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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Political Catholicism on Trial

IN December, 1918, Cardinal Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary, was arrested by order of the (predominantly) Communist Government of Hungary. He is to be charged shortly with conspiring against the safety of the State.

As one would expect, the anti-Communist as well as the international press of that powerful ecclesiastical corporation, the Roman Catholic Church, is already giving the Cardinal's trial plenty of advance publicity. The Pope has officially excommunicated the Prosecutors, and Cardinal Griffin, of Westminster, and no doubt, many other ecclesiastical spokesmen in other parts of the world have referred to the Cardinal's arrest as a fresh and dramatic episode in the age-long battle between God and Satan: Mr. Stalin is, it seems, the Anti-Pope who represents the last-named hero of, shall we say, fiction.

Already, before the trial is under way, we hear from the press of the Church of the Inquisition, the usual charges of persecuting religion and violating justice, directed against the Hungarian Government.

How far are these charges true? Some unexpected light is thrown upon the question by a recent official declaration issued by the Lutheran Bishops of Hungary: that is, from a Church which is Christian, but traditionally opposed to Rome. Such a declaration, and one coming from such a source, has at least the advantage of being immune from suspicion of dictation from the Cominform, or from sympathy with the views of the World Union of Freethinkers.

According to the explicit declaration of the Hungarian Lutheran Bishops, the arrest and impending trial of Primate Mindszenty has got absolutely nothing to do with religion as such, either the Roman Catholic Religion or any other. The Bishops energetically repudiate the charge of religious persecution now brought against the Hungarian Government by the Catholic Press and pulpit. Contrarily, they make the specific declaration that the Cardinal owes his present sojourn behind bars exclusively to his activities of a political character, in particular reference to his active association with the "Catholic Action" movement in Eastern Europe.

In short, the Lutheran Bishops charge, it is solely due to Political Catholicism, and in connection exclusively with its present activities behind the (so-called) Iron Curtain, that the charge of treason has been brought against the Hungarian Primate.

Considering the source of this statement, we think, it is not lightly to be dismissed. The present writer himself is in a position to bring what looks very much like corroborative evidence. In another capacity I had occasion, at a date some time prior to Cardinal Mindszenty's arrest, to read copies of the (English) anti-Communist weekly, "East Europe." This journal

was then lauding Cardinal Mindszenty to the skies as, so to speak, the Anti-Communist Number One in Eastern Europe, more specifically, as the leader of the *political* opposition in, not only Hungary, but throughout Eastern Europe in general.

Such a declaration from an entirely independent source, and made some time before either the Cardinal's arrest or the Lutheran Bishops' comment upon it, appears entirely to confirm the supposition that it is as the leader of political Catholicism, and not as a potential Christian martyr, that the Primate is awaiting trial to-day. It is on record also that the Hungarian Cardinal once expressed the wish that Communism and Socialism should be exterminated. Hardly a *religious* wish.

The world-wide press of militant Catholicism will, of course, keep quiet about such a role. Contrarily, they and their anti-Communist-at-all-costs journalistic associates will boost Mindszenty as a Christian martyr, and particularly, as a martyr to human freedom. As a Freethinker, I hold no brief for totalitarianism in either Church or State, but it must be pointed out that a glance at the actual history of Hungary does not confirm the supposition that the powerful Hungarian Catholic Church has ever demonstrated any particular enthusiasm for human liberty where, since liberty, like charity, begins at home, one might have expected it to have done so, viz., in Hungary itself. Where, incidentally, Roman Catholicism has been the dominating force ever since the now distant date when the Church crowned St. Stephen as the first King of Hungary (977-1038).

From that remote date down to the advent of Communism to power at the end of the Second World War, the general pattern of Hungarian society remained remarkably constant, and the land monopoly of a small exclusive feudal aristocracy has represented its outstanding feature throughout this millennium, a feudal monopoly, from which the Hungarian Church has always been one of the principal beneficiaries.

Everyone acquainted with even the rudiments of Hungarian history will know that this feudal land monopoly has been the perennial curse of Hungarian society, a society in which a handful of landlords, both "spiritual" and lay, have lorded it over, and ruthlessly exploited a nation of landless serfs.

The historic revolutions: of Stephen Doska, at the time of the Reformation, of Louis Kossuth, in 1848, of Bela Kun, in 1919, under whatever ostensible disguises, aimed primarily at ending this monstrous, monopolistic stranglehold upon the Hungarian nation's economic existence. (The above revolts were ruthlessly suppressed: Doska was literally roasted alive, with the full concurrence of the Hungarian Church, and the modern suppression by the landlords has been hardly less ruthless.)

Whatever faults may be alleged against the present Hungarian Government, it is the first government in

Hungary's long history to end feudal landlordism and to convert landless serfs into a self-respecting peasantry by the long overdue redistribution of the land.

This is the supreme crime of Hungarian Communism in the eyes of the feudal reaction of which political Catholicism is the mouthpiece and Cardinal Mindszenty the acknowledged leader.

It would obviously be most improper for me to comment upon the technicalities of a case which is still subjudice. But until the Catholic Press can substantiate its torrent of denunciation with some proofs of genuine *religious* persecution on the part of the prosecuting government, we shall continue to share the view of the Hungarian Lutheran Bishops that it is political Catholicism, and not Christianity as such, which is on trial in the person of Cardinal Mindszenty.

We think that whatever the validity of the precise charges may be, all Freethinkers must congratulate the Hungarian Government on their courageous standing up to this monstrous bulwark of outworn privilege and of unrepentant intolerance.

F. A. RIDLEY.

MEDIEVAL TRADE AND TRAVELS

UNTIL the close of the Middle Ages, England occupied a secondary position as a trading and industrial country. The leading commercial centres of Europe were the Northern Italian City States, the Netherlands, the Rhine districts, and the Baltic towns. The rude methods of navigation, with their diminutive ships, made long distant voyages extremely hazardous. The longest range of a navigator from our island's shores in the twelfth century of our era was to Flanders, Denmark and Scotland. Two centuries later, Chaucer's Shipman did not venture beyond Portugal. Indeed, the boldest adventurers in Medieval vessels were Flemings and Italians, in whose trading centres manufacturing and commercial undertakings were far in advance of ours.

The Crusades greatly extended Western Europe's knowledge of the Near East, while between 1250 and 1350, intrepid mariners made Far Eastern lands better known than they ever became until Reformation days. Despite the atrocities that disgraced the Crusades, these ultimately unsuccessful campaigns made the Mediterranean an important commercial channel and established friendlier relations between Christian and Moslem. Consuls were instituted at trading stations, while agreements, first verbal, and later written, were entered into to safeguard the interests of the parties concerned. As Dr. Coulton notes in his *Medieval Panorama*: "The earliest of these written agreements dates from 1184; and, as time went on we find these commercial relations between Christian and Mussulman often regulated on higher principles than feudal law at home. In 1270, for instance, the principle of reprisals was repudiated; again the right of wreckage was abolished three centuries before it was abolished in Europe. Moreover, freedom of worship was allowed to these Christian traders in Mohammedan ports. Numerous documents testify to the commercial peace which often reigned between these political enemies, even in the thick of the Crusades."

