SOME NEW BOOKS.

A History of Free Thought.

We referred at some length not long ago to the influence of British rationalism on British literature as it is depicted in the two volumes of Mr. Haldane's interesting book. The rationalism with which Mr. Haldane dealt was mainly that of the nineteenth century. The work to which we would now invite attention may almost be said to stop where Mr. Haldane began, for the record of speculative philosophy in the nineteenth century is outlined with relative brevity in the two volumes collectively entitled *A Short History of Free Thought, Ancient and Modern*, by JOHN M. ROBERTSON (Putnams). It is the second edition, revised, corrected and materially enlarged, of Mr. Robertson's disquisition that we have before us. The first edition, originally planned as a mere sketch, reproducing a course of lectures, was open to so much criticism on the score of omissions that the author, on retrospect, determined to rewrite the work before reissuing it. That it is still an inadequate survey of a vast field he is himself the first to admit. The scheme, even when limited as far as may be by a tolerably strict definition, involves some approach to a conspectus of the history of human progress on the side of the intellectual life, and the immensity of the undertaking may be inferred from the fact that the late Lord Acton, a prodigy of erudition, who spent many years of his life in gathering materials for a "History of Liberty," which would practically have included a history of free thought, died without beginning to compile it. With that discouraging precedent in mind our author was led to deem it better to put forth even a slight record of a connected kind, written from a sociological standpoint, than to wait for the advent of one who should unite with Lord Acton's learning and more untrammelled sympathies the productive industry of the hardly less learned Mr. Lea of Philadelphia. After all, a concise history, which, rightly conceived, is a different thing from the epitomes denounced by Bacon, has advantages of its own, and Mr. Robertson has striven to guard somewhat against the obvious disadvantages by a habitual citation (in foot notes) of authorities and by the frequent brief discussion, in paragraphs printed in smaller type—which can be skipped by the unleisured reader—of disputed and theoretical matter.

Limited in space as he was by his design, the author necessarily has found it difficult to set up a definite standard of inclusion and exclusion. He says in a preface that looking back he is conscious of some anomalies. It would have been on some counts, for instance, not inappropriate to name as a practical free thinker Leonardo da Vinci, who struck out new paths in so many lines of science. Yet on the other hand "one might be accused of straining the evidence in claiming as a free thinker a man not known to have avowed any objection to the teaching of the Church. Difficulties arise also in the case of such a writer as Cardan, who figured for orthodox apologists as a free thinker but who to us seems to make more for credulity than for rational doubt, and in the case of such a writer as the pro-ecclesiastical Campanella, who, while writing against atheism, and figuring only in politics as a disturber, reasons on various issues in a rationalistic sense." Mr. Robertson, on his part, does but press the difficulty of drawing the line and cheerfully admits that his own work offers ground for criticism on the score of being at once too exclusive and too comprehensive. Such strictures can hardly be avoided. We are reminded that Paulus, a professed rationalist, fought for the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the very year in which Tholuck, a reconverted Evangelical, gave up the Pauline authorship as hopeless; that when Schleiermacher, a believer in inspiration, denied the authenticity of the Epistle to Timothy the rationalist Wegscheider opposed him and that Eichhorn, a species of rationalist, maintained the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch long after the supernaturalist Vater had disproved it. Analogous anomalies are noted in the book before us, but the author does not pretend that all, even of the prominent cases of incidental free thinking on the part of the nominally orthodox, are recorded; neither does he profess to be able to detect all the cases of undue conservatism among self-styled free thinkers. The utmost that he has tried to do is to note the general movement.

I.

What is meant by the term "free thought"? It is pointed out in an introduction that the words "free thinking" and "free thinker" first appear in English literature about the end of the seventeenth century. They seem to have originated there and then, as we do not find them earlier in French or in Italian, the only other modern literatures wherein the phenomena for which the words stand had previously risen. The title of "atheist," indeed, had been from time immemorial applied to every shade of serious heresy by the orthodox, as when the early Christians were so described by the image adoring polytheists around them; so, too, in Latin Christendom with the term *infidelis*, the *apistos* of the New Testament, which, primarily applied to Jews and pagans, was easily extensible, as in the writings of Augustine, to all who challenged articles of ordinary Christian belief, all the infidels or "faithless" alike being regarded as consigned to perdition. The label of "deist," presumably self-applied by the bearers, began to come into use in French about the middle of the sixteenth century; and that of "naturalist," also presumably chosen by those who bore it, grew into currency about the same time. Apart from these terms, those commonly used in French in the seventeenth century were *esprit fort* and *libertin*, the latter being used in the sense of a religious doubter by Corneille, Molière and Bayle. Thus Mme. de Sévigné, writing to her daughter, says: "*Je suis libertine plus que vous.*" By Englishmen as late as Elizabeth's reign the term "infidel" was commonly used as if it signified only a Jew or a heathen or a Mohammedan; it is used exclusively in that sense by the pre-Shakespearian poets and dramatists and by Shakespeare himself, as well as by Milton in his verse. In prose, on the other hand, Milton uses the term in the modern sense. It was at times used in prose even by early Elizabethans.

