Of and About the Makers of Books.

Notices of Recent Interesting Volumes and Chats Concerning Literary Men and Women.

AGNOSTICISM AND RELIGION.

Believing that scientific discovery, properly understood, is the complement and not the foe of religion, and that the prevalent anti-theistic spirit threatens not only individual future happiness, but also the very foundations of present civilization, Rev. George J. Lucas, of Archbald, when standing as a candidate for the first doctorate in dogmatic theology at the Catholic university of America, chose as the theme for his dissertation a consideration of Herbert Spencer's religion of the unknowable, or modern agnosticism in its most synthetic and attractive form. His discussion of the subject, now printed in book form, by John Murphy & Co., Baltimore, must take high rank in Christian polemics, both for its scrupulous fairness to the opposition and for the incisive logic with which it asserts the theistic position. It should be added that Mr. Lucas writes not as a Catholic, but as a Christian; and that the tenor of his argument responds to the warning voice of the late Bishop Brooks when he said: "The world is trembling on the brink of atheism, while men are frittering away their lives in championing the shibboleths of their creeds."

I.

Prefixed to the author's main argument is a history, in 45 pages, of the rise of agnosticism from Xenophanes to Spencer which is a marvel of fair condensation. Beginning with an explanation of the origin of the word agnostic, which was first used by the late Professor Huxley, and not very aptly either, to designate those persons who, in modern time, represent the opposite extreme to the pretentious and know-all Gnostics of the early church, the author proceeds to note the origin, rise and decline of each separate philosophic school which, within the purview of recorded history, has sought to evolve a metaphysical hypothesis for existing things independent of the conception of a living God. We have not the space at our command to follow Mr. Lucas, as we would like to, through his keen dissections of the fallacies of each of these various schools; but we pause to note a significant passage or two. First, in his section on Hindu Sensationalism, since the thought in it possesses general applicability, the author truly says:

When a school of philosophers bid adieu to the principle of God's existence, they promise fair to leave all else that is noble in truth beside. The history of philosophy points to no non-theistic school which has not torn piece-meal all that is exalted in man, the grandeur of his higher nature, his superiority over matter, the essential difference between him and the lower forms of life and the imperishableness of the higher part of him when the lower and material part of his existence has begun to perish. Divorce from the verity that we know God to exist, is divorce from all the fountain principles of true philosophy, morality and religion.

Referring to Aristotle, "the father of modern realism," Mr. Lucas writes:

Aristotle was a physicist only per accidens, he was first and last a metaphysician. I think every person will admit that there has never been a man, and most probably never shall be, however super-eminent he may be in intellect, who can dispense with the experimental science of his time, and wing his mental flight into the higher planes of revolutionized progress of the ages yet unborn, and see things in those ages which his contemporaries cannot even dream of. The great scientific geniuses have, as a rule, made but one notable discovery; this was effected at times by chance, often after long and weary years of search, most often because the age had grown up to and was ripe for the new point of progress. The reason is simple, the physical sciences depend on experiment and observation. If these are not at hand, intellect has no lamp to guide it, inquiry no path to follow. Aristotle's physics were not his defects, but the imperfections of that age. It was not an era of great natural discoveries.

From Aristotle our author jumps over the mediaeval ages, in which, however much religion may have been perverted, it was at no time seriously threatened by skepticism, and takes up the discussion of modern agnostic doctrines, beginning with Lord Bacon, the brilliant, dogmatic and, shall we not say, conceited restorer of the physical sciences. Introductory to this consideration of agnosticism's modern manifestations, Dr. Lucas says:

If we disregard its antique form, Agnosticism culminated in the Sophist's supreme dictum that all cognition is encircled within the circumference of the mind's affections; that is, it does not transcend the phenomenal or subjective impressions of the age. For this is also the final word of actual Agnostic philosophy. In this, their message to this age, the trinity of the latest apostles, Messrs. Huxley, Tyndall and Spencer, are in exultant accord. In beginning, therefore, to trace the resuscitation and growth of modern Agnosticism from Bacon to Mr. Spencer, we are viewing not so much a progression as a retrogression, not so much an onward as a backward march to the days when the voice of Protagoras and the others spoke to the cities of Greece.

