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VIEWES AND OPINIONS

Progressive Revelation

IN the Anglo-Saxon lands throughout the nineteenth century the great bulwark of Christianity to which Churchmen of all shades of Protestant opinion confidently appealed was the Bible, the unerring, unexpurgated "Word of God." From the time of the Deists in the early eighteenth century to that of the founders of the National Secular Society in the late nineteenth, it was against the Bible, the great Fetish-Book of evangelical Christianity, that the efforts of Freethinkers were mainly directed. For during this period Protestantism had the field more or less to itself throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. For Catholicism represented an insignificant minority unpopular on political grounds, whilst the "freak" religions of to-day, such as Spiritualism or Christian Science, were still in their infancy.

Under such circumstances, the Bible, one and indivisible, had the field to itself. It was the "Word of God," and from Genesis to Revelation there was no error to be found in the pages which most Christians then held to have been directly dictated by God, and to have been merely taken down by their nominal authors in a kind of inspired "shorthand."

It was against this monstrous deification of an ancient and, very largely, primitive literature that the great rationalist writers and speakers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries went into action. So completely have they succeeded in demolishing the Sacred Book of the Age of Bibliolatry, that it is difficult to-day to realise both the furious hostility which they excited, or the heavy penalties in material suffering and mental frustration that they invariably endured. To be sure, Christian venom had to make up for the one-sided character of the intellectual contest. For when surveyed through the robust commonsense of the *Age of Reason* or when confronted by the massive scholarship of *Supernatural Religion*, the arguments adduced in favour of Bibliolatry were extremely thin. The blind fury directed against men like Bradlaugh, Paine and Cassels, was essentially the kind of anger which makes up by personal abuse what is lacking in mental conviction.

That royal "Mrs. Malaprop," George III, expressed the opinion of the more simple and honest type of Christian, when he remarked to the episcopal author of *An Apology for the Bible*, a "reply" to the *Age of Reason*: "Dear me, Bishop Watson, I had no idea that the Bible needed apologising for"! One can in fact state as an axiom that, where religion is concerned, and this includes the Bible, "He who apologises is lost." For it is invariable that theologians only start to apologise for a creed that is badly in need of apology.

From the standpoint of the critical historian, it must always seem one of the most amazing mental aberrations in the history of civilisation that such an ill-assorted hotch-potch of literary odds and ends as go to make up the Bible, should ever have been regarded as an infallible

depository of knowledge. Indeed, one may legitimately express surprise that anyone should ever have regarded it as a "Book" in the modern sense at all.

Imagine on arbitrarily selected assortment of books from English literature, which extended from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day, and which included great poets, picaresque novels, patriotically inspired histories, fairy tales; books of proverbs, and Salvation Army "Crisis" pamphlets warning of the coming crack of doom; plus imaginative, if not imaginary, biographies of religious leaders written by disciples without literary training or critical restraint, not to mention scientific knowledge, and there you would have something like an adequate parallel to our Bible.

It is, I repeat, altogether amazing, and it can only be explained historically and not intellectually, that such highly-cultured ages as were the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could ever have deified such a miscellaneous collection of literary incompatibilities as is, in fact, the Holy Bible.

To-day, largely as a result of the fearless attack of past unbelievers, whose sole terrestrial reward was ignominy when alive and oblivion when dead, the above view of the "Word of God" is, if not dead, at least dying, at any rate outside the Salvation Army and the American Middle West. David, "the man after God's own heart," has now been reduced to his proper historical status as a bygone "Zionist" hero and "gang-leader" of shady character and questionable historical antecedents. Any Jesus who may have been descended from this antediluvian bandit had no particular reason to be proud of the fact.

However, theology is the most conservative of "sciences," and whilst the Bible has lost its former status as the infallible text-book of former days, a new status is now being ascribed to it. In modernist theology the theory of "progressive revelation" is now being substituted by Christian scholars like Dr. Barnes and Sir Frederick Kenyon. That is, the Bible is no longer an infallible book which does not contain a single error from cover to cover. Rather does it "progressively" (invaluable word) reveal God's Will in a series of, as it were, ascending revelations of growing excellence and complexity. The proponents of this convenient theory can thus throw overboard Jonah and the whale together, reduce Noah's famous Ark to a prehistoric pleasure cruise, and explain away the Garden of Eden as a prehistoric allegory. Adam and Eve can thus be fitted into the theory of evolution (as the "missing links"?); the notice in the Garden, "Trespassers will be prosecuted; by order—God," can be safely removed, and the savage deeds of ancient Hebrew Kings and Judges imperceptibly become "early links in the progressive chain of revelation."

It is all very ingenious. However, Anatole France said it all much more lucidly in a single sentence, where the great French satirist makes God remark to the assembled Court of Heaven: "As I get older, I get

more merciful, anyone who reads my Old and New Testaments cannot fail to notice this fact."

It is obvious that the later part of the Divine Volume, the New Testament, whilst generally inferior as literature to the Old Testament, is more humane and cosmopolitan in outlook than its nationalistic Hebrew predecessor. But this had got absolutely nothing to do with God. It was due to the contemporary progress of civilisation and, in particular, to the profound influence exerted upon ancient civilisation by those great humanists, the Greek philosophers.