Of course, in England, as in the rest of Europe, the phenomenon of free thought had existed in specific forms long before it could express itself in propagandist writings or find any generic name save that of atheism or infidelity. In 1670, however, Spinoza devoted a famous tract to the advocacy of *libertas philosophandi* (freedom of philosophizing) and such a work necessarily had a general European influence. In Mr. Robertson's opinion it was probably in consequence of such express assertions of the need and value of freedom in the mental life that the name free thinker came into English use in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In the meantime the word rationalist, which in English tended latterly to become the prevailing name for a free thinker, had made its appearance without securing much currency. We meet with it, for example, in a London newspaper as early as 1646 and in 1661 the name *rationalista* is applied to a Socinian or deist. Between 1680 and 1715 the term rationalist is used to label rationalizing Christians, but as a name for opponents of orthodox religion it was for the time superseded in English by free thinker. The first certain instance thus far noted of the use of the term free thinker is in a letter of Molyneux to Locke dated in 1697 wherein Toland is spoken of as a "candid free thinker." It was not till 1713, however, that Anthony Collins's "Discourse of Free Thinking" gave the word a wide notoriety and brought it into established currency with the normal significance of deist, Collins having repudiated atheism entirely.

There seems, then, to be no doubt that at this time of day the term "free thought" must be acknowledged to possess prescriptive standing, as having no more drawbacks than have most other names for schools of thought or attitudes of mind, and as having been admitted into most European languages. The question begging element in it is not greater than it is in many other terms of similar intention, such as "rationalism," and it incurs no such charge of absurdity as lies against the invidious religious term "infidelity." For practical purposes our author would define "free thought" as a conscious reaction against some phase or phases of conventional or traditional doctrine in religion—on the one hand a claim to think freely in the sense, not of disregard for logic, but of special loyalty to it, on problems to which the past course of things has given a great intellectual and practical importance; on the other hand, the actual practice of such thinking. Mr. Robertson holds that this sense of the term, which is substantially agreed on, will on one or another side sufficiently cover those phenomena of early or rudimentary free thinking which were the guides of simple concrete opposition to given doctrines or systems, whether by way of special demur or of the obtrusion of a new cult or doctrine.

II.

In a chapter on "Primitive Free Thought" attention is directed to the enormous hindrance offered to critical thinking in the primary stages of culture by the mere force of habit. According to Tylor, a leading anthropologist, "the savage by no means goes through life with the intention of gathering more knowledge and framing better laws than his fathers. On the contrary, his tendency is to consider his ancestors as having handed down to him the perfection of wisdom, in which it would be impiety to make the least alteration. Hence among the lower races there is obstinate resistance to the most desirable reforms, and progress can only force its way with a slowness and difficulty which we of this century can hardly imagine." In the long stage of lower savagery, then, the only approach to free thinking that would seriously affect general belief would presumably be exhibited by the very credulity which gave foothold to religious beliefs to begin with. That is to say, without anything in the nature of general criticism of stories or doctrines, one of them might to some extent supersede another, in virtue of the relative gift of persuasion or personal weight of the propounders. Up to a certain point, persons with a turn for myth or ritual making would compete, and might even call in question each other's honesty, as well as each other's inspiration.

It is true that since the rise of scientific hierology there has been a disposition among students to take for granted the good faith of early religion makers and to dismiss entirely that assumption of fraud which was so long made by Christian writers concerning the greater part of every non-Christian system. Mr. Robertson, for his part, however, while conceding that some of the early deists and others have probably exaggerated the amount of deliberate deceit involved in the formation of religious systems, is inclined, nevertheless, to believe that "priestcraft" is a demonstrable factor in the process. Anthropological evidence suggests that while religion clearly begins in primordial fear and fancy, wilful fraud must to some extent have entered into all religious systems alike, even in the period of primeval credulity, were it only because the credulity was so great.

We are reminded that Thirlwall, one of the most judicial and sympathetic of the Christian scholars who have written the history of Greece, treats as unquestionable the view that alike in pagan and Christian cults "priestcraft" has been "fertile in profitable devices, in the invention of legends, the fabrication of relics and other modes of imposture," and that Tiele, the leading hierologist of the last generation, pronounces decisively as to an element of intentional deceit in the Koran making of Mohammed—a judgment which, if upheld, can hardly, in our author's opinion, fail to be extended to some portions of all other sacred books. "However that may be, we have positive evidence that wilful fraud enters at times into the doctrines of contemporary savages, and if we can point to deliberate imposture alike in the charm mongering of contemporary negroes and in the sacred bookmaking of the higher historical systems, it seems reasonable to surmise that conscious deceit, as distinguished from childlike fabrication, would chronically enter into the talemaking of primitive men, as into their simpler relations to each other." But, given the tendency to deceit among primitive folk, distrust and detection in a certain number of cases would presumably follow, constituting a measure of simple scepticism.

