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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Man and His Problems

MAN is an evolutionary product and his ancestry has imposed on him two burdens—one physical, the other mental. Looked at as physical structure, the human body resembles an ancient building that has been adapted to meet modern requirements by the use of the latest inventions of heating, lighting and sanitation. These inventions work, but they would function with much greater economy and efficiency if the architect had been given the task of constructing the building from the ground up. It is equally certain that given the power, a modern scientist would have constructed a much better one than that which now exists. The faults of the human structure have been stressed by experts, even while they have marvelled at the way in which adaptations to altered conditions have been secured. But withal, the human body bears the marks of an adapted structure. Nature is indeed both wasteful and miserly in its work. It is extravagant in its experiments, and niggardly in the way in which it uses old materials for new ends.

The other burden that man has to carry is mainly that of words coined to express old thoughts and thought forms that belong to a state of culture he has outgrown. Language is at once a vehicle and a determinant of thought. It is hammered out under the pressure of feeling and in its formative stage the same terms that are used to express man's relationships to his fellow humans are also used to express his relations to nature at large. Language is thus in its origin charged with anthropomorphic implications, and in the very act of expressing new ideas man finds that he is often suggesting old ones. Such terms as kindness and cruelty, goodness and badness, are applied to nature when they are properly applicable to conscious beings. Some of us are sufficiently on our guard to recognise against the power of the terms we are using, but with the majority the influence of the words used is fatal to exact and scientific thought.

So far as we know the first steps towards the creation of pure science were taken by the ancient Greeks. That meant the definite marking out of an area of human thought that was independent of the gods. That was the important feature that Greece gave to the world. Right through the golden age of Greek philosophy there runs insistent search for some "primary substance" from which all else should follow by necessity. It was the beginning of Atheism. The search was for "one" thing from which all other things followed. It was the dawn of Materialism. Unfortunately there intervened the Christian religion, which acted as Hitlerism did on modern culture. Centuries had to elapse before science could return to the free speculations of ancient Greece.

The search for this primitive substance led to speculations as to its nature. It was air, fire, water, ether, even so obvious abstraction as Number. But the most fruitful conception to which the Greeks gave birth was "Materialism," which was based on the existence of infinite atoms of matter moving in infinite space, and from the combinations and permutations of the atoms all things resulted.

This original conception of "matter" as a hard, impenetrable substance has undergone many changes in form, but in principle it remains the solid basis of modern science. The conceptions of these early Materialists unquestionably gave the most fruitful contribution in the history of science. The common talk of the death of Materialism is just nonsense. Materialism has been very frequently killed, but it has died only to be born again.

Freedom of discussion among the Greeks, the fact of their being without that terrible curse of Europe, a "sacred" book and a powerful priesthood, led to the creation of science, as distinguished from mere knowledge. And it was not long before the discussion of what man knew about the world led to the deeper question of "How do we know?" It was quite evident that the only avenue by which we acquired knowledge was the senses. But if all men were blind how should we know the nature of colour? Or even of the being of a world of colour? If all men were deaf could we live in a world of sound? Clearly, the world we know is one that we know through the senses. But then came a further question. Are our senses so reliable that we may say they give us the exact quality of things apart from us? In other words, is the world as presented to us in consciousness identical with the world that exists out of our consciousness?

Stated in this way it seemed then, and for many centuries afterwards, to land mankind in complete scepticism. It is plain we cannot get outside consciousness, and therefore it would seem that we simply cannot know what the outside world is like. It may be here that there is room for a real Agnosticism, the article in use is just a bundle of bad reasoning. We may believe in the existence of a world apart from consciousness while holding that we cannot know its nature, but it is laughably stupid to profess to be Agnostic regarding the existence of a "god" without knowing what is meant by God. It is the confusion of two distinct questions that enables the timid or muddled Atheist to pose as a reverent Agnostic.

The question I am posing—it may provide materials for Christmas puzzles, if for nothing better—is: "What is the nature of the world of my perception?" Does it exist independently of *me* or is it a creation of my mind? To this question there are various answers. One is, held by none of those who know the nature of the question, that the world is in its appearance exactly as we see it. There is the answer of Locke, that underlying the world of sensation

there is a "substance"—Matter, of which we know the primary qualities, extension, mass, etc. And there is the answer given by Bishop Berkeley, that the real world is the world we know, that it exists as an objective fact exactly as we know it. Berkeley did not deny the objective existence of matter, indeed his case rested upon "Matter" being very, very real. He insisted on the reality of matter over and over again, and as he is one of the most beautiful of our writers he should never be misunderstood. He said: "The world we know is a real world, the world that we know through our senses, with all its shapes and colours and weight." And no one has ever been able to disprove his case—so far. He fell when he claimed that as the world is there, and as "I" did not make it, therefore the creator of all things is God. The world we know exists as a series of emanations from the mind of God. That was Berkeley's method of getting over the implied Atheism of Locke and of establishing the being of God. There is a great fallacy here, but it is not that of the cheap misunderstanding which says that Berkeley asserted that the world existed in "My" mind. The best example of clotted ignorance is that given by Dr. Johnson, who disproved Berkeley by stamping on the ground to prove the earth was solid. That was something that was never denied. It is best to read Berkeley. Reading about him leads to confusion.