The adventitious and circumlocutory philosophy of Descartes, which Professor Huxley has eulogized as embodying the golden rule of science, is shown to be not only not original with Descartes, its central principle—"I think, therefore, I am"—having been uttered centuries prior by St. Augustine, but also not what it pretends to be, that is, basic and fundamental. "If," says Dr. Lucas, "we do not pre-suppose and pre-admit the principle of contradiction, viz.—that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be at the same time and in the same circumstances—what will become of Descartes' prime principle and first foundation, 'I think?' Without the principle of contradiction, the statements 'I think' and 'I don't think,' 'I now am thinking' and 'I now am not thinking,' will be in equal glory, the one will be as true as the other, and the Cartesian first principle, 'I think,' (no longer a first principle since subordinate to the principle of contradiction) will fade like a fair morning dream."

Since this Cartesian doubt is the corner stone of modern agnosticism, the author devotes considerable attention to it, and is especially happy in his refutation of Professor Huxley's well known championship of it. Quoting from the professor's address to the Cambridge Young Men's Christian society in which he said, "Existence is thought, all our conceptions of existence being some kind or other of thought," Dr. Lucas enters vigorous denial as follows:

We do not conceive existence as thought, but as the object of thought. What is more, we conceive existence as independent of thought. Did Professor Huxley believe that the young men of Cambridge existed because during his address they were present to his thoughts? Were his thoughts and their existence identical? Did he not know that they existed and sat before him independently of his or any other person's thought? If "existence is thought," we must suppose that Professor Huxley ceased to exist when he retired to rest at night, and resumed existence when he awoke next morning. Professor Huxley may have indulged in this pleasant process of nocturnal annihilation and mutual re-creation of himself each time that he ceased to think and each time that he resumed his thoughts, but this is not the lot of ordinary mortals.

With Locke our author finds fault that he pushed sensationalism to so extreme a point that he came well nigh to overlooking the objective external validity of substance; and with regard to Hume he enters the just criticism that because, in his empiricism, Hume could find no room for the principle of causation, he very unfairly and inconclusively ignored it altogether. Kantism is pronounced insufficient because it arbitrarily limits the human intellect to the sphere of experience; positivism, as championed by August Comte, in its rejection of the supersensuous, is believed by Dr. Lucas to carry with itself the germs of its own early decay; while as for John Stuart Mill's ingenious attempt to supply a metaphysical leaven to Hume's extreme idealist sensism by free use of his principle of the association of ideas, the author evinces respect but not conviction. This brings us, very hurriedly it is true, through the history of agnosticism and up to the scientific materialism of our own day, which has had such heroic defense from Tyndall, Huxley and Herbert Spencer. Dr. Lucas chooses to argue with Spencer rather than with the other two, because, as he says:

"Professors Huxley and Tyndall have embodied their views in no systematic philosophic shape. They have edited no ordered corps of Agnostic doctrine; they could not, as what has come from their pen has been in the forms of criticisms and replies. It has been reserved for Herbert Spencer, the third of these distinguished expositors of the new and now potent school of the physical science Agnostics, to reduce to a systematic unity the actual form of the Agnostic creed." This he has done in his Synthetic Philosophy, to which Dr. Lucas devotes the main portion of his argument.

II.

Mr. Spencer's position, as outlined in his Synthetic Philosophy, is concisely stated in an introductory chapter to Part II of Dr. Lucas' book to be the belief, shared with Sir William Hamilton and Mr. Mansel, that all knowledge is relative, and that beyond knowledge is an Inscrutable Absolute which, in Mr. Spencer's system, is called the Unknowable and made to do service as God. Science, in that system, has to do with knowledge; religion, with conjecture, but both are recognized as of use to mankind and neither is discouraged. The chief part of Dr. Lucas' essay is devoted, as we shall see, to an examination of this ill-defined Unknowable, from the standpoint of history.

The first objection that our author brings to Mr. Spencer's concept of religion is that he seems to consider his pronouncement that Science is knowledge and Religion nescience as not needing any proof. Contrary to commonly accepted definition, he lays this assertion down as his distinctive view and yet makes no effort to sustain it. Dr. Lucas is unwilling to take Mr. Herbert Spencer's ipse dixit on so vital a point in preference to the concensus of opinion of all prior philosophers and religious systems. Another basic generality of the Synthetic Philosophy which, in our author's judgment, is simply asserted and in nowise sustained consists of the declaration that religion is simply "a theory of original causation," while its essential characters and forms are merely a "supplementary growth." "Were the 'moral code' a simply supplementary growth," Dr. Lucas observes, "we should be able to find religions existing, at some period of their history, without a moral code; and we should find that religious creeds in general attach a greater importance to the theory than to the practice. But all is to the contrary. In beholding the religions of the universe, not mere theory but practice strikes us everywhere." In proof of which he adds:

The doctrine of love, sacrifice and prayer is preached in Vedic Hinduism. Guatama summed up his teaching in the verse: "To cease from sin, to get virtue, to cleanse the heart—that is the religion of the Buddhas."