Kings and Pontiffs legislated against the transport of armaments in Christian ships to their Saracen enemies. Nevertheless, Spanish, Venetian and Genoese traders continued to convey war materials to Moslem ports and, after Saladin's victories, trading between West and East increased both in volume and value. Pope Innocent

himself, dictatorial as he was, was unable to suppress it, while the Spanish and Italian potentates were more than suspected of conniving in this lucrative, if utterly "blasphemous trade."

Still, even if the Aragonese, Venetian and Genoese merchants had put the religion before their pockets, and their princes disdained the rich revenues they derived from this unhalloved traffic, Flemish and Baltic smugglers would have soon taken their places. Again, as pilgrimages to Palestine increased with abounding prosperity a more cordial relationship was established between Cross and Crescent.

As early as 1250 there was an English settlement in Acre and the chief maritime towns in the Mediterranean had their quarters in the main Syrian ports. The slave trade was increased by the Crusades and was conducted on an international scale.

It is true that relatively enlightened ecclesiastics, such as Lanfranc and Wulfstan, assisted in suspending the sale of native English slaves to the Irish, but serfdom and slavery were justified by the orthodox generally throughout Christendom, and the reformer, Wyclif, stood almost alone in protesting against servitude. As Coulton testifies: "No Pope or Church Council fulminated against slavery; the Archbishop of Narbonne, in 1149, left his Saracen slaves by will to the Bishop of Béziers; and in 1251, another Archbishop of Narbonne complained that the Viscount had withheld from him his rightful profit of two slave-markets, to the amount of 2,500 sols, or about £15,000 in modern purchasing power."

As the Middle Ages advanced, the German Hansa Towns and Flanders became Britain's chief buyers and sellers. The Hansa corporation established its depots, possessing special privileges in London, Bristol, Norwich, Ipswich and other cities in East Anglia; in York and at Hull. Trading was then a serious adventure and the merchant frequently accompanied his cargo on its voyage, fully equipped to withstand the pirates who infested the seas, or even to indulge in buccaneering himself.

Travelling across country was also beset with danger. The far-famed Roman roads had long since fallen into ruin, and most of our paths were little more than trackways, although the cities in several continental countries were paved. Save on a few of our main thoroughfares, waggons were rarely used, except from field to granary or barn. The backs of domestic animals and light vehicles were the common means of transport. Primitive as the roads were, they were shockingly neglected, and even in the town or village streets were obstructed by fallen trees and other impediments, and frequently rendered almost impassable by deep pits dug in the clay and left unprotected. In such circumstances land travel was exceedingly precarious and slow. Even an Oxford Fellow spent 34 days on a special journey to the Pope at Avignon for business reasons.

Travelling over the Channel was even less expeditious. In inclement weather and adverse winds it might take fifteen days to cross over to the Continent. Stormy seas were no respectors of royalty, and King John of France spent eleven days on a voyage to England while our sovereign, Edward III, suffered a passage so painful that he could only explain it by attributing it to the arts of "foreign necromancers and wizards."

Apart from pilgrimages, men went abroad to engage in warfare or on business. Pilgrims returned with wondrous tales of hairbreadth escapes from danger or death and their stories lost nothing in the telling. The

open-mouthed credulity of their listeners encouraged them in their mendacity. The most famous of these worthies was Sir John Maundeville whose wonderful "Travels" were popular reading for centuries. But Chaucer's experiences in Italy, when recorded, proved of permanent value, while Marco Polo's voyages to far Eastern lands made Europe familiar with countries and peoples hitherto almost unknown. On the other hand, the poet Chaucer introduced Italian customs and ideas into England. It appears that "he found in Lombardy and Tuscany, even more than in Bruges, newer methods in trade and industry, and incomparably vaster business buildings, than even in his native London."

Again, the arts of Italy and her earlier literature were thus made known by Chaucer to his fellow countrymen, and, moving, as the author of the Canterbury Tales did, in the most cultured and influential circles of his time, the fruits of his foreign journeys were assimilated and transmitted by his intellectual contemporaries to their successors, who laid firm the foundations of the coming English Renaissance.

T. F. PALMER.

RATIONALISM IN OUR TIME

SURELY there cannot be one amongst us who has not at some time or other passionately felt a sense of the full significance and beauty and dignity of human life and human destiny. Flying over the island of Jamaica in the West Indies, seeing with the aid of one of our great modern technological achievements the whole glorious panorama of those rolling green hills with their lush tropic vegetation and the winding rivers bordered with tall stately palms in this beautiful Blue Mountain land of the Caribbean, I recall feeling so vividly just how intellectually and emotionally meaningful human life could be. I recall wanting others to share this experience and this meaning. Reflecting now upon all the truly wonderful potentialities of humanity to-day, and upon the sad and sorry plight which is our current lot, one cannot help but realise that humanity in our time is like a pair of mighty eagles imprisoned in a small and dirty cage.

Surely one of the greatest and most worthwhile tasks of rationalism in our age is the freeing of our eagles to that world of splendid creative living which is so rightfully theirs.

Supernatural religion to-day is but one of many bars forming this prison. Uncontrolled private profiteering, lack of economic societal planning, the absence of a modern world state, the vast waste and horror and utter brutality of modern war—all due to lack of the use of the mind for the guidance of human conduct—are others. Mere negative attacks upon religion as a collection of foolish superstitions free in part our eagles but equip them not at all for modern life. Such attacks, made so easy by such obvious nonsense, attract all the discontented and frustrated souls, and all the wise ones who seek merely to display their intellects, and all those who couldn't, to save their lives, conceive a socially constructive concept. Further, a philosophy based upon mere negative reaction against error, is bound to extinction with the collapse of that error.

No, the task of rationalism is, of course, immeasurably greater and nobler than this. Humanity is emerging now in our own time from long ages of ignorance and false beliefs about itself into an age of increasing factual knowledge and understanding. Through our new human sciences, rationalism can show us the wonder that is us. Yes, the wonder that is us. Rationalism can tell us how brain physiologists and psychologists have discovered

what a truly magnificent instrument the average normal human brain really is, capable of the power of achieving a truly incredible number of different connections between nerve cells—thought and memory. Rationalism can point out that evolutionary biologists tell us that our minds—or, to use Julian Huxley's phrase, "conscious purpose"—should guide our lives. But surely it is obvious that we must think to live; in our time of such muddled and conflicting concepts on every side, we must think very carefully indeed in order to be able to guide our lives at all intelligently. People who don't think, certainly do the stupidest things.