By force partly of this and partly of sheer instability of thought early belief would be apt to subsist for ages, as that of contemporary African tribes does now, in a state of flux. On that view systems which are supposed to represent in the fullest degree the primeval spontaneity of religion may have been in part priestly reactions, organized against habits of freedom, accompanied by a certain amount of scepticism. We seem, at least, to have the evidence of the Rig-Veda itself, that in the remote period when it was being collected there were deniers of the existence of its gods. Taking the phenomena all along the line of social evolution, our author finds himself led to the generalization that the rationalistic tendency, early or late, like the religious tendency, is a variation which prospers at different times in different degrees, relatively to the favorableness of the environment.

It certainly is no mere surmise that individual savages and semi-savages in our own time vary at times toward disbelief in the supernaturalism of their fellows. To say nothing of the rational scepticism exhibited by the Zulu converts of Bishop Colenso, which was the means of opening his eyes to the incredibility of the Pentateuch, or of the rationalism of the African chief who debated with Sir Samuel Baker the possibility of a future state, we have the express missionary record that the forcible suppression of idolatry and taboo, and the priesthood, by King Rihoriho in the island of Hawaii in 1819, was accomplished not only "before the arrival of any missionaries," but on purely common sense grounds and with no thought of furthering Christianity, though the King had heard of the substitution of Christianity for the native religion by Pomare in Tahiti. Rihoriho simply wanted to save his wives and other women from the cruel pressure of the taboo system and to divert the priests' revenues to secular purposes; and he actually had some strong support on the part of the more enlightened members of the priesthood. Our author is convinced, however, that, had not the missionary propaganda soon followed, the old worship, which had been desperately defended in battle at the instigation of the more conservative priests, would in all probability have grown up afresh, though perhaps with modifications. Mr. Robertson's conclusion is that the savage and semi-savage social conditions, taken as a whole, are fatally unpropitious to rationalism. All the facts together entitle us to decide that religion, though itself only a variation, is yet the variation that has chiefly flourished by reason of its adaptation to the prevailing environment. This is a decision far from equivalent to the acceptance as scientific of the formula which, even in the face of the rapidly spreading rationalism of the more civilized nations, still affirms supernaturalist belief to be a universal necessity of the human mind.

III.

In a chapter dealing with the progress of free thought under ancient religions the author points out that of all the ancient Asiatic systems that of China yields the first clear biographical trace of a practical rationalist, albeit a rationalist stamped somewhat by Chinese conservatism. Confucius (B. C. 551-478) is a tangible person, despite some mythic accretions; whereas Zarathustra and Buddha are but doubtful possibilities, and even the less legendary Chinese sage Lao-Tsze (said to have been born B. C. 604) is elusive. Mr. Robertson holds it to be evident that before Confucius there had been in China a slackening in religious beliefs among the governing classes. As regards the worship of ancestors, indeed, there is extant a record of a display of disregard for it by the lords of Lu in Confucius's time and, according to Legge, the general attitude of Confucius himself, religious only in his adherence to old ceremonies, is incompatible with a devout environment. It has been disputed whether he makes a "sceptic denial of any relation between man and a living God"; but the same authority (Legge) who disputes this, complains that his "avoiding the personal name of Ti, or God, and only using the more indefinite term Heaven," suggests "a coldness of temperament and intellect in the matter of religion." He was, indeed, above all things a moralist and, concerning the spirits in general, he taught that "to give one's self to the duties due to men and, while respecting spiritual beings, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom." He would never express an opinion concerning the fate of souls or encourage prayer; and in his redaction of the old records he seems deliberately to have eliminated mythological expressions.

In the slightly earlier Lao-Tsze ("Old Philosopher"), the founder of Taoism, our author would recognize another and more remarkable early free thinker of a different stamp, in some respects much less conservative and of an intellectual cast markedly more original. "Where Confucius was an admirer and student of antiquity, Lao-Tsze expressly put such concern aside, seeking a law of life within himself in a manner suggestive of much Indian and other Oriental thought. So far as our records go he is the first known philosopher who denied that men could form an idea of Deity, that being the infinite; and he evolved, avowedly by way of makeshift only, the idea of a primordial and governing reason, closely analogous to the Logos of later Platonism." Mr. Robertson goes on to say that since the same idea is traceable in more primitive forms, alike in the Babylonian and Brahmanic systems, it is arguable that Lao-Tsze may have derived it from one of these sources. The problem, however, is very obscure. In any case his system is rationalistic pantheism.

The Golden Rule, as formulated by Confucius, "do *not* that which ye would *not* have done unto you," is, we are told, a condensation on his part of doctrine he found in the older classics. As against Lao-Tsze, he maintained the practical form of the principle of reciprocity. The older man, like some later teachers, preached the rule of returning kindness for evil; but Confucius, dealing with human nature as it actually is, argued that evil should be met by justice, and kindness with kindness; else the evil were as much fostered as the good. A regret is expressed in the book before us that Christian writers should keep up the form of condemning Confucius for a teaching the practice of which is normally possible, and as a matter of fact is never transcended in their own Church, where the profession of returning good for evil merely constitutes one of the great hypotheses of civilization. Of Mencius (B. C. 372-289), the greatest disciple of Confucius, we are told that "in his teachings the religious element retires still further into the background than in his master's; and he is memorable for his insistence on the remarkable principle laid down by Confucius that "the people are born good," that they are the main part of the State, and that it is the ruler's fault if they go astray. Moreover, Mencius, who as a sociologist excels in our author's opinion not only Lao-Tsze but Confucius, put his finger on the central force in Chinese history when he taught that: "It is only men of education who, without a certain livelihood, are able to maintain a fixed heart. As to the people, if they have not a certain livelihood it follows that they will not have a fixed heart." Lao-Tsze on his part had gone in the opposite direction to the length of prescribing that the people should not be instructed.