Repentance and a good life are at the core of the Confucian creed. Confucius remarks "Those who multiply good deeds will have joys to overflowing; those who multiply evil deeds will have calamities running over." The Pelasgians and the ancient Germans worshipped God when they had no name to express Him. Because of its dreaded sanctity, Jehovah, the ineffable name of the Supreme Being, was not pronounced by the Jews. The Egyptians never uttered the name of the God Osiris, so awful their veneration. Sculptor and scribe spelled it backwards, that is, instead of "As-ari" they wrote it "Ari-as." Before Mahomet, the Islamite worshipped the stars of Lot and Ozza and Manah and the 360 idols of the temple of Mecca. In the religion of Mahomet fasting and prayer and alms are among the essentials, the Koran is a book of religious practices. The aboriginal North American Indians, from Alaska to Mexico, believed in religious ceremonies, and practiced propitiatory self-torture. In Zoroastrianism, which was the state religion of ancient Persia, the Parsee worships fire as the symbol of the purity and effulgence of God. The Pharoah, like the Jewish high priest, alone entered the Holy of Hollies to present the oblations of his people. In a word, looking back upon the historic past, we find not a single race of men, in all the cycles of human history, who for a single moment held the theoretical separate from the practical in religion.

A third statement of the Synthetic Philosopher equally excites our author's opposition. This is the postulate that "the reality existing behind all appearance is, and must ever be unknown." The purpose of this dictum is, of course, to fortify Mr. Spencer's theory that the First Cause is Unknowable, therefore Unknown. But after convicting the Relativist philosophers, to whose testimony Mr. Spencer had appealed, of confused ideas and notorious disagreement as to the hypothesis that all knowledge is derivable through the senses and therefore empirical, Dr. Lucas proceeds to establish that in all ages a First Cause was known, not perfectly, indeed, since even orthodox religion does not clothe man with the power perfectly to understand the Infinite, but imperfectly, and far beyond the boundary line of flat negation.

No one will deny, says he, that Christianity, Judaism, and Mohammedanism are monotheistic beliefs and admit an extra-kosmic Personal Creator. Similarly the Parsees believed in a Personal God, Ahura-Mazda, which is interpreted the Omniscient Lord, who is the ruler and framer of the universe. The Confucianists also believe in the one Ti, "the supreme ruler and governor of all subordinate spirits." The Brahmo-Somaj, the newest creed in India, read the Verdas and the Upanishads as teaching a consimilar doctrine. A like doctrine was professed in the early faiths of Egypt, of China, of India, of Assyria, of Babylonia, and of Keltic Druidhism. No wonder, then, that Max Muller, in his famous philological proof, draws the conclusion that the Finns and Lapps and Tchuvashes, the Huns and Chinese, and other Turanian races had, in those primeval times before they separated, one common religion which was a worship of heaven as the emblem of the Deity, the Infinite. Likewise that the Arabians, the Assyrians, the Phoenicans, the Babylonians, the Carthaginians and all who belonged to the Semitic family of men, invoked as the Supreme God, El, the Strong One in heaven, and were united in one common worship of Him in that primitive age before there were Babylonians in Babylon, Phoenicians in Tyre and Sidon or Jews in Mesopotamia. Finally, that the whole Ayran race, Greeks, Latins, Slavs, Kelts, Teutons and the people of India before Homer sung the Iliad or the Veda was written, worshipped the Supreme Being whom they named the Heaven Father, "Our Father who art in heaven." With one harmonious voice these people all proclaim that there exists a Supreme Lord and Ruler who controls their destinies and whom they are bound to worship and love. This is surely knowledge, not, indeed, of the most perfect kind, but still knowledge. Such a God is not unknowable, but known.

Of all religions of which there is record, Dr. Lucas regards Hindu Pantheism as coming the nearest to Mr. Spencer's concept of the Unknowable. But even this unique conception clearly proves the insufficiency of the proposed Agnostic substitute for Christianity. As a religion it is, says Dr. Lucas, "insufficient because it needs the divine. A being to worship and revere, on whom our finite helplessness depends, that is, a God, is demonstrated as a natural need for the human race by the incompleteness of the teaching of Sakyamuni. Worship, reverence, recognition of dependence on the Deity clearly presuppose Him knowable, however vague may be the knowledge. This makes Buddhism a strong though negative proof of the knowableness of God. Its very negation and exclusion of the Divine Being from the contents of the religious concept marshal themselves into the ranks of the foremost factors to proclaim that man must have the Infinite, and that some knowledge of Him, be it luminous in the highest degree, or be it dark in the clouds of grossest error, is the essential heritage of the human mind."