Humanity to-day urgently needs a supreme philosophy of living, a rational way of life based on biological facts for modern times. The past has never possessed such a worthwhile and complete personal philosophy, nor any universal concept of good. The present reflects this in its lack of a universal wholesome direction in our human behaviour. Going to church is good to the religionist; kind and intelligent behaviour in life and to our fellow humans is the rationalist's good. Again, the religionist sees his or her vague concept of God as being the supreme good; belief in the power and supremacy of our minds delights and motivates the rationalist. To the doctor, the one good is the saving of human life; to the soldier, the taking of it. To the wealthy, intemperate extravagance in living and a sumptuous feast on gold plate is good; to the poor, sad poverty and a crust of bread is "the Lord's way." Slavery, public lupanars, a cruel double standard of sexual "morality," all flourished and were defended vigorously when religionists were in real control of societal behaviour. But then, of course, religion is but the mere mirror of each epoch of human history, reflecting within itself the life of the times, however ugly. To-day, precious women are publicly treated as mere playthings or lures or toys, while little bits of cloth called flags are venerated. Little children, the very own sons and daughters of men and women, live in neglect and filth and poverty, while primitive crucifixes are lovingly fondled. The noble and beautiful living reality is ignored, while the false image and the savage's fetish are glorified. To-day, it seems, error has many harsh clamouring voices, truth but a few quiet yet beautifully inspiring tones.

Rationalism, by asserting the supreme and infinitely inspiring beauty and worth and dignity of the human being, can greatly help humanity to achieve the full bright promise of our own splendid innate potentialities. The human mind must take over the control of life and guide human behaviour. And the human mind must have accurate biologically factual material for this guidance. It is just because religion seeks to guide our lives with its ancient superstitions and arbitrary dogmas that we must so powerfully attack it and sweep it aside. We must come to grips with religion out of a comprehensive realisation of humanity's sure and urgent need for a much better guide than this, for a factually biological guide, for intelligent and rational behaviour in our modern complex civilisation. And out of a sincere desire to improve our human lot. Springing from such lofty aims, our efforts cannot fail to attract the aid and active co-operation of all those persons in our world to-day who are genuinely interested with us in human betterment. With a supreme philosophy of living, rationalism can become the rallying point for all persons of goodwill who to-day so desperately need such a unifying philosophy. In such a united movement, all those who sense the social urgency of our age and who see a vision of the magnificent potentialities of the future can become a mighty force for progress.

Breaking forth from outworn channels of thought, breaking down that fatal acceptance of the however-unjust life of our age as natural and inevitably realising that change in our time is not only desirable but imperative, rationalism both dares and challenges us to make the freest and best use of our own fine minds in the intelligent guidance of our conduct. The nature of such rational behaviour may well develop wholly new qualities of intellectual and emotional awareness of life. And I would here define as rational that behaviour which is so perfected as to admit of no further rational criticism.

Yes, the responsibility of rationalism in our time is so much greater than any mere negative opposition to supernatural religion as a mere intellectual belief; we cannot understand religion unless we see it in relation to the human mind and the entire human societal scene. To achieve an appreciation of and reverence for human life, to create a rational philosophy of living for humanity, and to inspire us to press on to the full realisation and achievement of our own wonderful potentialities, surely this is the highest responsibility of rationalism in our time.

GORDON CAULFEILD, Canada.

A RATIONALIST ENCYCLOPÆDIA

II

TWO of the principal arguments urged against those who declare that there never was such a person as Jesus are the "witness" of Tacitus, and the "fact" that the Jews never denied the story of Jesus as a man.

The passage in the "Annals" of Tacitus is very well known, for it gives the story of the burning of Rome blamed on Christians who "had their denomination from Christus who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate." This is Robert Taylor's translation from the Latin—which he also gives—and other writers give slightly different versions. As Mr. Joseph McCabe in his "Rationalist Encyclopædia" goes so much to Dr. F. C. Conybeare, I must give his translation also. The relevant passage is: ". . . the populace called Chrestians. The author of this name, Christus, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator, Pontius Pilate." It will be noticed that Conybeare says *Chrestians*, and leaves out "as a criminal." Perhaps in some of the MSS. of Tacitus, or in some of the early printed editions, we had "Chrestos" as well as "Chrestiani"—but this would only increase the difficulties of the apologists for, in that case, it could be argued that Tacitus was referring neither to our Jesus Christ, nor to his Christian followers. The Greek translation of the word Messiah is "Christos," while the English translation of the word "Chrestos"—as far as I have been able to find out—is "good," a man called Chrestos being "Mr. Good." If a "Mr. Good" had any followers they would be "Chrestiani."

Taylor in his quotation of the Latin of Tacitus gives "*vulgus Christianos appellabat*," translating the word as Christians. Prof. Arthur Drews, in his "Witnesses to the Historicity of Jesus," gives exactly the same as Taylor. Thus, neither give the word which Conybeare translates as "Chrestians." And it must not be forgotten that it was Mr. McCabe himself who translated Drews' "Witnesses."

I have deliberately dealt with this point, because Conybeare insists "that the text of Tacitus is recognised by all competent Latin scholars to be remarkably free from

interpolations," which may be true; but did Tacitus write "Chrestians" or "Christians"? Moreover, how do we know what he wrote? I will deal with this point in a moment, but here I wish to point out that, whatever be the true text, it cannot be called a "witness" to the historicity of Jesus. All one can reasonably deduce from it is that at the time Tacitus was writing his "Annals" (about A.D. 110) he either knew some Christians, or Christians, who told him that they were called after their God Jesus Christ—or after a Mr. Good. In the latter case, as Chrestus (or Chrestos) was a common name, it could not have meant the "Historical Christ" who was the hero Conybeare was defending—followed by Mr. McCabe. If Christians are meant, it was no more surprising for Tacitus to learn that their God was Jesus, than it would have been surprising for him to record that the Egyptians worshipped a God called Horus. Surely this would not prove that Horus really lived as a man.

Right throughout his "Historical Christ," Conybeare pours scorn on the "scholarship" of Drews and W. B. Smith as well as John M. Robertson—but what about his own? He certainly had the reputation of being a great scholar, and in his own line perhaps deserved it. Yet no scholar could have shown less scholarship than he does when he has to deal with the suggestion that astral and sun myths are connected with Christianity. Drews connected Pilate with the "javelin-man" in the story of Orion, as well as with the story of the Roman soldier who pierced the side of Jesus with a lance. Conybeare says, "What evidence is there that Pilatus could mean a javelin-man even to a Latin? Many lexicographers interpret it in Virgil in the sense of *packed together* or *dense*, and in most authors it bears the sense of *bald* or *despoiled*."

Conybeare gives no authority whatever for these interpretations—though, incidentally, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith accepts them without question in his "Jesus Not a Myth." I can only say that in the Latin dictionaries which I have consulted, the word Pilatus is translated javelin—and if Mr. McCabe cannot give us, say, half a dozen "lexicographers" who accept Conybeare (or who have made Conybeare accept them) with full chapter and verse, I can only conclude that either he (Conybeare) was hopelessly ignorant of Latin, or that he "tried it on" in the hope that no Rationalist would check him. This was certainly the case with Mr. Howell Smith.

Now let us go a step further. The authorship of the "Annals" of Tacitus is by no means accepted by a number of writers who claim that, even if the rest of the "Annals" is genuine, the passage about Christ and the Christians is as impudent a forgery as a similar passage in Josephus. And it is remarkable that while those Rationalists who believe in a real Jesus are prepared to admit that Josephus was certainly interpolated, they are by no means ready to admit that Tacitus was. One can well understand Christians forging something into the text of Josephus—but into Tacitus, never!