Finally, there is the answer of Hume, one of the clearest of our best men. Locke had assumed a "real" world of "matter," of which we know certain primary qualities. Berkeley, by an acute analysis, showed that the assumption of primary as distinct from secondary qualities was useless as an explanation, and carried us no further along the road of understanding. His answer was the existence of the world as a direct product of the mind of God. Hume took Berkeley's analysis of knowledge for granted, agreed with him that there was no justification for assuming the existence of an entity "Matter," but applied exactly the same argument to the belief in a mysterious "mind." Just what Berkeley said of Matter Hume said of Mind. He said, when I examine myself I find sensations, memories of sensations and relations between sensations, but I never come across "Mind" as a substantial existence, and that wiped out Berkeley's proof of God. It left the world with a nexus of sensations which constitutes the world as we know it. Accept Berkeley's argument against Locke, and we are compelled to accept Hume against Berkeley. We can accept the Freethinker Hume against the Christian Bishop only so long as we accept the Christian Bishop against the Freethinker Locke. There is no reason whatever for accepting "Mind" as a substantive existence, but neither is there logical reasoning for accepting "Matter" as a substantive existence. The "thing in itself" is as useless as it is ridiculous, whether we call it matter or existence. There is no use for all these terms, so long as we use them in a strictly scientific sense. The curious thing is that so many Freethinkers should have gone on eagerly accepting Hume's analysis and as eagerly rejecting Berkeley's thesis not realising that the two are alike, although utilised to different ends.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Once admit that an honest man is as fit for any other world as he is for this one, and creeds become, not only superfluous, but impertinent.—G. W. FOOTE.

THE ATLANTIC TRANSFORMATION

THE discoveries of Columbus and his successors of the Atlantic route to the New World, and the Portuguese voyages via the Cape to the Far East, seriously reduced the trading security so long enjoyed by the Venetian and Genoese Republics.

The chief commercial gains were derived from the importation of silks and spices from the Orient to Europe by overland transport by caravan or the sea services of the Levant. But the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, and their subsequent capture of Cairo and Alexandria, lessened the prosperity of the Italian Republics, for the charges imposed by the Moslems on commerce reduced their trade to a minimum.

Then, with the Iberian discoveries, the Atlantic route soon eclipsed the commerce of the Ægean. As J. L. and Barbara Hammond aver in their excellent survey, *The Rise of Modern Industry* (Methuen): "For the Old World in which merchants of Venice and Genoa sent goods to the merchants of the Hansa Towns, to be sold in Augsburg or Bruges, or some other market town of Flanders or Germany over roads infested by robbers and interrupted by tolls, there was gradually substituted a new world in which the main commerce was maritime, and the most successful traders the nations living by the Atlantic."

England played little part in mediæval commerce, save in wool. Her imports were first provided by German traders and later entered London and other ports in Venetian sailing vessels.

Then the new Atlantic passage gave England her opportunity which she soon utilised successfully. For unlike strictly commercial Venice, England added industry to trading transactions and she soon ranked second only to France, the Netherlands and Spain in influence, industry and finance.

Five nations successively exploited the resources of America. Spain and Portugal remorselessly plundered the New World. Then the Dutch landed and became pre-eminent fortune seekers in the 17th century, while in the 18th, French and English fought for supremacy.

Spain and Portugal each secured vast territories in America. But while Spain recklessly dissipated her spoils, England devoted hers to more practical purposes. It is one of the ironies of history that when Columbus, disgusted with the scurvy treatment he had received in Portugal, sent his brother Bartholomew to England to arrange terms with Henry VII he was imprisoned by pirates, and when he at last returned to Spain, carrying the English ruler's acceptance, Columbus had already sailed on his voyage of discovery elated, with splendid promises of reward—promises, however, never redeemed.

The pitiless cruelties perpetrated by the Spaniards on the native races of Southern and Central America have been described by Prescott and other reliable historians. For, to the Catholic intruders, the natives were not only non-Christian, but Devil worshippers who might be mercilessly murdered in the mines when searching for treasure for their conquerors. Moreover, not content with the destruction of Mexican and Peruvian culture, they ruthlessly incinerated the native records which could have thrown a flood of light on the earlier history of Aztec and Toltec times.

When conveying their ill-gotten gains from America, the Spanish treasure ships soon became the prey of Dutch, French and English corsairs which waylaid and plundered them on their homeward voyage. Also, Spain squandered her precious metals in sanguinary religious strife and other follies, while her watchful competitors devoted their plunder to the creation of industry and commerce. Expenditure soon exceeded income in Spain, and even the Emperor Charles V and his successor Phillip II needed loans from foreign financiers for sustaining their credit for solvency. As the Hammonds testify, a large proportion of the bullion carried in Spanish ships "was lost by capture, much by fraud among officials and seamen, and much of it passed to the bankers from their royal debtors. In this way

it reached capitalists, French, Dutch, English and German, who could apply it to the interests of industry and commerce."

The 13 colonies settled in New England were valued by the Home Authorities chiefly as a source of raw materials, and evidently one of the leading inducements towards the colonisation of Virginia was the advantage accruing from the use of the extensive woodlands of America to relieve the strain on England's rapidly disappearing forests. Moreover, the early colonists were hardened by the heavy toil necessary to produce their crops and other utilities, while they exchanged their raw materials and agricultural products for the manufactured articles of their ancestral home.

The elder Pitt stressed the fact that the New World formed a market both for consumption and supply, but unfortunately more importance was attached in England to the West Indian sugar industry and sea island cotton than the resources of the colonies whose cotton was not then regarded as the invaluable commodity it later became. Again, the New Englanders were anxious to trade with the French and Spanish American possessions, but this reasonable request the Home Government strictly forbade. Naturally, this restriction was resented as tyranny, while other prohibitions intensified the discontent. This system of monopoly, as Burke termed it, culminated in the conflict which led to the independence of New England and the creation of the United States of America.