Finally, our author contends that while hitherto religion has been following out a law of evolution or progress from fetich worship, to polytheism, then to pantheism and lastly to monotheism, the substitution of the Spencerian concept of the Unknowable would put an end to progress. Upon this point he says:

Monotheism presents the Supreme Being as a Personal God, as pure, holy, eternal, living, intelligent, and merciful. He can sympathize with us and befriend us. He is "Our Father who" is "in heaven." No conception can be grander; it is the realization of the human ideal. If we conceive truth, He is the fulness of truth; if we conceive love, He is its origin and infinite plentifulness; if we conceive beauty, He is to whom St. Austin addresses the immortal ecstasy:

"O pulchritudo tam antiqua quam nova!"

"O beauty, ever ancient, ever new!"

Do we conceive happiness, "our being's end and aim?" He is "our reward exceeding great," merciful, benign, healing our sorrows, cancelling our crimes, and, when we die, clasping us in paternal embrace to the blessedness of perennial life. This is the highest ideal of the human spirit. This is the coronation of the religious evolution. All progressive religious conditions must be along these lines. We can ever grow in love and knowledge of the Infinite truth and the Infinite Beauty. We can never grow beyond it, for there is nothing beyond.

Mr. Spencer's religion, on the other hand, "admits an impersonal existence. The Unknowable, like Brahma, is pure existence and nothing else; it is without intelligence, without beauty, without love. To worship such a God is to retrograde, not to progress."

III.

Thus far we have considered only half of Dr. Lucas' book, the half which considers Mr. Spencer's religion from the historical standpoint. Did present opportunity permit we would gladly endeavor in this same connection to follow the author through his even more effective consideration of the Spencerian scheme from the metaphysical standpoint, judged from which its intrinsic weakness and insufficiency are most apparent. To the student who wishes to witness the application of the so-called newer philosophy of its own confidently asserted principles, and is willing to accept a result thus fairly reached, this dissertation will come as a welcome aid. We do not hesitate to pronounce it the most masterly refutation of agnosticism by means of agnosticism's own weapons that we have yet been privileged to read.

L. S. R.

RECENT FICTION.

"A Street in Suburbia" (New York: D. Appleton & Co., for sale in Scranton by Norton) by Edwin W. Pugh is a study of the dialect and idiosyncrasies of the low-born urban Briton, etched off in a fine humorous vein, with much quiet philosophy. It would not be strictly true to call this effort fiction, for it is a delightfully graphic and engaging series of pictures of actualities; but you must know that none of its droll folk are real; that Jack Cotten, for instance, and Phil Evers and Watty Staight are drawn with a free and possibly a prank-loving hand, and that the only photography in it is in its presentment of sociological conditions as they exist nigh the rim of the world's largest city. There is nothing that a Yankee reviewer can say in way of further introduction or explanation; the one who isn't satisfied with what has been said can have no recourse but to get the book and read its dozen clever chapters for himself.

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An unabridged edition, in paper covers, of Charles Reade's sledgehammer novel, "Put Yourself in His Place," has just been issued by Laird & Lee, Chicago, and is for sale at all the book stalls. Among novels with a purpose this voltaic onslaught upon the tyranny of radical trades-unionism stands easily first. It has been well said that a novel by Reade was better than a parliament to correct abuses.

AMONG THE MAGAZINES.

The June Bookman, with reminiscences of Whittier, selections from Ruskin's earliest writings, readable recollections of Stevenson's literary work while in college and a short biographical study of George Moore, the chief English prophet of pessimism in fiction, not to speak of its regular departments, all full to the brim with live news and gossip about books and their makers, is a charming number, and one that well sustains this new magazine's early promises. Although not yet six months old, the Bookman is already indispensable to all who keep in close and constant touch with the world of letters.

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To those who take interest in the unique personality of the age's greatest novelist, the late Robert Louis Stevenson, the "Personal Memories" of him which Edmund Gosse narrates in the July Century will be most welcome. Another feature of this number is Fitzhugh Lee's forecast of "The Future of War," being an attempt to calculate the effect of new tactics and new weapons. A paper on "Bryant and the Berkshire Hills," and the continuation of Sloane's Life of Napoleon add interest to this number, the other articles in which all possess high merit, each in its particular direction.