The curious thing is that there is nothing more elusive than the *original* text of the "Annals." If the reader is fond of detective stories, I advise him to try and find the necessary clues, and follow them up to the present text. For example, the "Editio Princeps," containing the six last books of the "Annals," and the first five of the "Histories" is says Dibdin, "a work of extraordinary rarity, supposed by bibliographers to have been printed in 1468." It is taken, says Ernesti, "from a very excellent, but at present unknown, MS." The first edition of all the works of Tacitus was published by Leo X in 1515. In it the first five books of the "Annals" were

taken from an MS "purchased in Germany at a considerable expense. It has served as the basis of almost every subsequent edition, though Beroaldus has been accused by Oberlin of deviating from the true ancient reading, either through negligence or ignorance."

Even Furneaux, who is supposed to be one of the best editors of Tacitus, seems hopelessly confused when he tries to track down the text of the "Annals." There is a notice of Tacitus in some writing of the ninth century by a monk of Fulda, and nothing further until, in 1425, Poggio Bracciolini writes that he is expecting some unknown works of Tacitus, preserved at Hersfeld, near Fulda. Nothing further is known till 1509. And Furneaux adds, "There are some discrepancies as to the circumstances of its acquisition, and neither Fulda nor Hersfeld, but the monastery of Corvey, in Westphalia, is mentioned as the place of its discovery." Moreover, this text is badly mutilated and full of misleading corrections, according to Furneaux.

This is a mere skeleton of the difficulties which the text of Tacitus gave to its editors; but to read Conybeare one would imagine nothing is more perfect. "I need hardly add that the narrative of Tacitus," he blandly declares, "is frank, straightforward, and in keeping with all we know or can infer in regard to Christianity in that epoch." And he calmly tells us and, of course, is followed by Mr. McCabe in his "Rationalist Encyclopædia" that Poggio (who has been put forward as probably the forger of the passage about the Christians, at least, and by some writers as the forger of the whole of the "Annals") "lived in the fifteenth century, whereas our oldest MS of this part of Tacitus is of the eleventh century; it is now in the Laurentian Library."

Dr. Conybeare gives no reference whatever for this statement, and I have been unable to meet any authority for it. As Mr. McCabe repeats it in his work, I challenge him to provide it. I want a full reference; that is, I want chapter and verse so that I can study the work, or works, for myself. I want, in addition, the fullest proofs that the MS, if in existence, is recognised by all authorities as of the eleventh century. If this is not done, then I say it is a most misleading statement, and should never have appeared in a work of reference for Rationalists. And I shall have something a little stronger to say of Conybeare if Mr. McCabe does not accept my challenge.

H. CUTNER.

EVOLUTION AND ENTROPY

It is difficult to attempt a comment on an extract only; it is therefore with diffidence that I approach the article by Mr. John Rowland, "A Critic of Evolution" ("The Freethinker," p. 22, January 16, 1949).

But on perusal, two points arise in immediate opposition to the conclusions of Dr. Clark. Firstly, is entropy constantly increasing? This is improbable if the analogy of heat radiation is taken, as the hotter the object, the greater its rate of cooling. Hence, if the Universe is cooling, the more it cools, the slower the rate of cooling (and entropy) must be.

But assuming entropy to be a continuous effect, this can only be assumed at the present time. It may be postulated that the opposite process may, at a given time, and in given circumstances, commence. The analogy of billiard balls, and their qualities, may be taken. Two balls may collide; one will stop dead and the second will rebound with energy increased by the loss from the first ball. This process could theoretically go on, a final speed being attained far greater than was originally possessed.

Hence, if atoms are continually colliding, it is not improbable that at some stage in the cooling process, a reverse process may be instigated and a great and furious core of heat and energy be recreated, with, of course, a corresponding loss of energy by the remaining atoms. The great Nebula so formed may thus recreate the Universe and the whole process be repeated.

If this proposition is condemned as too hypothetical, a second point is produced by Dr. Clark himself. He concedes that here and there temporary effects opposite to entropy are observed, e.g., heat turning itself into mechanical energy. On a rather larger scale, the evolution of life on earth may be so regarded. Life, we believe, has existed on earth for millions of years, but in relation to the history of the Universe its span is but a fraction of time, but a temporary effect acting in opposition to the general condition of entropy.

I have not read Dr. Clark's book, but feel that either of the two propositions help either to reconcile the theory of evolution with that of entropy or to refute any possible connection between the two.

DAVID MOORE.

A NEW DAY

Is there a man who can
With courage face the crowd—
An upright, honest man?
Not one who cringes, cowed,
And moans unceasingly
"I am a sinner, Lord;
There is no health in me."
For that man is a fraud!

An Atheist is he
Who walks ahead, alone;
In thought and action free,
Fearless and fooled by none.
Seeking no future prize;
Beggings no favours here;
Trusting in Truth—not Lies—
His mind and conscience clear.

In some not distant day
The wise will rise as one:
Only the ignorant will say
"O Lord, Thy will be done!"
'Tis Man who has the will,
The skill and strength, to right
This toppled world until
All nations shall unite.

With superstition slain,
Let Reason take its place;
While, in her dying pain,
The Church falls in disgrace.
Then men from bondage freed—
From greed and War's dark stain—
Shall know that God and Creed
Will never rise again!

—W. H. WOOD.

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION

By F. A. Ridley. A useful survey of Religion in relation to Socialism. A short history of Religion from the witch doctor to High Mass at St. Peter's. 20 pages. Price 1s. 1d. post free.

ACID DROPS

With truly religious zeal, Councillor George Ward complained to the Gillingham Town Council that he saw men working on a housing estate on Sunday, and consequently the builders have been forbidden to work on Sundays. After this, we think Councillor Ward is assured of a mansion in heaven for his defence of the Lord's Day. What does it matter to a true Christian—after all, this life is a "vale of tears" and merely a testing-time for the life after death. We hope the electors of Gillingham will remember their councillor at the next election.

A booklet by the Rev. H. Heywood has been sent to all residents in Southwell, entitled "What do you think of Christianity?" A pity that one wasn't sent to this journal. The author hastens to make it quite clear that he is not poaching on his colleagues' preserves, and that the booklet is not an attempt to encourage worshippers of other denominations to leave their usual churches and come to the Rev. Mr. Heywood's Church. But then, where else does he expect to get them from? Surely not from the N.S.S.?

There is no end to the possibilities of the idea of sport being used as an encouragement to religion, and as an example we give the Rev. E. Martin's report that after a win by Brighton football team, the Church gets "double the usual collections, increased congregations, better behaviour on the part of the choir boys, and better hymn singing." The difficult part about the whole business is that both sides cannot win, and we therefore ask, does the defeated team have the opposite effect on the local churches, do collections fall, and attendance drop, and do the choir boys sing worse than usual? The churches must be suffering around Crystal Palace, whose football team is at the moment bottom of the league.

The old saying that "the way to man's heart is through his stomach" must have been in the mind of the Vicar of St. Michael's, Camden Town. He is offering a breakfast to all those who attend Holy Communion. We guarantee that he will get a full house if he offers ham and two eggs (real ones). The Chinese used to refer to converts to Christianity as "Rice Christians." We will have to wait until we hear what breakfasts are served at St. Michael's before we can give an adequate description of communicants there.