Still, no interference with the religious beliefs of the colonists was allowed. And the French Catholics in Canada were granted complete freedom by the Quebec Act of 1775. At this time, however, the French colonists numbered about 11,000, while the population of New England was about two millions, that of Britain herself not reaching ten millions.

The French statesman, Turgot, contended that a free America would prove a great consumer of imports and that the system of monopolies so greatly esteemed by European States was utterly irrational. Truly enough the separation of the United States from the mother country was succeeded by an increased commercial intercourse, as the new Republic needed and therefore purchased British goods.

Yet, despite our improved relations with our revolted colonies before the conflict of 1812; when this regrettable occurrence was over, the United States adopted Protection. High import duties were imposed, but the immense increase in European wealth that followed the exploitation of America furnished the purchasing power of commercial and industrial communities which enabled them to easily surmount all artificial obstacles to trade between the Old World and the New.

During the 19th century all the colonial possessions of Spain and Portugal asserted their independence. Brazil and the other formerly Iberian territories were then eager to embrace the capital and trading facilities that Europe was ready to supply. British merchants had transacted business with South America for more than a century and with the removal of Spanish restrictions on commerce, business flourished between England and South America. For the Southern Continent had completely sundered itself from Spain and Portugal by 1825. Paraguay became independent in 1811; the Argentine in 1816; Chili, 1817; Colombia, 1819; Mexico, 1821; Peru, 1824; Brazil, 1825.

With the ending of the Napoleonic conflict, several of these States began an independent career. Their near neighbour, the United States, desired their trade. But the States were unable to provide the capital they needed, to purchase their raw materials or supply them with sufficient manufactured commodities. Also, British shipping remained predominant. As Professor Knowles states: "Great Britain emerged in 1815 without a rival as the one power able to carry on the shipping of the world in spite of the fact that she had lost about 40 per cent. of her ships during the years 1803-1814."

If England was first to surrender her American colonies, she was thus the chief gainer by the loss sustained by Spain.

T. F. PALMER.

DUALISM

IF God is all-powerful and all-knowing, then, whatever occurs is done either by him or with his permission. Hence God is responsible not only for any pain which he himself inflicts, but also for all the pain inflicted either by natural causes or by supernatural agencies.

It is vain to argue that God gives pain, or allows it to be given, because he uses it to produce something worth more than the cost of the pain used in producing it. For, being almighty, he could have wrought out that benevolent design by painless methods. If a medical man were to use the knife when obviously he could have cured his patient by administering inoffensive drugs, he would be deemed either grossly ignorant or remorselessly cruel. Thus experience affords no help in reconciling the moral perfection of God with his alleged omnipotence and omniscience. Euripides said:—

Goodness and being in the Gods are one,
He who would make them evil, makes then none.

If the universe is not an automatic system, then it seems that, either from inimical conditions or imperfect capacities, its maker or makers could not manage to keep pain out of it; or, that in case of dual or multiplex agency someone or more of the agents had a bad disposition, and sufficient strength to produce and to maintain evil. The doctrine that the source of evil had a beginning is far from rational. If there were only one original being, and this were almighty and all-good, how came it to permit the intrusion of an evil being? Still worse, why create him, knowing that although born good he would become bad? Luther called the Devil "God's ape." But, if created to afford amusement it was dearly bought for he is said to have ruined men, to say nothing of his having occasioned a great impediment to horticulture!

To affirm that God permitted the Devil to disturb things that he himself might show off his skill in putting them straight is to disparage his wisdom, and also to make him seem very cruel when it is remembered that the Devil's intervention caused the eternal torment of millions belonging to the human race.

A far less objectionable theory is the supposition that original principles of good and evil, whether two or more in number, have had an uncreated and coeval existence, and that neither or none has or have been able to overcome the other or the others. On the old axiom that "entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity" two such principles, one of each kind, are surely enough for the present purpose. Acceptance of this theory would relieve the Theist from a host of terrible difficulties, whilst leaving him in possession of his most cherished beliefs and consolatory practices. He would no longer have to rely on tortuous vindications of God's ways towards man and other sentient creatures; he could fully trust the divine love; and he might reasonably believe that in all his good actions he was being used by God as an instrument in his conflict with the Prince of Darkness. If it be true that man naturally craves for a religion here is one a thousand times more sensible than any now existing.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

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ACID DROPS

The Rev. H. Anton-Stephen, Vicar of St. Dunstan's, East Acton, along with members of the Church, says that over and over again a number of Monks—dead ones—can be seen walking in the Church. Now, in the name of all that is sensible, what are these dead monks doing that for? The monks cannot walk about this church for exercise, for ghosts never seem to require exercise of the body, in fact they have no body that will need exercising. They cannot come "to do their bit" for they would do it to greater effect if they appeared in the front of one of our theatres. We can't make it out, but if the Reverend H. Anton-Stephen will guarantee that we, poor lost Atheists, will see the monks on a certain night, we will be there, and damn the cold weather. Mr. A. says that he has witnesses. We don't want witnesses, we want to be there and shake hands with the phantoms. We promise to give these wandering souls a warm welcome—and a good advertisement.

The Rector of St. Matthew's Church says that people are tired of services (which we quite believe), and so he suggests that in the future the Church should have some dramatic plays. Well, we believe that if the plays are good, that is better than the usual religious performances, more people will come in—particularly if entrance is free. And after all it must be remembered that a good many scholars have asserted that the Christian story is nothing more than one of those old-time religious plays that flourished in the ancient world. It is quite clear that in the sacred plays of the ancient world we have the story of Jesus the Saviour in great detail. Those who can consult the volumes of Toynbee's "A Study of History," will find the Christ story discussed at length.