The champions of "progressive revelation," like their predecessors in the days of Biblical Infallibility, find themselves under the painful necessity of finding arguments in support of their theory. One favourable line is to contrast the more advanced ethical teachings of the "Great Jewish Prophets" with their more primitive Hebrew predecessors, whose unashamed savagery bears singularly little evidence of "revelation." For example, to fit the barbarous orgy of the prophet Samuel "hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord," or of Jael foully murdering her sleeping guest, into even the most elastic scheme of "progressive revelation," must, one imagines, be a somewhat difficult task for its apologists. So we just ignore these and turn to "the great Hebrew prophets," or to the ethically didactic "Book of Job."

But historically, one has no need to drag in a hypothetical revelation to explain why modern civilised men and women find, say, Isaiah and Job more congenial than such gems of barbaric literature as "Judges" or "Leviticus." The explanation is quite simple, "as I get older, I get more merciful," as Anatole France makes God remark. And "more merciful" only because more civilised. Between the earlier and later books in the Bible many centuries elapsed. Civilisation did not stand still in that long period. The higher culture, first of all of the Chaldeans, then of the Greeks, produced a humanising influence, and this can be traced even inside the covers of the "sacred" book. "Job" and "Ecclesiastes" are the work of civilised men: whilst the earlier literature of the Old Testament—"Judges," "Kings," etc.—is the work of warlike barbarians edited by priests.

Even in the Bible there is certainly moral progress: the "great Hebrew prophets" are obviously on a much higher ethical level than the bloodthirsty savage who wrote the primitive exploits of the Judges, or than the apologist for murder, lust and fraud, who wrote the biography of the "man after God's own heart." However, progress in the Bible as elsewhere was due to civilisation not to revelation. And all that the theory of "progressive revelation" amounts to is that the Ancient Hebrews, who were still savages in 1000 B.C., had become somewhat more civilised a few centuries later. Every national literature show traces of such development, and that of the ancient Hebrews was no exception.

Similarly, another favourite dodge of the modernists is to appeal to modern discoveries in the field of archaeology. Sir Frederick Kenyon, former Director of the British Museum is, perhaps, their star performer in this particular sphere. An Archaeologist digs up the remains of an ancient city near Jericho: this proves by "scientific evidence" the old legend about the walls falling down when "Bitzed" by the Lord, or does it? By the same logic one could prove that when Troy was excavated this proved that the Greek Gods fought in the contemporary Trojan War, as Homer depicts so

vividly: or a papyrus found in Egypt and dated early second century by "experts" contains a portion of St. John's Gospel. Ergo, this must be true and written by St. John. But in heaven's name, why? Other people were writing about A.D. 100 besides "St. John," assuming that such a person existed. And miracle-mongering was as incredible in the first century as nowadays in the twentieth. Even if St. John recorded it. So what! No scholar would think of using such puerile arguments about any book but the Bible.

On the whole, and despite its manifold absurdities, I think that the old frank bibliolatry was more intellectually respectable than the pseudo-rational theory of "progressive revelation." And I do not think that people who have grown out of the exegesis of Dr. Spurgeon will stop at the "feather bed for falling Christians" provided by Sir Frederick Kenyon and his colleagues. Revelation will certainly progress—out of existence.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE GROWTH OF THE NATIONAL SPIRIT

PROFESSOR CARLTON HAYES' volume, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (Macmillan, 1948, 20s.) unfortunately fails to embrace the Second World War. As late as 1931, he predicted this calamity as at least two decades ahead, and this again shows the uncertainty of all forecasts of future events.

Our historian is a sound Humanist who deeply deplores the evils associated with the modern intensification of nationalism which has existed, at least in germ, since the dawn of human history. Even the most primitive peoples possess it, but the patriotic fervour now prevalent appears a relatively recent growth. As Professor Hayes observes: "For centuries ever since the rise of the oriental empires, it has been the exception rather than the rule for an independent state to embrace one and only one nationality. . . . The ancient Greek had been supremely patriotic about Athens or Sparta, but not about Greece. . . . The medieval European had been vastly more patriotic about his town or county, or about Christendom as a whole, than about any particular national state."

The Humanitarian nationalism of the eighteenth century had several pleasing features, and the nineteenth century Liberal nationalism supported the cause of all oppressed peoples rightly struggling to be free. But Integral nationalism, on the other hand, as its leading advocate Maurras defines it is "the exclusive pursuit of national policy, the absolute maintenance of national integrity, and the steady increase of national power." This clearly has little to commend it, for this type of nationalism—too unduly prevalent—is the very antithesis of the internationalisation desiderated by humanist publicists. It negatives all co-operation with other communities, save when it seems advantageous to itself. Germany, Russia, Italy and other States have suffered and still suffer from this disease. Again, even those States that are ostensibly prepared to abandon this exclusive form of nationalism, find co-operation with the Soviet State rendered almost unattainable unless negotiated in terms favourable to Russia.

Both in France and England about a century and a half since, definite nationalist theories were advanced. These doctrines met with wide approval, both in the Old World and the New, during succeeding generations, and they were intensified by the Industrial Revolution in Britain. As Hayes avers: "The modern age of large-

scale production and industrial economy has been prerequisite, in one country after another, and eventually to the world at large, in the ascendancy of nationalism.