The meteorite that fell in Eastern Siberia some months ago may turn out to be one of the largest that has fallen on the earth. Its estimated mass is about 1,000 tons. Slinging a 1,000-ton meteorite at the earth with a velocity of 20 kilometres a second is of course a god's job and the Churches might consider including the story in the Old Testament. Seeing that the meteorite fell in Siberia, it may be Jehovah's contribution to the anti-Soviet campaign.

For the sum of one guinea you can learn, from "The Face of Saints" by W. Schumoni, what 90 saints really looked like—that is, if the expenditure of the money is worth it. Most saints in the calendar are just fiction, and their stories, fairy tales; their portraits, in consequence, were invented, and are here produced from

stained glass or paintings or from coins. A photograph is about the only genuine relic of a saint, and he has to be very modern on that account. Taking Christian saints in the bunch, so to speak, they are definitely a filthy, unwashed crowd, ignorant and superstitious. With very few exceptions they are better dead.

An inquiry as to the number of Catholics in the U.S.A. has now proved them to be far more than the official figure of 25 millions. Mgr. Hoffman thinks the figure should be 35 millions. He also denies that there are 50 million Atheists, for he claims that even among the acknowledged figure of 2.1 per cent. of "unbelievers" who really claim that they have no religion, "several carried pocket Testaments or stated a belief in a deity or some supernatural power." It is really fantastic the way these priests deceive themselves. We certainly should like to meet an Atheist who carries a Testament about with him and believes in a Deity. Still, even a priest has to buck up his sheep a little—otherwise they might well believe that there are real Atheists in the world.

In a review of the late Lytton Strachey's works in the "Observer," Lord David Cecil admits that, when "Eminent Victorians" appeared in 1918, it was hailed as "a literary event of first importance." Does it now have the same effect, "the same glittering impression?" And he answers his question—"Yes, and alas, no." No one needs be surprised at the reasons he gives. Strachey was "a post-Victorian Liberal rationalist . . . he simply could not understand the mystical or the fanatical . . . religion to Strachey was just a farrago of comical superstitions; anybody who professed to believe in it must be a fool or a knave." Obviously, if only Strachey had believed in religion wholeheartedly, Lord Cecil would no doubt have answered his own question with an unqualified "Yes."

He does not like the way Strachey showed up Newman (in that unforgettable essay) "as a poetical genius who was also the victim of a naive and grotesque mental aberration." Well, was he not? Some of Newman's conclusions about religion, God, and the Catholic Church, are not merely naive and grotesque, but utterly stupid. Outside the circle of his admirers, who nowadays take the slightest notice of them? Most of Newman's theology is as dead as the proverbial rusty nail.

Then Lord Cecil does not like Strachey's description of Manning "as a self-seeking worldling who deceived himself into using his faith as a means to achieve his ambition for power." But, at least one other biography of Manning does actually depict him in this way; and no one can read his relations with Newman not to see how right Strachey was, and how merrily he saw into the characters of both men. Had Strachey not been a Rationalist, and had he not attacked with his biting irony the two Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Faith, we are sure Lord David Cecil would have felt exactly what people thirty years ago felt for the magnificent writing and keen interpretation of character in "Eminent Victorians" and the other brilliant works of Lytton Strachey.

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SUGAR PLUMS

A Brains Trust, under open and honest conditions, has been arranged by the Executive of the National Secular Society to take place in the Stratford Town Hall, London, E., on Thursday evening, February 24. Questions on the subject "Religious Belief and Non-Religious Belief" will be submitted by the audience; the Brains Trust will consist of the Rev. V. L. Tucker Harvey (Vicar, Emmanuel Parish, Forest Gate) and the Rev. D. S. Wallace Hadrill, M.A., B.D. (Vicar, Holy Cross Church, Hornchurch). Archibald Robertson, M.A., and R. H. Rosetti. The Question Master will be Alderman Cannon, of West Ham. Proceedings will begin at 7-30 p.m. and admission is free.

Freethinkers in the Colchester area will have an opportunity of doing some useful work for the Cause if they will get in touch with Mr. S. A. Hawkins, 124, Braiswick, Colchester, Essex, who will be pleased to give details.

Every now and then the Catholic priest who advises puzzled readers of the "Universe" gets a question on Evolution, and it is quite amusing to read his replies. We must be fair, however, he does not always shirk difficulties and, of course, he is obliged sometimes to take shelter behind his Faith. His is no easy job. He was asked the other day about the "pre-Adamites," a handy term covering early man. Here is his reply:—

Catholics are free to believe in the existence of pre-Adamites if they wish, but it is of faith that the whole of the present human race is descended from Adam and Eve, and accordingly, if there were pre-Adamites, they must have been extinct when Adam and Eve were created.

We surmise that the inquirer will not be too satisfied, for he must know that Evolution has shown that Man has been on the Earth for something near one million years and has never been "extinct."

it required more hard work than is generally granted to run a show so successfully.

And finally, it was with real regret that many of the guests parted at the end of one of the happiest and most successful functions in the history of the Society.

H. C.

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S FORTY-THIRD DINNER

If ever Freethought had its moment of triumph it was certainly seen at the gathering of members and friends of the National Secular Society at the Criterion Restaurant on January 29. The Dinner was the first held for ten years, and everybody was obviously determined to make the occasion one not likely to be forgotten. Freethought was the common cause, and brought together many old friends, and made acquainted many known to each other only by name. The Dinner was, of course, not confined to London members only, for guests came from many parts of the country, including Cirencester, Paignton, Bentfleat, Southampton, Taunton, Nottingham, Chelmsford, Derby, Sheffield, Westliff-on-Sea and Glasgow.

The scene at the reception was quite a joyous one, and congratulations on her recent recovery from illness were showered on the wife of the President, Mrs. Cohen. The ladies present made the scene sparkling with colour and gaiety, and it was a happy family that sat down to the excellent dinner provided by the restaurant. One found it difficult to eat, there was so much to talk about. The nightmare of most of the ten years since the last Dinner was held had gone, but we were all ten years older and the problems facing those of us who held Freethought as "the greatest of causes" seemed as difficult to solve as ever. Many of the older problems had disappeared, but there were a number of new ones which still forced on us "eternal vigilance." We had won through in the past, and we were going to win through in the future. And it was this attitude which was the keynote of the speeches which followed the dinner.

But looking round the well-filled dining tables one was conscious of many new faces, and the absence of many of the older stalwarts in the movement. It was to be expected, of course, but it was also heartening to see the newcomers, some of whom, though old perhaps to the movement, were new to our dinners. For it is on these and their successors that we look for the continuation of our fight.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, received a great ovation, and his address was all to the point and warmly applauded. Mr. Archibald Robertson's toast to the National Secular Society was excellent in its appreciation of our work, and he was most ably followed by Mr. Tom Mosley, of Nottingham, who made a great impression; while Mr. William Kent and Mr. F. A. Hornibrook both dealt with Freethought at home and abroad in interesting and cleverly contrasted speeches.