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St. Nicholas for July recognizes the growing interest in biographical writings by including among its interesting contributions a paper by James Baldwin on Oliver Goldsmith and one by Brander Matthews on the poet Whittier. These articles possess merit sufficient to charm the most critical elders of the family, while instructing the younger folk.

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Maurice Thompson, in the July Mid-Continent Magazine, returns to the field of fiction with a capital short story entitled "The Defense by Dissolution," the purport of which is how a clever New York criminal lawyer acquitted a client accused of murder by frightening judge, jurors, witnesses and spectators pell mell out of court. A paper in a more serious vein is Eugenia Parham's discussion of "The Negro in America," which eulogizes the picturesqueness and the pathos of the uncorrupted character of the son of Ham.

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So far as we can see there is no use in trying to decipher how a magazine as good as the Cosmopolitan, with contributors of the foremost rank in all parts of the world, can be printed and sold at a profit at 10 cents a copy. It ought to be sufficient for the not-too-curious reader simply to know that the thing is being done, and that in the July number he can, for a dime, get a quantity and quality of reading matter and illustrations every whit as good as any sold for three and one-half times so much. In this number Rudyard Kipling has a capital story, Mrs. Burton Harrison discourses upon "The Myth of the Four Hundred" and eminent men in short letters compass the month's progress in art, science and letters. If Brisben Walker can stand this kind of thing, the public certainly ought to.

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Munsey's, also a dime phenomenon among the magazines, has probably the best illustrations of all. The beauty of Munsey's pictures is in their timeliness. Men and women of note are mirrored in its pages, both pictorially and by pen, while interest in their appearance and doings is yet keen; and the same is true of noted pictures, architectural triumphs and other creations of public concern. The reader of Munsey's gets a bright newspaper elegantly illustrated, and robbed of most of the trivialities of the daily paper. That probably accounts for its great growth in circulation—from near nothing to 500,000 copies inside of a year.

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Dr. Conan Doyle is on record with the remark that McClure's Magazine is "the most readable one he knows." Opinion may differ on this point, but all readers of the July number must agree that an amazing amount of first-class literature is supplied in that issue for ten cents. E. J. Edwards continues his history of Tammany, Henry Muir describes the telegraph systems of the world; Sir Robert Ball writes down some of the astronomical mysteries of the heavens; Stanley J. Weyman, Mrs. E. V. Wilson and "Q" have capital short stories; Hamlin Garland eulogizes sculptor Edward Kemeys; Cy Warman describes a recent ride on the engine of a London and Paris express and Cleveland Moffett details from the archives of the Pinkerton detective agency the exciting story of the "American Exchange Bank Robbery." In future numbers Kipling will have more jungle stories, Robert Louis Stevenson's latest novel, "St. Ives" will be printed serially, and there will be a series of Lincoln anecdotes contributed by men who were the great war president's intimate friends.

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The July Chautauquan, in addition to its usual quota of timely and instructive contents, contains a detailed history and explanation of the Chautauqua summer assembly movement, with numerous illustrations and complete information for the guidance of vacationists.

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AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS:

Chicago is to have another fin de siecle publishing house like Stone and Kimball. The new firm is Way & Williams.

The Prince Bonaparte collection of valuable books is to be bought for the Boston public library on private subscription.

The advance orders for the cheap English edition of "Trilby" number 15,000. They are just catching the fever in England.

George MacDonald's new novel, "Lilith," will be published by Dodd, Mead & Co., who announce, also, the play of "Rip Van Winkle," as played by Joseph Jefferson.

G. W. Smalley, who has entered upon his new arrangement with the London Times, is writing for the New York Herald, while his place as London correspondent of the Tribune is being filled by Humphry Ward.

Conan Doyle has bought some land in the neighborhood of Haslemere, where he intends to build his new house. The country, is, of course, famous as Tennyson's later home, and is also the resort of Grant Allen, who, it is said, was unable to endure the English climate until he found health at Hindhead.

Captain Charles King is in the field with three ventures in fiction which should gratify summer readers. "Foes in Ambush" and "Starlight Ranch," are to appear at once in paper, while "Captain Dreams, and Other Stories," come forth in seasonable cloth. The two former are pronounced the most stirring tales of fighting and love ever done by their gallant author.

After several years of study among the libraries and coin collections of Europe, Alex Del Mar has at length completed his long-promised "History of Monetary Systems," a work planned while he was director of the bureau of statistics at Washington, and encouraged by Chief Justice Chase, Robert J. Walker, Henry C. Carey, Lieutenant Maury, Allen G. Thurman, Horace Greeley, John Stuart Mill and many other eminent men on both sides of the Atlantic.