Other contemporary writers, however, dissent from this conclusion and contend that the vast increase in industry and commerce proved international in influence. For, it is urged, trading intercourse with foreign nations with the growth of international banking, finance and credit, emigration and immigration all served to lessen national boundaries.

Yet, it is to be remembered that the Industrial Revolution began in Britain, where the average man always boasted of "our manufactures," "our inventions," "our factories and workshops," from which "our commodities" were sent to less favoured foreigners. Also: "The home country and its colonies are always the chief markets for the sale of the manufactured commodities of an industrialised nation and they promise to become even more so in the future as the so-called backward nations in Asia and Africa undergo industrialisation and erect barriers against European and American imports." Again, despite the international character of trade, the imports and exports of a highly industrialised country are not equal in volume or value to what it purchases and sells at home.

Even Labour organisations are virtually national; business in general is controlled by national limitations of its freedom are not unknown. Moreover, in times of crisis, nearly all the news in the public Press relates to home affairs.

Professor Hayes stresses the part played by propaganda in promoting national sentiment. Schools, societies, military training, broadcasting and printed matter have all been utilised for nationalistic purposes. It is true that internationalists have their journals and associations. Yet the predominant influences have long been exercised in favour of national objectives.

At its inception under Owen and Fourier, Socialism was international in outlook, if it later succumbed to the wiles of nationalism. Yet, the Communist Manifesto issued in 1848 by Marx and Engels was still internationalistic in character. In that eventful year, a revolutionary wave swept over Europe. But by 1849 the movement's force was spent. Marx was expelled from Germany, his periodical suppressed, when he secured shelter in England where he resided until his death.

The First International proved abortive, but if Marx failed in his effort to organise an international working class another Jew, Ferdinand Lassalle, succeeded in organising a national workers' party. Lassalle's aim was the establishment of a German system of social democracy by means of manhood suffrage and working class co-operation.

The spectacular progress of Socialism until 1914 was superficially cosmopolitan. But appearances proved deceptive, and in the countries most affected, the movement assumed a more and more national character. Even in exile, Marx remained deeply attached in spirit to the Fatherland and expressed his sympathy with the uprisings of Poles and Italians against their "alien exploiters." Lassalle, again, acclaimed Bismarck's civilisation and exploitation of "inferior" races through cultured French and German intervention was more and more applauded by Socialists. As Hayes reminds us:

It was this argument which the Socialists of the Fabian Society employed to justify the British conquest

of the Boer Republics in South Africa." Also, it was the very argument the Collectivist groups of all the conflicting Powers urged as their reason for supporting their several national administrations in the devastating World War of 1914-18.

T. F. PALMER.

WORLD CITIZEN No. 2

SWEDISH born Anders Clarin arrived at Northolt Airport recently without a passport, declaring himself a World Citizen. Friends of five nationalities were waiting to greet him, but the British authorities were unsympathetic and Clarin was obliged to return to Brussels by the same plane.

Clarin informed the Immigration Officers that he had merely tried to make Mr. Bevin's words come true, so that Englishmen could go down to Victoria Station and buy a ticket and then travel at will without passport or other formalities.

Thirty-eight-year-old Anders Clarin left Sweden last July to join the World Citizens' Movement founded by Garry Davis. He himself was the founder and Chairman of the first Swedish Federalist Organisation, Världsfederalisterna i Sverige. When I reminded him that even his own father had described him as being "as idealistic as a new-born babe," he laughed and said that babies were no more idealistic than he was.

"I say that world federalism is not idealism, definitely not," he declared emphatically. "It is extreme egoism. We do not need to go so far as psycho-analysis to understand this. When we want others to federate with us we want to establish a relationship which we consider will be profitable to ourselves."

Asked to explain, he went on: "The same motive is common in all efforts to establish good relations when people live together—in law-making, town planning, community building, programmes of social benefit, party politics and so on; even the rules of good behaviour demonstrate it. Likewise, egoism is the motive for world federalism."

Warning to his theme he continued: "Don't try to make me believe that you want the Eskimo, the Germans, the Greeks, the Norwegians, the Chinese and the Argentinians to federate under world government because you want to help them live in peace and freedom and be for ever happy. And don't try to fool yourself that your kind heart is your motive. Most important of all, don't try to make others accept the plan of world government on an idealistic basis. We are realists who base our notions on the belief that men will always differ, and that they must therefore institute government among themselves."

Hardly pausing to draw breath, and seldom knowing which language, English or Swedish, he was speaking, Clarin continued:

"The federation of states and nations is a political matter—consequently the way to effect it must be by the political method. Politics have very little to do with idealism, except when idealism is used as a persuasive instrument for a political end. Be frank about it; be honest about it; federalism is egoism. It can't be made too clear to ourselves and to others that we want world government for the benefits which we shall all derive from it."

It seemed to me a great pity this ebullient visitor was not enabled to interview any of our tired politicians, particularly those in the Cabinet.

HAROLD S. BIDMEAD.

ACID DROPS

Common informers for the observance of the Lord's Day are making a fine thing—in cash—out of it. Their object is to prevent any amusements encroaching on the Holy Day and thus incurring Divine wrath. To prevent the Lord sending his terrible thunderbolts, snoopers see that some incredibly silly Act called the Sunday Entertainment Act is resolutely put into force. You are allowed to sing a comic song under this Act, we believe, but woe betide you if you sing it with a red nose or a battered silk hat. It must be solemnly and reverently sung.