All these toasts were delivered between some splendid concert items—for the N.S.S. dinners have always been noted for particularly fine concerts. Mr. Cyril Addison, as well as acting accompanist throughout, gave us some beautifully played Chopin pieces; Mr. Arthur Richards' magnificent baritone voice rendered his songs doubly effective; Miss Eileen Murphy sparkled with humour and vivacity; Mr. Jock McKay's inimitable Scotch humour caused his audience roars of laughter; while Miss Eileen Cusack's beautifully trained soprano voice added artistry to her delightful songs. The final item, the famous duet from "Bitter Sweet," was splendidly given by Miss Cusack and Mr. Richards, and closed a fine concert.

A word must be added in praise to Mr. R. H. Rosetti and those who helped him in "organising" the event so successfully. Everything went without a hitch—but

(Concluded foot of previous column.)

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A PRIEST AND A DYING MAN

(Written at Vincennes prison in July, 1782; first published by Stendhal et Cie, Paris, 1927.)

(Concluded from page 43.)

THE PRIEST: Alas! justice did indeed treat one of these four thus.

THE DYING MAN: It was he who deserved it most. He was seditious, unruly, he possessed the art of imposing himself on the people and became consequently punishable in a kingdom such as Jerusalem under the then prevailing conditions. So he was really very wise to have himself done away with, and this is perhaps the only case in which my extremely mild and tolerant maxims can admit of the severity of Themis. I excuse all errors, save those which can become dangerous to the government under which one lives. Kings, in their augustness, alone compel my recognition and respect, and he who does not love his king and country is not fit to live.

THE PRIEST: But at least you must admit the existence of an after-life. Your soul must surely have been drawn sometimes to attempt to pierce the thickness of the shadows surrounding the fate which awaits us. And what system can satisfy it more than that which prescribes endless torment for those who live evilly and an eternity of rewards for those who live well?

THE DYING MAN: What after-life, my friend? That of nothingness has never frightened me and appears to me as both consoling and natural. All the others are the hypotheses of pride, this alone is the conclusion of reason. Besides, this nothingness is neither fearful nor absolute. Have I not before my eyes the example of nature's perpetual generation and regeneration? Nothing perishes, my friend, nothing is destroyed in this world; to-day a man, to-morrow a worm, the day after to-morrow a fly, is not this always to exist? And why would you have me rewarded for virtues for which I take no credit, or punished for crimes over which I have no mastery? Can you reconcile the goodness of your alleged god with this system, and can he have wished to create me in order to give himself the pleasure of punishing me, and that solely in consequence of a choice over which he allows me no control?

THE PRIEST: No, you have the power to control your acts.

THE DYING MAN: Yes, according to your prejudices. But reason destroys these prejudices. Your dogma of man's liberty of action was only invented so as to allow the fabrication of the idea of grace, an idea so favourable to your fantasies. What man in the world, seeing the gallows standing side by side with crime, would commit a crime if he were free not to do so? We are drawn by an irresistible force, and never for a moment do we possess the power to resolve upon any other course than that to which we are already inclined. There is no single virtue which is not necessary to nature, and contrarily, no single crime which is not needful to her, for it is in the perfect equilibrium which she maintains between the two that her science consists. But can we be blamed for the side toward which she chooses to thrust us? No more than the wasp which darts its stinging into your skin.

THE PRIEST: Then even the greatest of crimes should inspire no fear in us?

THE DYING MAN: That is not what I implied. The fact that the law condemns it and the sword of justice

punishes it suffices to inspire in us aversion or terror. but once it is unfortunately committed one must know how to make the best of a bad job and not give oneself up to sterile remorse. Such remorse is futile since it was unable to preserve us from the crime, and meaningless because it mends nothing. So it is absurd to indulge in it and even more absurd to fear consequent punishment in another world if we are lucky enough to have escaped being punished in this. God forbid that I should be held to encourage crime: one must indeed avoid it to the best of one's ability, but it is through reasoning that one must learn to avoid it, not through unreal fears which lead to nothing and which quickly vanish when faced with the least strength of mind. Reason, my friend—yes, reason alone should show us that to injure our fellow-beings can never make us happy, and our heart should convince us that to contribute to their happiness is the greatest thing which nature has granted us upon this earth. The whole of human morality is contained in this single phrase: *make others as happy as one would wish to be oneself* and never do them more harm than we ourselves would wish to receive. There, my friend, are the sole principles which should guide us, and neither religion nor god is needed to help appreciate and practise these principles; a good heart suffices. But I feel myself growing weak, preacher. Abandon your prejudices, be a man, be human, without fear and without expectations; cast off your gods and religions. All these serve only to bind mankind in chains, and the very name of all these horrors has caused more blood to flow on this earth than all other wars and plagues together. Renounce the idea of another world, for there is none; but do not renounce the pleasure of being happy and making others happy in this world. There is the only way nature affords you of duplicating or furthering your existence. My friend, sensual pleasure was always the dearest of my possessions; I have burnt incense at its altar all my life, and I would wish to end my life in its arms. My end is approaching. Six women, more beautiful than the dawn, are waiting in the adjoining parlour: I was keeping them for this moment. Share them with me, and try to forget on their breasts, as I do, all the vain sophisms of superstition and all the idiotic errors of hypocrisy.

(The dying man rang, the women entered and the preacher became in their arms a man corrupted by nature because he had been unable to explain what was nature's corruption.)

Translated by Simon Watson Taylor from the French of

D. A. F. DE SADE.

A CHINESE VIEW

... Still more preposterous another proposition seemed to me. This was the argument that, when Adam and Eve ate an apple during their honeymoon, God was so angry that He condemned their posterity to suffer from generation to generation for their little offence, but that, when the same posterity murdered the same God's only Son, God was so delighted that He forgave them all.

Finally my salvation came. "Why," I reasoned with a colleague, "if there were no God, people would not do good and the world would go topsy-turvy?"

"Why?" replied my Confucian colleague. "We should lead a decent human life simply because we are decent human beings." This appeal to the dignity of human life cut off my last tie to Christianity and from then on I was a Pagan. Dr. LIN YUTANG, "Why I became a Pagan."

NELLY SHORTLAND

AROUND me are my books, collected over a period of many years. They are, of course, not all the books I have obtained, for the restrictions of space, and vicissitudes, have caused me to sell to merchants, and others, give to friends and children, and even to cast away in railway carriages, certain volumes. I have done so because, at the margin of utility, their possession was worth less, for example, than that of other books, or the cost of transport, or the preservation of a good angel's peace of mind, and, therefore, my own; for our comfort interdepends on the ease of angels, especially when the angels are feminine, and only in sacred literature are they otherwise.

I now hold in my hand one of these volumes, and, opening it up, I perceive, by a secret symbol, made by myself, and which a sagacious acquaintance informs me is by no means hard to decipher, that I paid the great sum of threepence to call the book mine. The price you may think of no importance, or you may consider it derogatory to reputation to have paid so small a price for a valuable thing, or for having thought the price worth mentioning.

Dear friends, I bought the work from a bookseller who knew his business as well as I ought to know mine, and the published price was only one and sixpence. It was one of a famous series, cloth, uncut edges, gilt top: therefore it was rightly priced. On the other hand, to print merely the names of authors in the series would lead you back to the magic lands of the ancient and recent past. So the contrast between economic and cultural value was worth a mention.