By the way, we should like to know why the remaining volumes of this great work have not appeared. Is it because the book said too much? If so, it is not anything new. Books have been left unfinished, or else have never been permitted to be published because they told the truth. Our histories are not exactly a bundle of lies, but they are works that seldom tell the truth.

It is reported that in the Dominican Republic, West Indies, earthquakes have destroyed ten churches since last August, while in the village of Saman a fire did not stop at houses, but burned the church and Rectory. That is God's way of managing things. He takes a church and a dwelling house equally, and with the same lack of concern. What would be said by humans if a man could control a fire, or an earthquake, and did nothing? We can picture many contemptible attitudes of humans, but surely nothing can be more contemptible than a man, or woman, watching disasters and meeting them with a "God's will be —." We leave common sense to pick out the deserved word. If there is anything in the old saying "Curse God and die," there seems a good opportunity to use it here.

A circular reaches us through the post appealing for help for a "Children's Homes." We quite appreciate that much kindness is mixed up with these institutions, but what struck us was the expression that the homeless ones were "God's Children." Of that we know nothing. If they are God's children he has woefully neglected his youngsters, and if they are not, then someone is libelling God. All the parents we have met are just ordinary people, some very good, some very bad, and most just average. But in this instance the poor suffering little ones are deliberately called God's children, and in that case God, as a parent, is not very attractive. If a man wilfully starves his children we call him a criminal, or a brute. And it does not seem fair for mere man to look after God's children and He be called a loving father. There seems something wrong in the picture.

We are also reminded that in helping children we are doing God's work. But what is God doing? So far as we can see the best phases of life come from Man, not from Gods. God left the world in a very bad way and man had to do what he could to make it habitable. God spreads a river over a countryside

and leaves a morass. Man deepens a channel, raises an embankment, drains the land and makes it habitable. God left man frightfully ignorant, and human inquisitiveness gives him knowledge. God leaves man the prey of brutal passions. Men teach each other to understand the world. And all the time that man is striving here and there to improve mankind God is upsetting part of his civilising efforts. Man's only protection against God is knowledge, and it was the tree of knowledge that God forbade him to eat. It is ignorance that brought gods into being; it is human knowledge that reduces them to museum pieces.

The B.B.C.'s religious department must have had a great shock the other Sunday evening when a talk was given on Alfred Nobel, the great Swedish industrialist, who left a fund at his death for what is known as the Nobel Prize—one of the most coveted of honours, apart from its yearly cash value of £7,500. The speaker actually pointed out in his panegyric of Nobel that he was an *Atheist*. It was made worse, of course, by being pointed out on a Sunday evening when listeners had just heard some preacher calling them to God Almighty; and to be told that the subject of an eulogy on the air was an *Atheist* must have felt like a gross insult. Besides, we were told that Nobel's favourite poet was Shelley—another *Atheist*. So it looks as if a very Christian audience, listening in on a Sunday, can be told that there are *Atheists* in the world and very great ones at that. What is the B.B.C. coming to?

The "Universe" is by no means pleased with the defence made by Fr. Andrew of the way the B.B.C. is using Catholic services to the advantage of Roman Catholicism. It denies that Catholic services are getting their fair share, and once again protests angrily at the B.B.C.'s "system of religious censorship." It "is appalling and intolerable," cries the "Universe," "that there should be any supervision which involves censorship of religious beliefs and practices by a *non-Catholic department*." The italics are ours, and we emphasise this because the very last thing any Catholic journal would protest against is the censorship of Freethought utterances on the air. It only hurts when Catholic practices are in question. Needless to add that if the "Universe" had its way only Catholic religious nonsense would be permitted on the radio. Everything else would be rigorously suppressed.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are seriously disturbed at the way in which the income of the Church will fall as a direct result of the nationalisation of the railways and kindred securities. The losses will run into thousands of pounds. Well, this may lead to a reduction in the number of clergy, and if at the same time to fewer bishops also, we see no cause for being disturbed. After all, the Church will have to face some pretty severe losses anyway, and the sooner it realises that it is rapidly becoming the Church of "lost causes" the better it will be for the community at large.

Both of our Archbishops are working as hard as they can to induce people to be married in the Church. They know they are losing touch with the people and they stick at nothing to get their end. The most general thing is to induce an engaged couple to have a Church marriage. But, as we are constantly stressing, there is no religious ceremony in England where the "religious" marriage carries any legal power.

One of the most curious phases of historic Christianity—and there can be none other—is that no one seems to believe it. If it is argued that the state of the world does not seem to be controlled by a wise, powerful, and lovable deity, we are told that *educated Christians* no longer believe in that. If we ask for proof of answers to prayers, we are told the results are not objective, if they are subjective, that is, they cannot be traced by anyone. If an *Atheist* denounces the doctrine of hell we are informed that *real Christians* no longer believe in Hell. If the *Atheist* presents the Christian with hell and the devil, he is told that no one believes in them now, although it stands as plain as possible in the Old and New Testaments. So we go on, which proves that no one can be sure what Christianity exists for, unless its function is to find employment for a type of character that society would be the better without.

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SUGAR PLUMS

When the Christian Church began its career it fixed its attention on right belief. Mere conduct did not matter much. The thief on the cross was not saved because he had done something morally good, but simply because he believed in Jesus, and as he was being crucified he took a chance of worshipping Jesus. He had nothing to lose. And for many centuries the Christian Church followed the steps taken by the thief on the cross. It was right belief that mattered, evil conduct could easily be wiped away. Christ, said the great Spurgeon, delights in sinners, the greater their infamy the more valuable the man.

