne. Sunday, September 7, 7 p.m.: Blackburn Market. Thursday, September 9, 7-30 p.m.: Padiham (Moor Lane).
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park). — Every Sunday evening, 7-30 p.m.: H. DAY.
- Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: J. M. ALEXANDER and F. A. RIDLEY. (Highbury Corner), Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, September 6, 7-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. WOOD and O'NEILL.

WANTED. — Copies of *God and His Book* and *Supernatural Religion*; any condition. Offers to Box 101, *The Freethinker*.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

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

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

## MISQUOTATIONS

A FEW years ago I sent a letter to *The Scotsman* against the claim that Christians originated hospitals. A hefty Scottish Professor of Greek, who also had opposed the Christian claim, called me in question for my statement that "Christian Fathers, like St. Ambrose, declared the precepts of medicine contrary to celestial science, watching and prayer," and, like Augustine, Origen, Tertullian, ascribed "all diseases of Christians to demons."

To *The Freethinker* readers I pass on the information given by the Greek Professor: "But to tax the Fathers with holding this to be the only origin of disease is absurd. Mr. Ross quotes so loosely that I have not been able to find the relevant passages in St. Ambrose or in Tertullian but Origen ("Hom. in Numeros," XVIII, 3) is emphatic that medicine is of Divine origin, like all sciences and arts. Elsewhere ("Hom. in Lucam," I, vol. III, p. 933, d. of Delarue's Benedictine edition) he reckons medicine among the applied sciences, and if, in expounding a Biblical passage (Hom. in Matth., XIII, 6) he upholds the demonic origin of some kinds of lunacy, his view is no further from the facts than the astrological theory which he there rejects.

St. Augustine, whose circle of friends included the physician Vindicianus, often speaks highly of doctors, as for instance (Enarr. in Psal. cii, 5) where he rather quaintly excuses their failures by pointing out that, as they did not create the human body, they cannot have perfect knowledge of it. His own view of the origin of disease was simply that of traditional Greek medicine, that it is the result of the elements which make up the body not being present in their right proportions. (See "Contra Julianum," v. 28.) Although holding, as he did, that man was created perfect, he is of opinion that if man had not sinned, such disproportions and consequent maladies would not exist."

I wrote him privately, and he very kindly replied to me: "You have been misled by a false reference. In Augustine, De Diuin. Daem., 3, whether you take the Louvain or the Benedictine numbering of the chapters, there is not a word about diseases. The only pertinent mention of the subject in the whole treatise (which I have just re-read, it is very short) is in ch. 9 and runs thus: "Accipiunt enim saepe potestatem et morbos immittere et ipsum aerem uitando morbidum reddere." [They (the demons) often get the power of sending diseases and of corrupting the atmosphere itself so that it becomes unwholesome.] That is, Augustine, like everyone else in those days, supposed that disease could be caused by the workings of an unfriendly supernatural power. In the very next chapter, he mentions in passing the natural and normal workings of disease and its symptoms."

When I acquainted one author, who had said "All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to these demons," he replied to me that he had accepted and copied Dr. Andrew D. White's "Warfare of Science with Theology," giving same reference as White gave. Dr. White in his "History of Warfare of Science with Theology," vol. II, p. 27, says: "All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to these demons; chiefly do they torment fresh-baptised Christians, yea, even the guiltless new-born infants"; White giving as his reference in note, p. 28: ("De Divinatione Dæmonium," ch. III, p. 585 of Migne, vol. XI.)

White quotes Origen: "It is demons which produce famine, unfruitfulness, corruption of the air, pestilences; they hover concealed in clouds in the lower atmosphere." White's reference, vol. II, 28, is to Contra Celsum, lib. VIII, chap. XXXI.

The same copier of White misled me in the only seeming-reference in a "documented record"; and I find, in another book, great prominence to two statements, viz.: "There is no historical evidence of a residence of Peter in Rome" when the reference in Encyc. Bib. gives not "Rome" but Babylon. The second statement, "Peter never was in Rome," I cannot find from the reference given.

The need to verify references still holds good for all.  
G. ROSS

## MORE THOUGHTS

Among the different views held by our religious teachers is the one regarding worldly goods and success. Many cite the example of Christ who extolled poverty and sought neither success or riches, and teach that it is wrong so to do. But some (including whole sects like the Christian Scientists) believe that religion (their own particular brand, of course!) will give you everything you want—including money. They quote "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and the rest shall be added unto you." Fair enough. You could, if you liked, and thought it worth while, retort with the "rich man and eye of a needle" story—or "Blessed are the poor!" An army padre the other day, preaching to the troops, taught how virtue brings a worldly reward in this way. "If when you get your pay, instead of spending it at once on cigarettes, beer, football pools, etc., you put it in the Post Office, later on when you need it, perhaps to get married, or some other good purpose, it will have accumulated and you will find yourself in a comfortable position. This will show you how spiritual virtues, in this case, thrift, will bring good rewards even in our earthly life."

Well, well, well, did I hear someone say, "Take no thought for the morrow"?

I read recently of a man who was dismissed from his post as Master of Foxhounds because of cruelty to a fox. Interviewed afterwards, he said, "This finishes me, *my whole life was hunting.*" What an epitaph that suggests! It is reminiscent of the well-known example of cynicism: "It's a pity she's dead, she waltzed rather well."

D.C.

## HAPPY MEDIUM

My address is "The Villa," The Villas,

I'm a "Villaness," you may suppose;  
I give you a chance when I run a séance—  
To learn how the Summerland goes.

I know several stunts with a cheese-cloth,  
I'm choc-full of conjuring tricks;  
And I point with due pride, to my Hottentot "guide,"  
Who never fails me in a fix.

I know all the Other World's mazes,  
I carry its map in my head; ;  
If I ever get lost, I don't "give up the ghost,"  
But just "try a new one" instead.

If you'd speak with your own dear departed,  
I'll make you a handsome concession;  
As money's got tighter, and business is lighter—  
I'm down to a guinea per session.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.