Cultural value is not economic value, as all students of socialistic, or capitalistic, or even unepitheted, economics ought to agree. Perhaps everyone in those varieties of students will agree that I know something about exchange value; for have I not mentioned marginal utility? They might, however, think that it is only a little I know. The more rustic of them might, indeed, invite my attention to the case of the Bachelor of Science, who knew not how to light the kitchen fire, and in an heroic attempt to remedy his defect, set fire to his house; and that, and all in it, were consumed, except himself, his wife, children, the dog, the cat, and his mother-in-law. As one after another, all these beings were brought to safety, he ejaculated a series of "Thank God," one exclamation for himself, one for his wife, one for each child, one for the dog, and one for the cat. He only groaned at hearing of the preservation of his mother-in-law, but as this is being written at Christmas time, when we ought not to think ill even of politicians whose policies we deplore, I attribute the groan to physical pain rather than disappointment in God's judgment.

There were also a few other living things in the house, hiding among rafters, behind wainscots, and under floors. Some of these went up with the flames, some scurried away to find other accommodation, incidentally causing an intensification of that struggle for existence, which is concomitant with life. Well, well, never mind! Neither God nor man cares for vermin.

To put an end, however, to all possible exclamations of indelicate critics, we point out that a Bachelor of Science is not a Bachelor of all sciences, any more than a wife is everyone's wife. If that doesn't silence them, 'tis Christmas, so I brush them aside.

I brush them aside, as the broadcaster I have just heard brushed aside his critic, which was himself, when he asserted that no one dwelling in his country would

attempt to analyse the feeling of loyalty there universally felt for the monarchy and for Britain. I brush aside, too, all further thought of economic value, and begin to think only of the cultural value of the book, and of Nelly Shortland, one known to me, whose name is on the inside of the volume, in handwriting dated 1893, she being, by inference, no doubt its then owner.

This work contains teachings by Epictetus, one-time an ancient slave, who obtained at length his freedom, and whom, we are told, lived with great simplicity, and had no servant or other inmate of his house, until he hired a nurse for an infant which was about to be exposed, according to the practice of those days when it was desired to check the inconvenient growth of a family, and which Epictetus "rescued and brought up."

"Pause here, friends, and we will thank God, of whom, it being Christmas, we ought to think nothing derogatory. Let us be grateful for his love for Epictetus and allowing him to live to old age, in order to teach us of religion."

The philosopher tells us that the chief element of religion is to have right opinions concerning the gods, as existing and governing the universe in fair order and justice; and "then to set thyself to obey them, and to yield to them in each event, and submit to it willingly, as accomplished under the highest counsels. For so shalt thou never blame the gods, nor accuse them, as being neglectful of thee."

We excuse Epictetus for his plural "gods," for, although he lived after Jesus, it is probable that the restrictive nature of his upbringing prevented his hearing those great preachers, who, carrying no money or script, were then proclaiming the oneness of the Trinity.

There is, however, the unwanted baby, exposed, and not because of the wickedness of men; for did not the gods govern the whole in fair order and justice? "Do not hurry," you would say, "here is no room for persiflage. Be careful of the pit of fallacy. The gods, or rather, the Christian God, sent Epictetus opportunely to rescue the infant, and often before, God had sent the magnanimous man to rescue the devoted infant, devoted to death of course, or to stay the steps of tottering age."

By no means should we hurry, but we are in no danger of falling in the pit yawning so fearfully before us. It is not a baby here and there, saved by the good man, that absolves the gods. For, if that is good because it is a saving, then is the case of the others evil, for it is a losing, and all things are governed in fair and just manner.

But said the master, "there are some who say that a Divine Being does not exist, and others that it exists indeed, but is idle and uncaring, and hath no forethought for anything."

"Dear Epictetus, I thank you; for all thought is of value, vital, cultural, if not economic. You, too, dear Nelly Shortland, whose story I cannot yet tell, please accept my sincere thanks, for your preservation of the little book you kept, until the gentle God you used to worship smote you with the plague, that took you in the prime of life to the place from whence no traveller has returned."

J. G. LUPTON.

THERE WAS ONCE—

A PATRIOT. He went away to fight for his country, with bands playing and banners flying, while the populace turned out to cheer him. Had he been blown to bits those same people would have glorified his courage and honoured the memory of a hero.

Unfortunately he returned alive. And so they let him beg in the streets for his carelessness.

W. H. WOOD.

A CHRISTIAN RATIONALIST

IN the opening paragraph of the first of his interesting series of articles, "The Totalitarian Papacy and the Middle Ages" ("The Freethinker," November 14), Mr. F. A. Ridley, referring to Dr. W. R. Inge, calls him "that acute Christian Rationalist." With the first epithet of the description I am in entire agreement. No one who is acquainted with Dr. Inge's writings but must allow that they are the offspring of an acute cultivated intellect. But I must take exception to the latter part of Mr. Ridley's characterisation, not only as applied to the former Dean of St. Paul's, but to anyone else. In other words, there can be no such person as "a Christian Rationalist."

If Christianity is the belief in a supernatural Being or God, and Rationalism, the denial, on grounds of reason, of such belief, it must follow that the phrase, "Christian Rationalist" implies a contradiction, the one term ruling out the other.

In his books Dr. Inge, like Bishop Barnes, has shown unequivocally that he does not accept many of the doctrines which have always been regarded as essential constituents of historic Christianity. As a student of science and a Biblical critic, he repudiates as contrary to scientific truth and the known operation of natural law, the Gospel stories of Christ's virgin birth, his messiahship, his miracles and his bodily ascension. In rejecting these beliefs he may, to that extent, be a rationalist, but he is emphatically not a Christian.

After eviscerating Christianity thus, Dr. Inge, like his confrere, the Bishop of Birmingham, professes a fervent belief in the divinity of Christ, though on what grounds is a puzzle to the unsophisticated Christian, who naturally expects his God to behave like one. Divest Jesus of his thaumaturgical character, as displayed in the Gospels, and what remains that entitles him to be regarded as divine? The few precepts, parables and repartees ascribed to him have nothing superhuman about them. Even allowing them to be original, they have been equalled, if not surpassed, in their kind by many authors claiming no help beyond their own casual wit.

But it seems that Dr. Inge has a source of information independent of any material or sensory medium, and as such, not accessible to the ordinary uninitiated Christian. His faith does not rest on records of dubious authenticity whose manifold mistakes and contradictions declare only too plainly their human origin in a credulous pre-scientific age. The source of his assurance lies within what he calls "the supersensible sphere," and is known as the mystical experience of the "inner light." As he puts it ("Outspoken Essays"), "At the core of our personality is a spark lighted at the altar of God in heaven . . . an inner light which can illuminate our whole being. . . . It carries with it its own proof and justification in the increasing clearness and certainty with which the truths of the invisible world are revealed to him who diligently seeks for them. . . . The hypothesis on which mysticism rests is that there is a real affinity between the individual soul and the great immanent Spirit who, in Christian theology, is identified with the Logos-Christ." On this, I merely remark that every delusion "carries with it its own proof and justification" to the deluded person; it would not be a delusion otherwise. But, be this as it may, the point at issue is the "reality" of the Being thus revealed by spiritual illumination.