On the whole Mr. Robertson deems it not going too far to say that no ancient people produced sane thinkers and scientific moralists earlier than the Chinese. "Centuries before our era China had a rationalistic literature, an ethic no less earnest and far more sane than that of the Hebrews, and a line of known teachers as remarkable in their way as those of ancient Greece, who flourished about the same period." He adds: "But where even Greece, wrought upon by all the other cultures of antiquity, ultimately retrograded till under Christianity it stayed at a Chinese level of unprogressiveness for a thousand years, isolated China, helped by no neighboring culture adequate to the need, has stagnated as regards the main mass of its life despite some political and other fluctuations till our own day."

IV.

In the chapter on "Relative Free Thought in Israel" what the author has to say about the books of Job and Ecclesiastes will be found particularly interesting. As to the time when the original form of the Book of Job was composed—400 lines in the matter of the present Hebrew version seem to have been added after the Septuagint translation was made—Renan's dating of the book six or seven centuries before Ecclesiastes is pronounced oddly uncritical. Our author concurs with Dr. Dillon in holding that it must be dated after Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Cornill even ascribes it to the fourth or third century B. C. Some details in the book suggest the possible culture influence of the Himyarite Arabs, who had reached a high civilization before 500 B. C. It is pointed out that not only the Authorized but the Revised version is false in the sense "I know that my Redeemer liveth," the perversion of the Hebrew original dating from Jerome. The probable meaning is given in Dr. Dillon's translation: "But I know that my avenger liveth." The original expressed a complete disbelief in a future life.

What marks off the Book of Job from all other literature is, of course, its dramatic and reflective handling of the ethical problem of theism, which the Prophets either evade or dismiss by declamation against Jewish sin. Our author would not pretend that the problem is solved in Job, where the rôle of Satan is an inconclusive resort to the Persian dualistic solution, and where the Deity is finally made to answer Job's free thinking by "sheer literary thunder much less ratiocinative, though far more artistic, than the theistic speeches of Job's friends." He submits, nevertheless, that "at least the writer or writers of Job's speeches consciously grasp the issue; and the writer of the epilogue evidently felt that the least Yahweh could do was to compensate a man whom he had allowed to be wantonly persecuted. The various efforts of ancient thought to solve the same problem will be found to constitute the motive power in many later heterodox systems, theistic and atheistic."

Mr. Robertson thinks that in certain aspects the Book of Job speaks for a further reach of early free thinking than is seen in Koheleth (Ecclesiastes), which latter book, however, at its lowest level of conviction, tells of an unbelief that could not be overborne by any rhetoric. Koheleth unquestionably derives from late foreign influences. By an increasing number of students, though not yet by common critical consent, the book is dated about 200 B. C., when Greek influence was stronger in Jewry than at any previous time. "The thought of the book is, as Renan says, profoundly fatigued, and the sombre avowals of the absence of divine moral government are ill balanced by sayings, probably interpolated by other hands, averring an ultimate rectification even on earth. What remains unqualified is the deliberate rejection of the belief in a future life, couched in terms that imply the currency of the doctrine; and the deliberate caution against enthusiasm in religion."

Attention is here called to various traces in other books of the Old Testament of the same species of tired or stoical semi-rationalism among the Jews of the Hellenistic period. Even earlier, namely, in the Book of Malachi, which is commonly dated about 400 B. C., there is angry mention of some who ask, "Where is the God of Judgment?" and say, "It is vain to serve God"; even as others, according to Jeremiah, had said it in the days of Syrian oppression. The opening verses of the thirtieth chapter of the book of Proverbs attributed to Agur, who has been called a Hebrew Voltaire, are admittedly the expression of a sceptic's conviction that God cannot be known, the countervailing passages being plainly the additions of a believer. Agur's utterances probably belong to the close of the third century B. C. Here, as in Job, there are signs of Arab influence, but at a later period the main source of scepticism for Israel was doubtless the Hellenistic civilization.