Then step by step the Christians felt they were losing ground. People began to value conduct more than belief, intelligent understanding more than blind acceptance of ancient superstitions. So gradually all men were damned because our first parents committed the crime of wanting to know things. Steadily the belief in the story of Adam, Eve and Satan grew weaker, and the desire to know about things grew. Life began to assume a more intellectual form. Human nature and human knowledge grew—if not rapid, it grew. Self respect grew greater. Man began to understand himself and the world around him. The miracle worker Saviour began to lose ground, and the developing conquering man began to write his own history.

In the later stages of religion many reasons are given for fasting. It is as an act of penance, to overcome "sin." All of this is just religious bunkum. Fasting means a lowered vitality, and among certain types of humanity, visions are easily created. In the Church, particularly the Roman Church, thousands of celestial visions have been created by that simple method. The Saints who had celestial visions did so by ill-using the body. Nature takes its revenge in its own way. The Zulus have a saying that a stuffed body cannot see "sacred things," and that expresses a very common fact in a very few words. It is probable that there are as many visions of the unknown today as there were in the Dark Ages, but they are handled differently. And as a result the doctor kills the visions, the priest does what he can to multiply them. It is a case of ignorance versus knowledge. There is hardly a need to point out on which side ignorance lies.

The world is not short of "good" people. It never has been and it never will be. Neither has there been wanting moral counsel. There has always been plenty of that. If a man with the toothache took only half of the remedies given him he would probably be dead in a week. If anyone carried out all the moral counsel given him he would be called a fool, and would deserve the title. Luckily, mother nature, while it gives man a capacity for listening to moral advice, has furnished him with the capacity for not bothering about it. If we were all perfectly honest in

thought and deed we should probably be looking round for some method of breaking the ethical circuit. It was a Scotsman who said that it took all sorts to make a world. That there may be evil in all things good, just as there may be good in all things evil is a great truth that deserves attention.

THE LOST FAITH

Never, perhaps, before has so large a part of the population abandoned all interest in what the wisest of all ages have regarded as the fundamental problem of life, the problem of religion. It is not only that faith has lost its hold upon the majority of modern men and women. Even where religious feeling is deep and sincere there is, outside the ranks of professional theologians, a strong sense of the futility of the discussion of religious problems.—"ENGLISH THOUGHT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY," BY D. C. SOMERVELL (1929).

WHAT IS ATHEISM?

No. 2—Atheism and History

IN seeking to trace the historic fortunes of Atheism it is not, obviously, necessary to trace the origins of scientific thought back to the Garden of Eden, or even to the remote ape-men whose primitive psychology has left so many and such deep traces upon religious concepts. Atheism is a civilised philosophy: as founded on logical abstractions it can only be found in very advanced cultural and psychological phases of human evolution. Indeed, this last fact has been its heavy practical handicap and the reason for the comparative failure of Atheism to become a mass-philosophy in historic times.

Indeed, in this last respect, the common theological criticism that Atheism—i.e., scientific philosophy—has not met with lasting popular success, is, in reality, merely a confession of the generally primitive character of human society up to and including our present age. For, if the primitive psychology of animism—and all and any theology is, at bottom, only a pseudo-rationalisation of animism—has hitherto flourished generally, and often exclusively, such a recurring phenomenon could only occur in very primitive social states. Indeed, in last analysis, the statement of the religionists that mankind has usually been animistic—i.e., religious—is merely an assertion that, hitherto, human society has been usually primitive!

Indeed, so true is the above statement that, when we seek for the historical origins of Atheism, it is impossible to trace them very far back even in the annals of "civilised" mankind. The earliest civilised societies were, in fact, invariably ruled by priests. For the modern entirely reactionary role of the clerical class must not blind us to the prominent and not altogether reactionary role which its ancient counterpart played in the earliest civilisations. To be sure, no less a person than the rationalistic Aristotle has gone on record with the remark that the Egyptian priestly class founded civilisation precisely because it was the first leisured class. And, historically, there was much truth in this observation. Naturally, a priest-ruled civilisation—whatever the private opinions of the priests!—could not be officially atheistic. Nor could its attitude to scientific phenomena have a genuinely scientific character. For example, the ancient Egyptian and Mediaeval Peruvian priests, who worshipped the Sun, could neither "deny" its existence, nor, presumably, record too many of its *eclipses*!

Hence, in seeking for the origins of Atheism we are reduced to seeking for them in the last 2,500 years—out of the million odd years during which Homo "Sapiens" (sic.) has honoured the earth by his presence! It is only in ancient Greek and Indian (perhaps we should add Chinese) philosophy that an atheistic philosophy made its bow to history.

We note in passing that two atheistic—or near atheistic—philosophies acquired a mass-following in Antiquity: Buddhism in India, and Epicureanism in Greece. But the original Buddhism which did not “deny” the existence of gods but was essentially atheistic in that it reduced them to mere by-products of cosmic evolution, conceived in a fundamentally scientific manner as an infinite sequence of cause and effect, soon itself became enmeshed in compromise with popular Hinduism, and itself ended up as, in effect, a new supernatural religion. Whilst Epicureanism, probably the most important of all atheistic movements prior to the present age, eventually succumbed altogether, after six centuries (c. 300 B.C.—A.D. 300) to the inrush of oriental religious cults and to the victorious expansions of Christianity. Here again, Epicureanism was not formally atheistic, since it did not “deny” altogether the existence of the gods. But the gods of Epicurus, who dwelt in “blessed indifference,” did nothing but contemplate their own blessedness: perhaps the most harmless occupation for a god! They were divine “Merovingians,” who reigned but did not govern; and who were even more like figure-heads than a modern Lord Mayor, since they never even showed themselves to mortals!