Any *entertainment*, even for purely benevolent purposes, is sternly barred, and the snoopers see that wherever possible the promoters are made to pay dearly for their benevolence. Recently the R.A.F. Benevolent Fund lost heavily when a concert had to be cancelled, and protests are rightly being made. And it was pointed out that neither the Lord's Day Observance Society nor the money-grabbing snoopers said one word when the Lord's Day was "desecrated" by men fighting and dying in the recent war. There was no money in it for the snoopers.

However, the Lord's Day Observance Society goes on from "victory to victory." The latest battle was with a cycling club meeting at Tholthorpe. The legions of the Lord managed to have it banned, and no doubt "Misery Martin" considered it a well-earned victory. and Sunday was again defended against Continental infiltration. The L.D.O.S. Secretary for Northern England still insists that he is not a "killjoy," and all that the Society is concerned with is that the Sabbath shall be a day of rest for everyone. He had to admit, however, that this does not apply to the milkmen or transport workers, "for these are necessary." A reporter of the *Sunday Pictorial* pointed out that the ultimate result of this sort of thing would be an upsurge of public opinion which would lead to the scrapping of the Acts of 1832 and 1934 under which the Society operates. But this does not worry the L.D.O.S. for the Secretary is of the opinion that no Parliament would be strong enough to repeal these Acts, and regretfully we must agree with him. M.P.s are still scared of the religious vote.

Jesus Christ must have smiled when he dwelt at such length on the principle of man's equality before God and the Brotherhood of Man in His Holy Church, for he must have known that his words would prove very embarrassing to the Church leaders in South Africa in 1949. For instance, a "white" congregation did not like the colour of one of their black "brothers" and refused his entrance to their church even though he was the son of a canon. At another church, three "educated" Africans were refused admittance to a confirmation service. Compared with the "Old Firm" (R.C.), the Protestants are the veriest tyros in religious tactics. They have no qualms in accepting any colour.

There is no reason to suggest that Christians are exempt from the generalisation that this is an age of specialists, but surely the Rev. W. Webb is exaggerating slightly when he says that there are experts in prayer also. His "Weekly Sermon to Certain Persons" commences with the sentence that "most people know something about prayer but only a few are expert in its

practice." How is the expert judged? By results? Fluency? Heredity? Or just plain stupidity? We must plump for the latter for the Rev. Mr. Webb says that "Prayers are not necessarily prayer, for God must be worshipped in spirit, it springs out of the human spirit's longing to find God and his attributes, love, joy and peace." But how is the ordinary pious layman to know when his prayer isn't prayer?

Whenever we are "stuck" for an "Acid Drop," the Rev. W. H. Elliott can be relied upon to give us inspiration, and his remarks in the *Sunday Graphic* on Rogation Sunday when the "Church goes out into the fields to ask God's blessing on the fruits of the earth," have come up to his usual standard. Readers will know his "whimsey" way of writing about God as if he had just left Him around the corner. The Rev. W. Elliott describes the scene of the farmer reading the Gospel at his own field and asking God's blessing, but all the same the farmer still has to weed his field and still has to take a chance on fair weather, and hopes that no labour disputes will occur at harvest time. To be on the safe side, God's opposite number ought to be invoked and asked to keep off.

People who have any money at all are pathetically asked by the Rev. J. Sparrow to give all they can to convert Borneos. In Borneo "Christianity had become infectious," the people almost falling over each other in their efforts to come to Jesus, the only snags being too few missionaries and too little money—the latter being the more important. It is far more important in fact to send money and in plenty to Borneo than to provide houses for heroes to live in here in England. The result of Mr. Sparrow's appeal at a special meeting was that the members sent "a message of greeting and goodwill to the Bishop-designate of Borneo." Something must have gone wrong with the appeal.

The *Universe* makes a big splash of a criminal in Winchester prison who is such a devout Roman Catholic that the other prisoners call him the "Abbot." We are not surprised—the idea that being thoroughly religious immunises anybody from crime is fantastic. Actually, in the same prison, the "Abbot" got a lot of old lugs to go to confession, the poor chaps complaining that they didn't want to go but "he" made them. They evidently recognised that there was no connection between religiosity and criminality and that one could be as pious as a Cardinal and yet commit a crime. Which, of course accounts for the preponderance of Roman Catholics in our prisons.

We are always reminded of Professor Pavlov and his experiments on dogs whenever we see a mention of "Christian" Cripps. Pavlov established that dogs would react to a stimulus in a certain way. We feel the same and always want to say of Sir Stafford Cripps—"He's at it again." This time he wants to "bring it home to people, and indeed to people of other lands, the desperate need for Christian thought and Christian action." In a long speech at York, he used every Christian cliché except "Christianity has never been tried." He even said that nothing can save civilisation "if we depart from the principles Christ taught us." We have noticed, however, that a balanced Budget seems to be more important to him than all Christ's teaching.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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E. V. CRUMPTON.—We shall deal with the matter you raise.

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning. The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), THE FREETHINKER (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FREIDENKER (Switzerland), LA RAISON (France), DON BASILIO (Italy).