Of Greek or other atheism, however, there is no direct trace in the Hebrew literature; and the rationalism of the Sadducees, who constituted substantially the priestly party, was, like the rationalism of the Brahmans and the Egyptian priests, something esoteric and withheld from the multitude. So far, indeed, as the literature shows, save for the confused Judaic-Platonism of Philo of Alexandria, there is practically no rational progress in Jewish thought after Koheleth, till the time of contact with revived Greek thought in Saracenic Spain. In the usual way the mass of the people are found gravitating to the fanatical and superstitious levels of the current creed. None of the more rationalistic writings in the Hebrew canon seems ever to have counted for much in the national life. "The anti-sacrificial and universalist teachings in the Prophets and in the Psalms never affected, for the people at large, the sacrificial and localized worship at Jerusalem, though they may have been esoterically received by some of the priestly or learned class there, and though they may have promoted a continual exodus of the less fanatical type, who turned to other civilizations." Nor, in our author's opinion, can it even be said that the learned rabbinical class carried on a philosophic tradition, while the indigent multitude discredited their creed.

V.

Some eighty pages of the author's first volume are devoted to "Free Thought in Greece." It is well known that the Greeks varied from the general type of culture evolution seen in India, Persia, Egypt and Babylon and approximated somewhat to that of ancient China, in that their higher thinking was done not by an order of priests pledged to cults but by independent laymen. "In Greece, as in China, this line of development is to be understood as a result of early political conditions—in China, those of a multiplicity of independent feudal States; in Greece, those of a multiplicity of city-States * * * Such conditions prevented the growth of a priestly class or organization. Neither China nor pagan Greece was imperialized till there had arisen enough of rationalism to prevent the rise of a powerful priesthood, and the later growth of a priestly system in Greece in the Christian period is to be explained in terms, first, of a positive social degeneration, accompanying a complete transmutation of political life, and, secondly, of the imposition of a new cult on the popular plane, specially organized on the model of the political system that adopted it."

It is in the great progressive period of Greek thought that the possible gains from the absence of a priesthood are displayed most strikingly. For the Greek speaking world in general there was no dogmatic body of teaching, no written code of theology and moral law, no sacred books. The two great epopees ascribed to Homer had a certain Biblical status, and the bards who recited them did what in them lay to make the old poetry the standard of theological opinion. They lacked organized influence, however, and could not hinder higher thinking. The special priesthood of Delphi, wielding the oracle, could maintain their political influence only by holding their function above all apparent self-seeking, or effort at domination. There were only needed then such civic conditions as should evolve a leisured class with a tendency toward study to make possible a growth of lay philosophy. These conditions first arose in the Ionian cities, because there first did Greek citizens attain commercial wealth as a result of adopting the older commercial civilizations, of whose maritime urban entrepôts they took possession

There it was that in matters of religion and philosophy the comparison of their own local cults and myths with those of their foreign neighbors first provoked their critical reflection as the age of primitive warfare passed away. There it was, accordingly, that on a basis of primitive Babylonian science there originated with Thales of Miletus in the early part of the sixth century B. C. the higher science and philosophy of the Greek speaking race. "Thales was thus in the direct sphere of Babylonian culture before the conquest of Cyrus, and his Miletian pupils or successors Anaximandros and Anaximenes stand for the same influences. Herakleitos, in turn, was of Ephesus, an Ionian city in the same culture sphere; Anaxagoras was of Klazomenai, another Ionian city, as had been Hermotimos, of the same philosophic school. The Eleatic school, founded by Xenophanes, and carried on by Parmenides and the elder Zeno, come from the same matrix, Elea having been founded by exiles from Ionian Phokaia on its conquest by the Persians, and Pythagoras, in turn, was of the Ionian city of Samos, in the same sixth century. Finally, Protagoras and Democritos were of Abdera, an Ionian colony in Thrace; Leukippos, the teacher of Democritos, was either an Abderite, a Miletian or an Elean, and Archelaos, the pupil of Anaxagoras and a teacher of Socrates, is said to have been a Miletian." We are reminded that Wellhausen has spoken of the rise of philosophy on the "threatened and actual political annihilation of Ionia," as corresponding to the rise of Hebrew prophecy on the menace and the consummation of the Assyrian conquest. Mr. Robertson admits that as regards Ionia this may hold true in the sense that the stoppage of political freedom threw men back on philosophy, as happened later at Athens; but he would have us note that Thales philosophized before the Persian conquest.

From the mere second hand and often unintelligent statements which are frequently all we have in the case of Thales, the father of Greek philosophy, it is hard to make sure of his system, but that it was pantheistic and physicist seems clear. The phrase attributed to him, that "all things are full of God," clearly meant that in his opinion the forces of things inhered in the cosmos, and not in personal powers, who spasmodically interfered with them. For the rest, he speculated in meteorology and in astronomy, and is credited with having predicted a solar eclipse—a clear proof of his knowledge of Chaldean science—and with having introduced geometry into Greece from Egypt. He was one of the many early moralists who, in one form or another, laid down the golden rule as the essence of the moral law. Our author suggests that with his maxim "Know Thyself" he seems to mark a new departure in ancient thought, the balance of energy being shifted from myth and theosophy and poesy to analysis of consciousness and the cosmic process.

VI.