In the history of Atheism the mediaeval era (c. A.D. 400-1400) is a vast blank. Any atheists who existed in that terrible era of clerical totalitarianism either flourished—or failed to flourish—in obscurity; or provided free fuel for the bonfires of the Inquisition! The classical atheistic literature was systematically censored and destroyed. So rigorous was this process of “smelling out” heresy by the witch-doctors of the Inquisition that only one complete freethinking work has survived: the great poem of Lucretius on “The Nature of Reality.” And this now acknowledged poetic classic, with its fighting Epicurean philosophy, was, it seems, at one time obliterated, with the exception of a single copy from which all subsequent MSS descend. Incidentally, we have often thought that one of our more rationally-minded novelists might well write a moving historical romance around the figure of the presumably atheistic monk who, in the darkness of the Mediaeval Age preserved for posterity—both from mice and Inquisitors—the greatest of all literary masterpieces inspired by the atheistic view!

In the modern age, which began with the Renaissance that recovered the secular culture of Antiquity, and with the Reformation that broke the Catholic stranglehold on society, there have been several periods during which Atheism has raised its head. We refer, in particular, to the Italian Renaissance, where the University of Padua and even, at times, Papal Rome (!) were its recognised centres; and to the epoch of the French and Russian Revolutions. In all these aforementioned ages the philosophy of Atheism was able to ally itself with up-and-coming social interests and classes which, for a variety of reasons, were hostile to clerical orthodoxy on the political and economic fields, and whose own interests induce a favourable attitude to science, useful from the practical standpoint, and, consequently, to the theoretical scientific standpoint, which last is identical with the standpoint of Atheism.

But in all these cases the vogue of Atheism proved to be only partial and temporary in character. In the case of 16th century Italy the Italian Renaissance, possibly the most brilliant efflorescence of culture in European history, was drowned in blood by the Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Spanish sword: one of the major tragedies in human history, whose high water-marks were the judicial murder of Giordano Bruno by the Inquisition (A.D. 1600) and the imprisonment of Galileo by the same clerical “Gestapo” a generation later.

Whilst, in the case of the French Revolution, the victorious French bourgeoisie, who had originally read the often atheistic “Encyclopedists” and revolted against the Church, no less than the State of the old régime, on the morrow of victory compromised with religion and acquiesced in Napoleon’s “Concordat” with Catholicism (1801). (Whilst precise information about

present-day Soviet Russia is hard to come by—for obvious reasons—some analoguous process seems to be taking place there. At least, it seems probable that there is now a much closer tie-up between the Soviet State and the Russian “Orthodox” Church than was the case in the early days of the Revolution: possibly as a political antidote to the anti-Russian activities of the Vatican?)

What conclusions must we draw from the above resumé, necessarily brief, of the role of Atheism in history? Surely this: Atheism, as the scientific philosophy, par excellence, represents a very advanced psychological human state. And so advanced a mental state requires for its existence and mass-diffusion correspondingly advanced social conditions. As conditions of this character have usually been absent, Atheism has, hitherto, only existed precariously, and even where possible, as the culture of advanced élites ahead of the broad masses.

To-day, however, for the first time in all history, the masses are entering history. What, now, are the social conditions upon the basis of which Atheism can, henceforth, flourish, not merely as a philosophy of advanced minorities, but as the permanent philosophy of the broad masses of mankind?

F. A. RIDLEY.

A GOD IN A CRADLE

THE God family is a very ancient and respected one. Cosmopolitan in pedigree and prolific in generating, its members rapidly spread all over the inhabited globe, especially before the dawn of civilisation. The health of the family was good until science and civilisation began to develop. From that time symptoms of a wasting disease appeared among the gods, their birth rate began to decline, the mortality among the living members became serious, and today the situation in the more enlightened countries is desperate; there are grave fears in some quarters that the family may become extinct. The medicine men of the Christian churches are doing their utmost to arrest the disease, and the B.B.C. with politicians of various colours are lending active support. The Conservative Party is really alarmed and Tory politics are suggested as a cure. That seems to be the only hope for God.

The gods were never a happy family, jealousy, rivalry, squabble and scrap were common family features, and whenever two gods met there was bound to be trouble. A particularly quarrelsome member of the family was one named Jehovah. He was jealous, aggressive and domineering by nature, and when not making trouble with his relations was interfering with the inhabitants of the earth. On the other hand he was not without merit and appeared to have a rare gift for craftsmanship. He is reported to have once made a living man out of dust, and many people believe the modern dustman is a descendant. We are told he also made a live woman out of a spare rib, whilst suns, moons, stars and planets were turned out by the millions and tossed into space. After about 4,000 years of that pastime Jehovah became a father and a little god was born, ordained to save the world. The preliminary arrangements for the birth left much to be desired. A stable was requisitioned, and the manger served as an improvised cradle. Let us hope that when the next saviour of the world is born better arrangements will be made. But a god in a cradle somehow doesn't seem to inspire confidence. Give me the ready-made god, a god who is a god 100 per cent. of his days, busy all the time making suns, moons, planets, wars, earthquakes and priests. Now all the world loves a baby, be it a baby giraffe, a baby alligator, a baby hippo., or a human baby. But a baby god, a helpless little mite of a god, how should one behave in its presence? Speaking of infancy, Emerson said, “One babe commonly makes four or five out of the adults who prattle and play to it.” That is quite true, but when the occupant of the cradle is a baby god, what then? Should one

coo, make funny faces, and utter baby talk? Would it be the right thing to kiss a little god, or congratulate its mother on her bonny wee god? Those are matters of world wide importance and the churches should give a ruling on them so that we are prepared should another saviour of the world be born in the near future.