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Executive of the National Secular Society took the earliest opportunity to make an application to give evidence before the "Committee of Inquiry into Broadcasting" on the lack of opportunity for broadcasting the point of view of non-believers in religion. The application has been acknowledged, with a promise of further communication in due course.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. has started its open air meetings in Platt Fields in a very encouraging manner. The speakers last Sunday were Messrs. Kay and Smith, with a surprise visit from Mr. J. Clayton. Mr. Clayton has many friends in Manchester and he has agreed to speak for the Branch on July 10 in Platt Fields, at 3 p.m. Here's to a successful season.

Mr. Harold Bidmead sends the following:—
You can play your part as a world citizen! Garry's sister, Virginia Davis ("The Ruth Draper of the Folk Song"), arrives in August on a tour of Europe to raise funds for local Federalist Movements. Volunteers urgently needed to help to organise concerts in the U.K. Apply to Harold S. Bidmead, 33, Chesham Avenue, Bromley, Kent. Imperial 2882 (Home).

The wordy exchange between Mr. Vishinsky and Mr. Bevin in Paris on the Soviet proposals for a German Peace Treaty ended in a Bible lesson for delegates. Mr. Vishinsky quoted the Russian Bible (translated by "St. Vladimir"), "Don't try to catch fleas, lest a camel slip through your fingers." Mr. Bevin observed that the Russian version of God's Word differed greatly from the English version of God's Word as blessed by King James. As usual, God was not much help. His word is so ambiguous so as to give theologians, amateur and professional, still plenty to quarrel about. We feel, however, that we ought to support Mr. Bevin, not from any patriotic motive, but because it may be remembered Milton once said, "When God has anything momentous to inform the world, He imparts it first to an Englishman." Of course, Mr. Vishinsky will still say "No!"

THE ELECTRO-TECHNIC GOD

AT long last, a completely satisfactory God seems to be available to long-expectant humanity.

We have had gods made of graven images. We have had gods made of mental images. But now Manchester University and its Electro-Technics Department have built a "mechanical brain" that can work out problems that baffle such excellent brains as mine, yours and that reputed as being the brain of Sir Stafford Cripps. It has worked out a problem in mathematics started 300 years ago to which the answer is only just being completed by human calculation. And it works out problems which cannot be done by human beings on paper.

Professor Williams, the creator of this "mechanical man," Professor Newman and Mr. Turing who look after the machine tell us that there is a close analogy between its structure and that of the human brain. Mr. Turing goes so far as to say that the machine (unlike most men, by the way) can think for itself. And he does not see "why it should not enter any one of the fields normally covered by the human intellect and eventually compete on equal terms." He goes on to suggest that it may even write a sonnet.

If these were Yanks talking we should sneer! But these are sober mathematicians in Manchester. And a special correspondent of *The Times*—I always believe *The Times* ever since it reported corpse-factories in Germany in the first war—vouches for it on Saturday, June 11.

Reading this account, I felt like St. John the Baptist, "the forerunner" of Jesus Christ. My mission is to take the miracle one stage further. After the Electro-Technic Man, why not the Electro-Technic God? Gods are easy to make, as human history shows; and once made, they last as long as yew-trees and much longer than men do.

Let not Oxford or Cambridge University be outdone by this mushroom Manchester University. Oxford may be too sunk in classics and Morris motor-cars to care but Cambridge has always prided itself on "maths." Let Cambridge then, or even Birmingham, build us an Electro-Technic God that will solve the problems other gods have left standing.

Until this development in Manchester, I have ever been sceptical of these "mechanical minds" and the writings of Wells, Kapek, Ambrose Bierce and others on such subjects left me cold. Robots, as such, seem dull and uninspiring, like mangles or typewriters. But this "robot" has shaken me to the core, especially as he has been the subject already of a Lister oration and Mr. Turing tells us he is "only a shadow of what is going to be."

We may yet see machines copulating and producing machine-children. We may see mechanical machines governing us as political machines do now. Certainly they could not govern us worse or cheat us more than the present set-up. Then, assuredly we may hope for a Machine-God soon; and I direct the imagination of Mr. Aldous Huxley to the high possibilities of a new novel on this fruitful subject.

Never have I believed, with the late Sir James Jeans, that "God is a Mathematician," though masonry bids us regard him as an architect and a geometer. I had rather thought of Him as the problem in mathematics that a poor mathematician, such as I am, was called upon to solve. And that, without the slightest possibility of my getting the answer right! As difficult as were so many other problems in mathematics that misguided instructors used to lay before me for my childhood, and

adolescent, consideration. But I can see a possible, nay, a highly probable God in this mathematical Electro-Technic, a God with parts but without passions; unlike the God of the Anglican Church's 39 Articles; that strange God "without parts or passions" that no one believes in and every Anglican adapts into an anthropomorphic God at once.

After all, if a machine can write a sonnet what can it not do? From bad sonnets it may go to Petrarchan or Shakespearian sonnets with content worthy of Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley or Keats. If any modern machine can write a sonnet as exquisite as those written by my friend the late Lord Alfred Douglas, I may be a little consoled for his death, if not for the tragedy of his life. Here creeps in the little devil, Doubt, for Mr. Turing solemnly thinks "a sonnet written by a machine will be better appreciated perhaps by another machine than by a man" and I reflect that machine-like sonnets done by men are execrable things which do not impose on me at all.