From this point the progress of Greek rationalism was continuous, despite some local reactions, till the Roman Conquest, Miletos long figuring as a principal source of scepticism. Anaximandros, pupil and companion of Thales, was, like him, an astronomer, geographer and physicist. We find him seeking for a "first principle" (for which he invented the name); affirming an infinite material cause, without beginning and indestructible, together with an infinite number of worlds, and—again showing the Chaldean impulse—speculating curiously on the descent of man from something aquatic, as well as on the form and motion of the earth (figured by him as a cylinder), the nature and motions of the solar system, and thunder and lightning. It may be doubtful whether, as affirmed by Eudemus, he taught the doctrine of the earth's motion, but the derivation of this doctrine from the Babylonian schools of astronomy is so probable that, in our author's judgment, it may have been accepted in Miletos in the first half of the sixth century B. C.

It is after some two generations of persistent questioners of nature have passed away that we encounter in Herakleitos of Ephesus, who flourished about 500 B. C., a positive and unsparing criticism of the prevailing beliefs. Though doubt attaches to some of his sayings, and even to his date, there can be small question that he was mordantly free thinking, though a man of royal descent. "No thinker among the Ionians left a deeper impression than he of massive force and piercing intensity; above all the other gnomic utterances of his age his have the ring of character and the edge of personality. The gossiping Diogenes, after setting out by calling him the most arrogant of men, concedes that the brevity and weight of his expressions are not to be matched." He has stern sayings about "bringing forth untrustworthy witnesses to confirm disputed points" and about "eyes and ears being bad witnesses for men whose souls lack understanding." "What can be seen, heard and learned, this I prize" is one of his declarations; and he is credited with condemning book learning, as having failed to give wisdom to Hesiod, Pythagoras and others. From his cryptic utterances it may be gathered that he, like Thales, was a pantheist and from his insistence on the immanence of strife in all things, as from other sayings of his, that he was of the Stoic mood. "It was doubtless in resentment of immoral religion that he said Homer and Archilochos deserved flogging and that he was severe on the phallic worship of Dionysos, on the absurdity of prayer to images and on popular pietism in general." His saying, "Character is a man's dæmon, or guardian angel," seems to be the definite assertion of rationalism in affairs, as against the creed of special providences.

While free thought, however, was travelling so much faster in Ionia than in the Greek motherland, it was travelling faster still in the colonies planted from Ionia in Italy and Thrace. To the city of Elea, founded on the western Italian coast by Phokaians, seeking a new home after the Persian conquest, came Xenophanes of Colophon, likewise seeking freedom. His Ionic pantheism expressed itself in an attack on anthropomorphic religion, no less direct and much more ratiocinative than that of any Hebrew prophet upon idolatry. "Mortals," he wrote, "suppose that the gods are born, and wear man's clothing, and have voice and body. But if cattle or lions had hands, so as to paint therewith and make works of art as men do, they would paint their gods and give them bodies like their own—horses like horses, cattle like cattle." On Homer and Hesiod, the myth singers, his assault was no less resolute. "They attribute to the gods all things that with men are of ill fame and blame; they recount of them countless nefarious things—thefts, adulteries and deception of each other." When the Eleans, somewhat shaken by such criticisms, asked him whether they should sacrifice or merely sing a dirge to Leukothea, the child bereft sea goddess, he bade them not to sing a dirge if they thought her divine, and not to sacrifice if she were human. "Beside this ringing radicalism, not yet out of date, the physics and philosophy of the Eleatic free thinker are less noticeable, the physics being weak, though the philosophy was not unsubtle nor unoriginal; but it is interesting to find him reasoning from fossil marks that what is now land was once sea covered, and had been left mud; and that the moon was probably inhabited." With all this alertness of speculation, however, Xenophanes sounded the note of merely negative scepticism, which, for lack of fruitful scientific research, was to become more and more common in Greek thought. "No man," he avowed in one verse, "knows truly anything, and no man ever will."

Apparently a limit was soon set to free speech, even in Elea; and the Eleatic school later in the hands of Parmenides, Zeno and Melissos of Samos and their successors turned, first to deep metaphysics, and then to verbal dialectics, to discussion on being and not being, the impossibility of motion and the frivolous problem of Achilles and the tortoise. Our author deems it possible that thought took these lines because others were socially closed. Melissos, a man of action, who led a successful sally to capture the Athenian fleet, was apparently the most pronounced freethinker of the three, in that he said of the gods: "There was no need to define them, since there was no knowledge of them." Such utterances could not be carried far with impunity, as Socrates was to learn, in any Greek community; and from Melissos and Parmenides—our author considers the latter the most philosophic mind of all the Eleatics—there was a rapid descent to professional verbalism, popular life the while proceeding on the old levels.

VII.