Today Jesus is in his 1,946th year, quite a youth as gods go, but at this season of the year Christians like to forget the 1,946-year old saviour of the world, the terrible mess the world is in, and the big hand Christian countries have had in that making. On a wave of cheap sentiment they travel back mentally to a god in a cradle. They picture a scene that never happened, they sing praises to a baby god that never existed, they chant carols of peace and goodwill in the midst of preparations for a third world war, and fancy themselves intelligent members of a civilised country.

There is nothing ungodlike in 1,946 years of failure and it should be left at that, as something godly and expected, and perhaps after all it is a welcome change for Christians to act sensibly in religion once a year in one direction. That is, to ignore the annual 50 weeks' failure of their god and get back to the baby Jesus for a fortnight each year and talk silly about a god in a cradle.

And so with half the population of the world facing hunger, disease and premature death, millions homeless and wretched, widows and orphans beyond count, freedom being bled to death—representing civilised man's dividend from six years of reckless destruction of the things he was supposed to be fighting for—Christians will call upon the unthinking to rejoice because they have good tidings of a god in a cradle 1,946 years ago. That is the beginning of the good tidings, and also the end, so "Come all ye Faithful."

R. H. ROSETTI.

A CHRISTIAN ?

"I LEAD a good life, therefore I am a Christian!" This misconception represents the outlook of a large number of people to-day. It is an attitude that all Freethinkers should combat, because from it the Church receives undeserved credit as an influence in everyday life. The people who make this statement are often the very people who most despise organised religion, and who will say "Holy Communion is rot. . . I do not like parsons. . . I can worship God better in the sunshine than I can in a church," etc. Yet they still call themselves "Christians." They fail to realise that only those who acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, who regularly attend Holy Communion, and who avow a belief in all the superstitious mumbo-jumbo of the Church are Christians in the sight of Christ. He has said this with "Do this in remembrance of me."

They will agree that the Bible is silly, and admit that they cannot believe in it, yet, despite the fact that it is the basis of Christianity, they will claim to be Christians. They seem unaware that they are helping to perpetuate this nonsense by using its name to label what is really their own goodness of heart. They must be made to realise that if they would speak the truth and say, "I help my fellow man, therefore I am a humanist," they would be doing humanity another service by breaking down the idea that everything good stems from the Church. They are good because their basic instincts include love of their fellow man. Their goodness is not inspired by religious feeling, as is proved by the ready way that they disown Christ's Church as soon as they are really tackled about it.

It would be a worthwhile crusade for all Freethinkers to make a vow never to allow my opening statement to pass without pointing out the falsity of its logic.

FREDERICK C. HAGGER.

THE MIGHTY ATOM

Born in a blood-bath and conceived in hate,
Strange Monster-child adopted by the State
That other States shall in subjection lie—
That other Subjects shall submit—or die.
Only the warped and twisted mind of Man
Could engineer so hideous a plan;
Destroying human masses at one blow
As crumbling into dust whole cities go.
If genius amounts to nought but this—
Then Ape-life in the jungle would be bliss!

But listen well, you clever ones. Beware!
This Monster you have reared with loving care
Is Slave to none—and will your Master be—
Enslaving you who set this mad thing free!
So smother now this beast of evil birth
Before it swallows you—and all the Earth!

W. H. WOOD.

CORRESPONDENCE

"RETRIBUTIVE VENGEANCE"

SIR,—I would just like to make one comment on the excellent article on "They Deserve Hanging," by Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann in the "Freethinker" of November 24th. He says in regard to "retributive vengeance" that "Christ's teaching is the very antithesis of this." Is it? Admittedly, according to Mr. Du Cann's pamphlet "The Faults and Failings of Jesus Christ" (what a blasphemous title!) Christ was a well meaning sentimentalist and inconsistent both in his actions and his teachings. On one thing, however, he was both consistent and insistent—the inevitable hell-fire eternal for those who did not accept him and his teachings. Of the two forms of retributive justice give me that of the blundering British—or even that of the Germans!

—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—
12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

LONDON—INDOOR

West London Branch N.S.S. (The National Trade Union Club, 12, Gt. Newport Street, W.C.1).—6-30 p.m.: "The Political Aims of the Vatican," Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—
6-30 p.m.: "Secularism," Mr. T. TOWNEND.

THOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds. By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 4d.; postage 1d.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

THE MORAL LANDSLIDE. An Inquiry into the Behaviour of Modern Youth. By F. J. Corina. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

ESSAYS IN FREETHINKING. By Chapman Cohen. First, third and fourth series. Price 2s. 6d. each; postage 2½d.

THE EVOLUTION OF REVELATION

THERE is something ludicrous about Freethinkers following learned theologians in their re-interpretation of scripture, especially Revelations. The assumption that the Scarlet Woman refers to Rome when she is specifically described as the City of Babylon, Mother of Harlots, reminds one of the idea that the City of Seven Hills refers to a city where there never were seven hills, and of the Protestant idea that the beast number 666 is the Pope as Anti-Christ. And why should we assume that the Jews were the only people with the idea of a liberating Messiah; or that the revolt of Barcochba is of more importance than that of Boadicea; were the people of these islands unable to form such ideas? Making assumptions is no explanation. Anything can be proved that way.