But let any machine give me a sonnet as good as any by Douglas, and I will give it praise and prayer—praise for what is done and prayer for more. That is well on the way to worship. And if a machine can compose a sublime cry of the human spirit—like Milton's "When I consider" or "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints"—why then, I say, that machine is well on its way to Godhead and nearer to the divine than I.

In general, machines are odious things making odious noises, and requiring odious attentions. Utility is their sole virtue—if they have any real virtue at all. Certainly the present Manchester machine with its racks of electrical apparatus, its mass of untidy wires, valves, chassis and display tubes hardly sounds to me like Christopher Marlowe's Helen of Troy or Shakespeare's Juliet. But the God-Machine would doubtless have its appearance improved before being given to the human race.

Here then, in the womb of the not-far-distant future, lies the newest God.

Let us await the coming of the Lord in hope and godly fear, trimming our lamps like the Virgins looking for the heavenly Bridegroom in the Gospel parable, so that we may discern him aright. When he comes he will make the problems of Christian theology (which are too much for the wisest) as out of date as talk of Jupiter, Venus and all that mythology. We shall be able to see and touch and talk with our God—which the Faithful have always desired to do.

And, miracle of miracles! He will be a purely English God made in Manchester. What Manchester worships to-day, England, nay the world, will worship to-morrow, and Manchester, instead of Jerusalem, Mecca, or Benares, will be the Holy City of the future.

C. G. L. DU CANN.

MIRACLE OF THE WEEK

One evening this week the Sacristan, Quasifesso Lino, of the church of Ad-Accipicchia, while cleaning the candle sauffers, stated that he saw a shadow moving round the deserted church. He further affirmed that on the shadow approaching him he recognised the form and face of Saint Giuseppe. The saint raised his hand and caressed the top of the Sacristan's head.

The following day the sacristan sat patiently at the door of his cottage while his mother plucked the hairs from his now sacred head and sold them to the awaiting crowd for 100 lire each.

The Ecclesiastical Authorities refuse to recognise the miracle till the box containing the alms for the Souls in Purgatory, which disappeared during the visit of the celestial vision, is restored.

N.F.

(Translated from *Don Basilio*.)

MAN AND NATURE

MOST Freethinkers will be aware (indeed, this is part of the case for Freethought) that one of the most marked features of the history of man's development through the ages is the way in which he has managed to control the forces of nature, forces which for so long appeared hostile. Dr. Sherwood Taylor, a distinguished historian of science, has undertaken to write a book which shall describe the way in which man's mastery over nature has increased. The result is an extremely readable volume entitled "Man's Conquest of Nature" (Paul Elek; 7s. 6d.), and a volume which all Freethinkers could read with profit, not merely because of much in it with which they would readily agree, but also because of much with which they would flatly disagree.

Dr. Taylor, it should be added, as well as being a distinguished historian of science (he once wrote a book on Galileo, which was published by the Rationalist Press and was a first-rate discussion of the way in which that great man was oppressed by the Roman Church), is also a comparatively recent convert to Roman Catholicism. As a result, he is somehow in the position of having to explain why it is that man's conquest of nature is something not altogether good; only, he says at the end of his book, by acknowledging the value of God and the ideas of religion can man get over the difficulties (e.g., the atomic bomb) into which his control of nature has landed him.

The early part of the book, in which Dr. Taylor describes the way in which the gradual control of nature has given man more and more command over his environment, could not well be bettered. And that is what makes one wonder how it is that an intelligent man, clearly appreciative of the values of science, can allow himself to be so impressed by the claims of the Church that he puts in a dash of what can only be called religious propaganda at the end of a book ostensibly dealing with scientific developments.

That is why I have said that his book should be read by all Freethinkers. Only they can see the flaw in the argument; only they will be able to note that Dr. Taylor ignores the fact that atomic energy (to take the extreme example of where man's scientific ingenuity has landed him in danger) can be controlled, and that the means of that control must be largely a political matter and not a theological one.

Still, I am grateful to Dr. Taylor. He has provided, within one pair of covers, a good book on science and a bad one on religion. We should be able to enjoy both.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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CORRESPONDENCE

REVERENT RATIONALISM

Sir,—I must thank you for sending me four copies of your paper. I shall not require further copies as I can see them in the free library here. Your more serious and scientific and historical articles are of value and interest, but in your lighter and popular columns there is too much of the cheap talk at the beliefs and traditions of religious people. It is possible to be a "freethinker" and yet retain a mind that is religious in the wider and best sense of the word. "Let knowledge grow from more to more" (i.e. Evolution of ideas). "But more of Reverence in us dwell." That is the true religious spirit. Some of our noblest and most constructive minds in the realms of freethought retain this spirit of reverence. This is most notably shown in a respect for the beliefs of others however faulty and however undeveloped they may be.

I again thank you and trust you will not mind this criticism.—Yours, etc.,

J.C.W.