Although, compared with the early Milesians, the elusive Pythagoras is not so much a rationalistic as a theosophic free thinker, yet in his system he did rationalize and discard mythology. There seems to be no doubt that his philosophy, like that of his Ionian predecessors, started from Oriental precedents. According to tradition he was a pupil of a Syrian, and before settling at Kroton, in Italy, he travelled in Egypt, and also had intercourse with the Chaldean magi. Parts of the Pythagorean code of life point to an Eastern derivation. As regards, however, the mystic doctrine that numbers are, as it were, the moving principle in the cosmos—another thesis not unlikely to arise in the Babylonian world, whence came the whole system of numbers for the later ancients—our author can but pronounce it "a development of thought *in vacuo*, and look further for the source of Pythagorean influence in the moral and social code of the movement, in its science, in its pantheism, its contradictory dualism and perhaps in its doctrine of transmigration of souls." On the side of natural science, indeed, its absurdities point to the fatal lack of observation which so soon stopped progress in Greek physics and biology. On the other hand, in the fields of astronomy, mathematics and the science of sound the Pythagorean school seems to have done good scientific work, being praised by Aristotle for special service in that way. It is recorded that Philolaos, the successor of Pythagoras, was the first to teach openly (about 460 B. C.) the doctrine of the motion of the earth, which, however, as we have seen, would also seem to have been taught previously by Anaximandros. Ecphantos of Syracuse is also credited with asserting the revolution of the earth on its axis. He, too, is grouped with the Pythagoreans, though he appears to have had a pantheism of his own.

At last the critical spirit found utterance in the great Periclean period, at Athens itself, though first by way of importation from Ionia. Anaxagoras of Klazomenai (480-428 B. C.) is the first free thinker historically known to have been legally prosecuted and condemned for his free thought—Philolaos had been prosecuted, but not convicted, at Elea. It was in the Athens of Pericles and in spite of Pericles's protection that the attack was made. Coming of the Ionian line of thinkers, Anaxagoras held firmly by the scientific view of the cosmos and thought that the sun, instead of being animated and a deity, as the Athenians believed, was "a red hot mass, many times larger than the Peloponnesus," and the moon a fiery (or earthy) solid body, having in it plains, and mountains, and valleys—this, while the philosopher asserted that infinite mind was the source and introducer of all the motion in the infinite universe; infinite in extent and infinitely divisible. This materialistic doctrine as to the heavenly bodies was propounded, as Socrates tells in his defence, in books that, in his day, any one could buy for a drachma apiece; and Anaxagoras further taught, like Theagenes, that the mythical personages of the poets were mere abstractions, invested with name and gender. It is probable enough that, even in pious Athens, where he taught in peace for many years, the Ionian philosopher might also have died in peace, but for his intimacy with the most renowned of his pupils. It occurred ultimately to the enemies of Pericles to strike at him through his guide, philosopher and friend. Prosecuted on the charge that he disbelieved in religion, and held theories of his own about things on high, he was saved by Pericles from the death punishment, but according to one account was fined five talents, and certainly was exiled, or chose to leave the intolerant city.

While Athens was persecuting Anaxagoras, the colonial city of Abdera in Thrace, founded by Ionians, had, like others, carried on the great impulse of Ionian philosophy and had produced in the fifth century some of the great thinkers of the human race. Concerning the greatest of these, Democritos, and the next in importance, Protagoras, we have no sure dates, but they seem to have "flourished" from about 450 to 410 B. C. The second, though apparently later, seems to have been profoundly influenced by the first, who, indeed, has influenced all scientific philosophy down to our own day. Logically continuing the non-theistic line of thought, Democritos either struck out or newly assimilated and developed one of the most fruitful of all scientific principles, the atomic theory. "He stands forth as one of the most original minds in the whole history of thought. No Greek thinker, not Aristotle himself, has struck so deep as he into fundamental problems; though the absurd label of 'the laughing philosopher,' bestowed on him by some peculiarly unphilosophic mind, has delayed the later recognition of his greatness, clear as it was to Bacon." It is from Democritos that the vital maxim, "Nothing from nothing; nothing into nothing," is substantially derived. His atomic theory, held in conjunction with a conception of "mind-stuff" similar to that of Anaxagoras, is termed in the book before us the high water mark of ancient scientific thought. It is noteworthy that somewhat earlier in the same age Empedocles of Agrigentum, another product of the freer colonial life, threw out a certain glimmer of the Darwinian conception that adaptations prevail in nature just because the adaptations fit organisms to survive, and the nonadapted perish. In his teaching, too, the doctrine of the indestructibility of matter was clear and firm; and the denial of anthropomorphic deity was explicit. Empedocles, however, wrought out no solid and consistent system. Democritos also shunned dialectic and discussion, and founded no school; and, although his atomism was later adopted by Epicurus, it was no more developed on a basis of investigation and experiment than was the biology of Empedocles. "Greek society failed to set up the conditions needed for progress beyond the point gained by its unguided forces."

When Protagoras, who flourished somewhat earlier than Democritos, ventured to read at the house of the freethinking Euripides a treatise of his own beginning with the avowal that he offered no opinion as to the existence of the gods, life being too short for the inquiry, the remark got wind, and he had to fly for his life. In the course of his flight, if we may trust tradition, the philosopher was drowned, and his book was publicly burned. This is the earliest known instance of censorship of the press. About the same time the poet Diagoras of Melos was proscribed for atheism, he having declared that the non-punishment of a certain act of iniquity proved that there were no gods. Diagoras, who was further charged with divulging the Eleusinian and other mysteries and with making firewood of an image of Herakles, telling the god thus to perform his thirteenth labor by cooking turnips, became thenceforth one of the proverbial atheists of the ancient world, and a reward of a silver talent was offered for killing him and of two talents for his capture alive. No antidote to the bane of fanaticism was found or even sought, and the greatest of Athenians was to be the next victim.