What we get out of a book depends on what we put into our reading. To understand any book we need some idea of the idiom in which it is expressed. The Jews were important because Hebrew was a system of hieroglyphics closely connected with the development of the alphabet, and it was the development of script that led to the Voice of God being enshrined in a Book. This apocalyptic literature is a connecting link between the ideographical visualisation and the abstract verbal mode which developed with the alphabet. With the characteristic of poetic allusion it is not less abstract, only more crude. For instance, the instruction to write in a book and eat it; eating the scroll is no more figurative nor less abstract than the injunction to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest; eating is more crude than digesting. The writers ability to express himself is limited by the language he uses.

In the book of Daniel, the dream is specifically described as visions of the bed; his eyes were closed. But in Ezekiel the visions are what he saw in the sky; his eyes were open. Visual thinking was his mode of expression. Like the animals he saw, with eyes within and eyes without, his seeing was both introspective and extraspective. The apparent inconsistency arises in the allegorical idiom. With an appreciation of this, we can go further than to identify the mystical fantasy of Revelations with Daniel and Ezekiel; and see their parallel in such as the Winged Bull of Assyria. We can also see in them the Cherubim and Seraphim in the Solomon's Temple of Chronicles. But also, the limitations of the idiom in measurement and structure lead to apparent inconsistencies of a physical character. But in observing that these structures were the same dimensions in all directions we might see that their form was circular, and we might realise the difficulty of Ezekiel, who saw wheels in the sky, wheels within and wheels without. So that the building was a conglomeration of circles.

We now know that men knew how to make circles and triangles with pegs and ropes; to build stone circles; long before they had a word to verbally describe a circle. So we can realise, perhaps, that Solomon's Temple was similar to the stone circles at Avebury; but that the monoliths were not unhewn stones, but carved representations of our zoological phantasia. Returning again to Ezekiel, we can take it that his plan of the New Temple was also circular, with three gates to the East, three to the North, to the West and South. But our Bible tells us, in the margin, that the word gates is in Hebrew, portals. As the portals are the uprights and the cross-beam we can visualise a circular structure with 13 uprights with cross pieces, which is reminiscent of Stonehenge.

But Ezekiel's New Temple is a visualisation and not an actuality. It has no carved representations but bears the names of the twelve tribes. If we realise that the whole is astro-mythological symbolism, we can see that the New Temple, the temple not built with hands, which is the same as the New

Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, is a visualisation of the Heavens, and that it is the diagrammatical form of what came to be known in Greek as the Zodiac. We can see a definite connection between the monolithic circular structures of Avebury and Stonehenge and the Pyramids and obelisks of Egypt. They were a kind of primitive observatory, whose roof was the sky, for noting the positions of stars and planets. The Zodiacal diagram was also used for noting the configurations.

But just as men learned to build circles before they learned to think of them, so also did they learn to visualise the planetary movements in action; in circular processions and dances; the whirling movement of the dancers within the stone circles representing the whirling movement of the planets in the heavens. But the idea of astronomical prediction arose from and was confused by, ideas of a very different character, for a further consideration shows that the upright monoliths were phallic emblems before they became carved images; and the ceremonial connected with them, like the maypole dance, was originally phallic in its magic significance. We also know that the general plan and structure of the Barrows closely connected with these stone circles, were identical with that of the Egyptian Mastaba. The Temple was also the place of worship and of the oracle, the voice of the Gods.

Forecasting the times and seasons was a theological prerogative. Even in the late Middle Ages the days were kept as the Calendar of Saints, and the Churches kept the times; from which custom we have clocks in church towers and belfreys. There has been throughout an astrological tradition, accepted until quite recently by theologians. It was by the use of such symbolism that Bishop Usher calculated the exact time of creation. It is only since astrology has been discarded that the New Jerusalem has become a future Earthly Paradise, heralded by an Earthly Messiah. But the presence of astrological symbolism does not mean that this is a form of astrological prediction, for the ideas of prognostication by such means is as much an historical development as the Christian superstition itself.

What we have to realise is that there has been an evolution in the meaning implied by the word prophecy. The word prophecy is used in different ways. We read of prophesying against and of being prophesied against. The word may mean accusation, declamation, denunciation or condemnation. Indeed, the works of the Prophets are little more than declamation. But an appreciation of astrological divination gives a key to its character. The conflict of cultures has its psychological aspect. We have to visualise the conflict of ideologies. The non-physical astro-mythological was in conflict with the physical phallicism. Hence, the wholesale condemnation of idolatry and fornication. The psychological projection is of interest. Just as Dante saw his friends in Paradise and his enemies in the Inferno, so it was with the Odium Theologicum. The curse is crude prophecy, just as vengeance is rough justice.

The character of the prophecy is thus clearly seen. The power of magic was defeated by the force of argument; the prophet had an argument that defeated the philosophers of old. The course of events was the will of the Gods. The destruction and desolation of the ruins of Empires, from Sumer and Akkad, Babylon and Assyria, the Medes and Persians, up to Alexander and Rome, still continued into the modern world. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is the classic concept of the modern Armageddon. Wholesale declamation and condemnation in the name of righteousness is still a powerful weapon, and widely used. But religiously, it does not stop at mundane affairs, it follows beyond the grave. The ferocious vilification that calls upon the wrath of heaven cannot be explained by a belief in an earthly Messiah, nor a heavenly Christ who is to lead us to a New Jerusalem.

H. H. PREECE.