It is plain that if there were no Gospel Christ there could be no mystical Logos-Christ, and therefore, the whole question turns on the authenticity of the former.

If no such divine Being ever existed then the *ex-dévant* Dean's spiritual perspicacity is at fault, and his "beatific visions" an hallucination. The matter is worth a brief investigation, especially as Dr. Inge's scientific beliefs furnish, oddly enough, the main arguments against his mystical claims.

As an evolutionist, he regards the Creation story in Genesis as a myth, and asserts that its rejection as such in no way affects the central truth of Christianity, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. On the contrary, I contend that the whole fabric of Christian faith depends on the truth of Genesis, and that in rejecting the account of the Creation contained therein, he cannot consistently profess himself a Christian. In saying this, I am stating a truth which admits of easy demonstration as thus.

If the narrative of the Creation in Genesis is, as he believes, totally irreconcilable with scientific truth, where are Christians to look for authentic information on the subject? It is only there that *the existence and first acts* of the God in whom they believe are recorded. There is no other source of knowledge on these points to be found anywhere else. Now, if the Creation therein described is only a myth then the Creator must be included in the same category, for his existence is part of the fiction, and has no better evidence to support it. But the God that is there represented as creating the world in six days and drowning it in forty is, awkwardly enough, the Jehovah of the Bible, the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of the Law and the Prophets, and, according to Christian theology, the Heavenly Father of Jesus Christ. There is no hitch or breach in the connection. The question arises; at what particular epoch did He emerge from the mythic state into divine Reality, and become the God Dr. Inge has preached and written so much about—the incarnate Christ? The transition must have occurred at some time in Scripture history—but when?

It avails nothing to say that some books of the Bible show a higher conception of God. That is no proof that such a Being actually existed. A concept does not necessarily represent a reality. All it does show is that in their advance from tribal savagery to a higher social state the Jews developed a correspondingly more elevated idea of their God; and, as there is no evidence that they had at any time repudiated the God of Genesis, He could have been only the maturer growth of the same myth.

Jesus, himself, had no doubt of his identity with the God of Genesis; we have his own testimony to prove it—"I and my Father are one" (John x, 30), "Before Abraham was I am" (John viii, 58), "And he said unto them: these are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me" (Luke xxiv, 44). Thus, in virtue of his own declaration, Jesus is the same God who destroyed a world of his creatures for being no better than he made them, the God whose jealous wrath could be appeased only by bloody sacrifices, the tribal God who sent the plagues on the Egyptians, and who condemned to wholesale slaughter and slavery the enemies of his chosen people—in short, the God who did all the things which Dr. Inge and other "Christian Rationalists" object to. How does he reconcile his belief in the one with his disbelief in the other? If the Being to whom these acts are ascribed is only a myth, an allegorical figure, a nonentity, from whom does he derive his Logos-Christ? In rejecting the account in Genesis as false he cannot (except by ignoring the only conclusion that can follow his rejection) believe in the divinity of Jesus, the

validity of whose claim depends entirely on old Scripture attestation, as recorded in Genesis. If that be false, as he admits it to be, Jesus is a god without credentials, born of a myth. So much for the Christian Mystic and "Christian Rationalist."

A. YATES.

CORRESPONDENCE

"THE HOLY THORN"

SIR,—For the first time in thirty years or more I have opened the current copy of "The Freethinker" and been disappointed! Don't be overcome! It is not for what it says but for what it omits to say!

For the last two or three weeks there has been a most entertaining correspondence in the columns of "The Times" on the budding of the Holy Thorn at the abbey of Glastonbury. This outstanding event has evoked a leading article in "The Times" which, of course, fully endorses the miraculous event which it surely deserves! It seems also that Joseph of Arimathea, one of the syndicated sires, brought with him a staff which like these blossomed into bud at the hour of midnight on Old Christmas Eve. Surely a thing to be noted in "The Freethinker." Of course, admittedly, the same process of miraculous budding has taken place in India—hence no doubt the name Buddha.

But as I say, my disappointment is in finding no typically pungent comment in the usually lively and enlightening columns of comment in "The Freethinker."—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR HANSON.

[So sorry we missed the correspondence in "The Times." Why did not Mr. Hanson send it on to us?—EDITOR.]

OBITUARY

WM. PARKINSON

I am sorry to have to report the death at sea of Wm. Parkinson, of Chester-le-Street Branch. He was a member of the crew on S.S. "Hopedar," which was lost with all hands in the North Atlantic about November 14, 1948. Wm. Parkinson was a keen Freethinker and had been associated with the N.S.S. for a number of years, although his age was only 23 years.

His death follows closely on the death of his only sister, Mary Poppy Parkinson, in November, 1947. They were deeply attached to each other, and the loss of two such fine young people is a loss to Freethought in general, and in particular to the North East Area. They will be missed by all in and around Newcastle Secular Society's range of influence.

To Mr. and Mrs. Parkinson this loss is terrible; to lose their only two children so young, and so tragically, must have left a very deep wound which will last all their remaining lives. Our sympathy goes out to them in their great sorrow and grief.

JOHN T. BRIGHTON.

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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held January 27, 1949

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair.

Also present, Messrs. Hornibrook, A. C. Rosetti, Seibert, Bryant, Griffiths, Ebury, Lupton, Woodley, Morris, Taylor, Barker, Mrs. Venton, Mrs. Grant and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, Halifax, Kingston, West Ham, West London Branches and to the Parent Society.

Invitations for the Annual Conference to be held in Nottingham and Sheffield were reported and instructions given for the vote of the Branches to be ascertained.

The Secretary reported arrangements had been completed for a Brains Trust on the question of "Religious Belief and Non-Religious Belief" to take place in the Stratford Town Hall, London, E. 15, on February 24. The Brains will consist of two clergymen and two N.S.S. speakers.

Final arrangements for the Annual Dinner were reported. All tickets had been sold, and a number of disappointments had resulted. The Executive expressed its regret to those unable to obtain tickets.

Correspondence from the Home Office, Merseyside Branch and London districts was noted.

A vote of sympathy with Mr. G. Thompson, a member of the Executive, on the death of his wife, was passed, with instructions that it be forwarded to Mr. Thompson.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for March 3. and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI.

General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. J. G. LUTON and Mr. L. EBBY.

LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, February 8, 7 p.m.: "Who Was Shakespeare?" Mr. WILLIAM KENT, F.S.A. Chairman, MAJORIE BOWEN.

Rationalist Press Association (Alliance Hall, Palmer Street, S.W. 1).—Monday, February 7, 7 p.m.: "Intuition and Reason." 4th Lecture: "Analysis of Instinct," MAURICE BERTON, D.Sc.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Business Morality and Government." Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: "Can This Life Be All?" Miss JOYCE WOOD.

COUNTRY—OUTDOOR

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS and others.

COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Puritanism," Mr. H. DAY.

Glasgow Secular Society (East Hall, MacLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "The Rebirth of Israel," Mr. MISHA LOUVISH, M.A.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Concert, Mellor Bromley Male Voice Choir.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Is Present Coal Nationalisation State Capitalism?" Mr. L. ELLIS.

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