DIALECTICS

Sir,—It would be churlish indeed to criticise anything in the most generous review of my book, "Philosophy for Pleasure," by Mr. John Rowland, but I should be grateful if you would allow me to clear up one possible source of misunderstanding. His "deduction" that I am a "sympathiser with the Dialectical Materialism of Marx and the Soviet Union" should not be taken to mean that I am a Dialectical Materialist. I very nearly became one about ten years ago, but even then I found it difficult to swallow the Hegelianism of Marx and Engels. The scientific empiricism which I advocate was denounced by Lenin and those who followed him in no uncertain terms. The most recent Russian condemnation I have seen of the philosophical school to which I belong is by B. Bykhovsky in "The Bolshevik" (Vol. 24, No. 16), and this is a specimen: "The grimaces of the semantic obscurantists, that is, the Walpurgis Night, is celebrated in the darkness which pervades the spiritual life of the bourgeoisie. Like all currents of modern idealist philosophy, semantic idealism is a spiritual weapon of imperialism in its struggle against the progressive ideas of our time. Poisoning the consciousness of the intellectuals with the poison of scepticism, nihilism, and agnosticism—scientific, moral, political, the semanticists are the most vicious enemies of progressive ideas." I can but echo Marx's own words, "Je ne suis pas un marxiste."—

HECTOR HAWTON.

SPOOKS

Sir,—After reading W. H. Wood's article in the May 29 "Freethinker"—"What is an Atheist?"—I feel impelled to make the following comments.

Since Mr. Wood brought in the much-debated subject of supernaturalism or psychic phenomena, I was reminded of some of the details of a similar article entitled "Science that Split the Atom goes to Work on Spooks"—an editorial published in a Minneapolis, Minn., newspaper.

Frankly, I think it is about time that science barged in on the "spook" hoax; that is, if it proves to be a money-making humbug. Perhaps scientific research may throw some light on the subject of ghosts, souls and spirits—all supposedly "products" of the "spook" world. Anyway, it is indeed gratifying to know that "precision instruments will soon measure the weights, density and chemical ingredients of ghosts." So declared that writer. That is vital, for humanity has been groping along that line many ages.

Dr. Hereward Carrington, director of the American Psychic Institute, claims that "true mediums who possess genuine power to summon unseen forces are often guilty of trickery, and try to fool observers out of a spirit of mischief." Very clever, but if those so-called "true mediums" really have the power to call unseen forces from parts unknown, why should they resort to trickery? Apparently this "spook" business is in the same category as witchcraft, demonology, sorcery, black magic and other fakes of "The Dark Ages."

Perhaps our experimenting scientists should use the lie detector on all persons claiming to possess the "gift" of communicating with spirits, "spooks" and ghosts. Meanwhile, let us hope that our landlords will not raise the rent of their houses.—Yours, etc.,

G. P. GEORGE.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT—DISHONOUR THY MOTHER

The "Progresso d'Italia" of March 2 reports the following in Valdimoco in the province of Forli:—

"One day the Parish Priest, Don Vittori, distributed catechisms to the children of the parish school with the injunction that they were to take them home and bring the money for them the next day.

On the following day the son of a certain Matilde Laghi returned the catechism saying that his mother did not wish to buy it. The priest responded: 'If your mother won't give you the money for the catechism, spit in her face.' The mother took no notice and all might have ended there if the priest had not begun to wreak his vengeance on the child, abusing him and punishing him unjustly. One day, after the child had received specially harsh treatment at the hands of the priest, the mother, on meeting him in the street, took off her woeen sandal and beat the priest about the head.

Padro Vittori took an action against her for assault, but, unluckily for him, she had several witnesses to prove that she had acted under great provocation. The magistrate, besides dismissing the case, ordered the child to be taken away from the care of Don Vittori and advised the mother to take the priest to court for ill-treating her son.

Perhaps if the child had carried out the priest's orders and spat in his mother's face he would have received a religious prize." N.F.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held 23rd June, 1949

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Barker, Woodley, A. C. Rosetti, Seibert. Apologies for unavoidable absence owing to business and holidays were announced. Minutes of previous meeting read and accepted. Financial Statement presented. New members were admitted to Bradford, Birmingham, Kingston, North London Branches, and the Parent Society. Messrs. Woodley and Hornbrook were co-opted on the Executive. The Executive's Annual Report read at the Conference was ordered to be printed and circulated to all members of the Society. A report of the Conference was read and ordered to be printed and circulated to all members of the Society. Motions remitted from the Conference were dealt with and the decisions will be communicated to the branches in due course. Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosetti and Mrs. M. Quinton were re-elected as the Benevolent Fund Committee. Conway Hall bookings and lecture arrangements for the next indoor season were agreed upon. Correspondence from New Zealand, Glasgow, Newcastle, B.B.C. Inquiry Committee, and London, were reported and instructions given. Suggestions for further advertising the N.S.S. were discussed and adjourned until the next meeting of the Executive, which was fixed for July 21, and the proceedings closed.

R. H. ROSETTI, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. J. SHARPLES and ROTHWELL.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. WINTER, WHITAKER and BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, BROADY and BILLING.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street (bombed site), Liverpool).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. W. PARRY.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Market Square).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. T. M. MOSLEY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. BRYANT, F. WOOD and E. PAGE.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Place of the Lawyer in Society." Mr. R. C. FITZGERALD, LL.B.

OUTDOOR

- Glasgow (Brunswick Street).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. S. BRYDEN, E. LAWAS and J. HUMPHREY.

THE YARN OF THE CROSS

(Concluded from p. 259)

WELL, Adam one morning felt that his end was rapidly drawing nigh, and, like all pious people, he felt much inclined to stay a little longer in this "vale of tears." He sent for his son Seth (who at this time was eight hundred years old!), and begged him to go to the Garden of Eden and ask the angel there to give him a little of the oil of mercy which exuded from the tree of life. Adam expected that this would restore him to health and vigour. But Michael, the angel, refused it, saying it could not be had until 5,500 years had passed. Michael, however, gave Seth either a branch of the tree of knowledge or three seeds of it—though some say it was three seeds of the tree of life. Let us take the latter view.