VIII.

Socrates was fundamentally and practically a freethinker in that in all things he thought for himself, turning definitely away from the old ideal of mere transmitted authority in morals. He was the first and chief agnostic. "Starting in all inquiries from a position of professed ignorance, he at least repudiated all dogmatics. Being, however, preoccupied with public life and conduct, he did not carry his critical thinking far beyond that sphere * * * He hoped to rationalize conduct, without seeking first to rationalize creed." Our author submits that, if we may take the trial and execution of Socrates for "blasphemy" and "corrupting the minds of the young" as accurately reflecting the state of thought at the time in the Athenian community, there must have then prevailed in Athens nearly as much hypocrisy in religious matters as exists in the England of to-day. No doubt Socrates was liable to the death penalty from the traditionally orthodox Greek point of view, having practically turned aside from the old civic creed and ideals. Most educated Athenians, however, had in some degree done the same. Euripides had been so frequently critical of the old theology and mythology in his plays that he, too, could easily have been indicted. Aristophanes would have been glad to see him prosecuted. "Yet the psychology of Aristophanes himself, who freely ridiculed and blasphemed the gods in his own comedies, while reviling all men who did not profess to believe in them, is hardly intelligible save in the light of parts of the English history of our own time, when unbelieving indifferentists on the conservative side have been seen ready to join in turning the law against a freethinker [Bradlaugh] for purely party ends." In the case of Socrates, no doubt, not only party malice but the individual dislikes he had so industriously provoked must have counted for much in securing the small majority of the dikastery that pronounced him guilty; and his own clear preference for death over any sort of compromise did the rest.

Of Plato the opinion is here expressed that, while nobody contests the perfection of his literary craftsmanship, he enjoys a repute above his deserts as a thinker. "In the history of free thought he figures as a man of genius, formed by Socrates, and reflecting his limitations, developing the Socratic dialectic on the one hand, and finally emphasizing the Socratic dogmatism on matters outside the sphere of conduct to the point of utter bigotry. If the Athenians are to be condemned for putting Socrates to death, it must not be forgotten that the spirit, if not the letter, of the laws drawn up by Plato in his old age fully justified them." It is pointed out that this code, could it ever have been put in force, would have wrought the death of every honest freethinker, as well as most of the ignorant believers, within its range of operation. Alone among the great serious writers of Greece does Plato implicate Greek thought in the gospel of intolerance passed on to modern Europe from antiquity. It is recorded of him that he wished to burn all the writings of Democritos that he could collect, and was dissuaded only on the score of the number of the copies.

Prof. Bain has suggested that not only Plato but subsequently Aristotle was so cowed by the execution of Socrates as to suppress his personal views on the higher questions of philosophy. It will hardly be disputed that the prescription of intolerance in the *Laws* classes Plato decisively on the side of fanaticism, and even ranks him with the most sinister figures on that side, since his earlier writing in the *Republic* shows that he would be willing to punish men for rejecting what he knew to be untrue. He seems to have practised "the will to believe" till he grew to be a bigot on the plane of the most ignorant of orthodox Athenians, and after all that science had done to enlighten men with regard to that natural order the misconceiving of which had been the foundation of their cosmogonical creed he inveighed furiously in his old age against the impiety of those who dared to doubt that the sun and moon and stars were deities, as every nurse taught her charges. Our author holds that in the face of such teaching as this it may well be said that "Greek philosophy made incomparably greater advances in the earlier polemic period [of the Ionians] than after its friendly return to the poetry of Homer and Hesiod"—that is, to a polytheistic basis.

The service rendered to free thought by Aristotle is also here distinguished as indirect rather than direct. While Socrates had furnished the critical or dialectic method or habit, Aristotle supplied the great inspiration of system, partly correcting the Socratic dogmatism on the possibilities of science by endless observation and speculation, though himself falling into scientific dogmatism only too often. That he was an unbeliever in the popular and Platonic religion is clear. "Excluding such a thing as divine interference with nature, his theology, of course, excludes the possibility of revelation, inspiration, miracles and grace." Apart, moreover, from the general rationalistic tenor of his works there was a current understanding that the Peripatetic School denied the utility of prayer and sacrifice. It is, indeed, well known that the anti-Macedonian party attempted to impeach him for impiety, but he avoided the attempted prosecution by leaving the city, and died shortly afterward. "While guiltless of Plato's fanaticism he had no scheme of reform whatever and was as far as any other Greek from the thought of raising the mass by instruction. His own science was not progressive and his political ideals were rather reactionary. * * * He was in some aspects the greatest brain of the ancient world and he left it at the close of the great Grecian period without much faith in man, while positing for the modern world its vague conception of deity."

Having brought our survey of Mr. Robertson's book down to the death of the Stagyrite we must reserve for some other occasion an outline of his history of free thought in Roman and Christian times.

M. W. H.