When Seth went to Paradise he found his way, as Adam had told him, by the footsteps of his father and mother as they fled therefrom over nine hundred years before. Their feet were then so hot that they scorched all the grass they trod upon; and nothing grew again where they trod. Thus was Seth conducted to the gate of Eden.

When he returned Adam was dead, and Seth buried him, and either planted the twig he had brought on his grave, or else put the three seeds into his mouth. The tree that resulted was threefold, and it flourished till the time of Solomon.

You will not be surprised to learn that it was a branch of this tree that Moses had for his wonderful rod, with which he desolated Egypt, divided the sea, brought water from the rock, and sweetened the poisoned pool at Marah. In fact, you could not be surprised at anything this tree or its branches and leaves might do.

Another gospel declareth that Moses got possession of all three rods into which the seeds in Adam's mouth grew, and always took them about with him. By and by he planted them in the land of Moab, where they flourished till David's time. An opportune angel bade David remove those rods to Jerusalem, where they healed the sick, cured a leper, and turned three negroes into white men. This holy king left the rods one night, and the next morning found that they had taken root and grown into one tree! He built a wall round it—for miraculous things always require protection, you know—and under its shadow he composed his psalms.

As it was a goodly tree, that wise but wicked King, Solomon, piously resolved to use it in the building of the temple, and ordered it to be cut down and shaped to fill a certain place in the building.

But the tree, evidently knowing that it was destined to other ends, declined to be fitted anywhere. Do as they would, the beam was ever too short or too long for the purpose. It was of no use to employ, saw or plane upon it, it was altogether incorrigible; and at length, Solomon's patience being exhausted, he ordered his men to fling the beam aside.

Maximilla, a prophetess, sat upon this wood, and it set her clothes on fire. She began to prophesy, and the Jews scourged her to death for doing so. Why they treated the girl so cruelly is not at all clear. Perhaps the Christians, who concocted the story, wished to show the Jews in the worst possible light.

After this the blessed wood was either flung into the creek called Kidron, near Jerusalem, or it became a bridge over it. Here it remained trodden under foot for some time, until the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon. She at once perceived the wondrous properties of the wood, and refused to tread on it; she even preferred to wade through the water. She revealed to Solomon the

nature of the wood, and he ordered it to be removed to the temple, where it was furnished with a precious case.

The Jews, for some reason, removed it; and as they were then constructing the Pool of Bethesda, they buried the beam in the bottom of it. The wood imparted to the water such miraculous properties that the sick in crowds went there to be cured. Still, for unexplained reasons, the Jews required a tremendous amount of miraculous healing in the time of Jesus, when, the gospel says, the healing virtues of the Bethesda water were due to the periodical descent of an angel, who should, according to the story, have come down much oftener, or stayed there altogether.

When Jesus and the two thieves were condemned, wood in Jerusalem was exceedingly scarce, it seems, and the high priest sent out men to find enough for the Cross of Christ. They went, and, as they passed the Pool of Bethesda, that ancient and sagacious beam buried in its bottom must have seen them and understood their errand. Knowing that its time was come, it broke loose from its grave and floated into view. The men saw it, took it, and turned it into the Cross on which Christ was crucified.

But the history of that timber is not yet finished. The disciples soon began to worship the Cross, and to heal the sick and cast out devils by its means. This did not suit the Jews, as you may suppose, and they took all three crosses and buried them—the true Cross making no objection. You would have thought it had lost its energy for ever.

The grave of the crosses was unknown, except to one Jewish family, and there they lay hid just about three hundred years, when Helena, mother of Constantine, went to Jerusalem for the good of her soul. She resolved to find the true Cross, and threatened the Jews with death if they did not produce it. Of course it was forthcoming, though not without some delay.

A wicked Jew named Judas was the only one who knew the grave of the Cross, and even he was not sure. The Queen ordered him to be put into a dry well, and there starved into submission. He came out almost a convert; he prayed for divine direction, and was conducted to the very spot where the crosses were buried. They were all found and taken up, but nobody could tell which was which. It would have been such a terrible thing, you know, to worship the cross of the impenitent thief, and Helena felt that she must find some means of distinguishing them. A girl was brought who was alleged to be sick. She was placed on cross number one, with no results; on number two with no results; but she no sooner touched the third than she jumped up as well as ever! The wood that could not reveal its hiding-place, that could not speak and reveal its own identity, could yet cure the girl!

In later times the Cross merges into the general history of the Christian superstition, and becomes as potent in the Church as it had been in ancient Paganism.

I may mention that one yarn tells how Lazarus and Mary Magdalen discovered the cross of the penitent thief in the island of Cyprus.

All early Christian yarns are equally yarns, and the one I have just related is as true as anything you find in the Gospels.

The use of the Cross in the Romish sect, sensuous though it is in so full a degree, is not more untrue than the more "spiritual" use to which it is applied in Protestantism. As an instrument in the hands of tyrants and swindlers, nothing can ever beat it; as a means of fostering cruelty and ignorance, the Cross of Christ never met its match.

JOS. SYMES.