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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Freethought and Society

UPON January 27, 1077, the German King and "Holy Roman Emperor" Henry IV, made his submission to Pope Gregory VII (1073-85), the greatest of the totalitarian Popes of the Middle Ages. Outside the Castle of Canossa in Tuscany, where the Pope was in residence, the German Emperor was kept waiting bare-footed in the snow until finally admitted to make an abject submission. This now distant event represented the high-water mark of ecclesiastical supremacy over the secular power. Thenceforward the name "Canossa" became the synonym for the totalitarian authority of the Church over State and Society.

1877, eight centuries later, the boot was on the other foot. For then it was Prince Bismarck, "The Iron Chancellor," who set himself to break the power of the Church of Rome in the celebrated "Kulturkampf" "War of ideologies," an attempt which collapsed in the face of the fierce and ultimately successful resistance offered by Rome to the authority of the modern absolute State under one of its strongest leaders.

The old quarrel between what medieval jurists termed "the two swords" of Church and State for the absolute domination of Society, has again flared up with unparalleled violence with the rise of the Totalitarian States, Fascist and Communist, of the twentieth century. For neither Fascism nor Communism can be accurately termed a political party, in the limited sense, say, that one attaches this term to the British Labour and Tory Parties or to their political counterparts in other democratic lands. For both totalitarian Parties of the Right and Left claim, and where possible, actually exercise an absolute and universal control over Society; a control which extends to Philosophy, Ethics and to general culture, no less than to specific questions of politics and of economics. For, however antagonistic to each other, and however widely their social philosophies may differ, both Communism and Fascism are alike in this, that the "party line" has the last word and is the final arbiter of truth, whether it be the "party line" of the Fascist Fuehrer or Duce, or of the Communist Politbureau or dictator.

To-day Fascism has overreached itself and no longer counts, at least on a world scale. Communism, on the other hand, is flourishing like a green (or rather, red) bay tree. The collapse of the rival Fascist Empires in Europe and Asia, coupled with the short-sighted policy of Churchill and Roosevelt (from their own point of view and the interests they represented) in insisting upon the complete destruction, the unconditional surrender of the Fascist empires, has effectively handed over the greater part of the Old World to Communism, and to its Marxist-Leninist ideology.

More and more the ideological struggle in Europe is between totalitarian politics, Communism and totalitarian religion, Catholicism, or more precisely, between what

has been so aptly termed, "the Church of Moscow" and the "Church of Rome." It being, of course, always understood that Rome is an empire no less, than a Church. Whilst the Moscow "party line" of "Marxism" lays down the law upon culture and science with no less assurance than upon politics and economics. As was observed recently in this column, more and more Catholicism tends to become the dominant ideology in the anti-Communist camp, and fresh proof of this has accumulated in a sensational manner since the above observation was made.

For faced with the loss of the entire world to the first strong anti-Christian ideology to arise in Europe since the Roman Empire, the Papacy has reacted with dramatic violence. It has drawn from its medieval arsenals its ancient thunderbolt of excommunication which in times past it hurled at contumacious emperors, and it, to-day, excommunicates the Catholic adherents of Stalin just as in the days of Magna Carta, Rome hurled her spiritual lightnings at our own King John. For the Vatican is fighting for its life, and it has no illusions about the mortal danger in which it stands.

For Marxism and Communism are young, virile and fanatical, and the "Church of Moscow" has this major advantage over its Roman rival that both its organisation and its ideology are modern in origin, and belong naturally to the industrial age and reflect its conditions whereas Rome speaks the language of a vanished age, and reflects the social milieu of an agrarian, pre-industrial age long dead and gone. It is, above all, this last fact that makes the advance of Communism so extraordinarily dangerous to Rome—a state of things of which the Vatican is fully aware, as its present actions demonstrate "infallibly."

In the midst of this mortal conflict between two rival totalitarian regimes for the absolute control of civilisation and society, where stands Freethought to-day? This is a vital, indeed, we would say, all things considered, *the* vital question of our age for all Freethinkers. And as such, it is one that Freethinkers and the Freethought Movement will have to face and to decide upon, and that soon, under pain of being ground to pieces between the proverbial hammer and anvil. The following reflections are submitted with reference to this fundamental question of our times.

Under no conceivable conditions can Freethought accept the totalitarian principle, by whomsoever applied, and remain simultaneously, genuine *free* thought. And this applies to both Rome and Moscow, to both the "Red International" and to the "Black." For under the concrete conditions of the mid-twentieth century, social absolutism, the totalitarian principle itself, which has now succeeded the age of *laissez faire*, is, more even than any particular religion, the mortal enemy of Freethought. For it inevitably destroys not merely the conclusions of Freethought, but Freethought itself.

This is surely obvious. If Truth and one's attitude to Truth, is, in the last analysis, decided by authority, whether it be that of a Pope, or a Dictator, of a Party,

or a Church, by *any* force outside of, and apart from reason, then Freethought is no more, and "rationalism" has died along with the supremacy of reason which alone constitutes it as such, and Truth has given way to "gospel truth."

We cannot see that there are any loopholes in such logic. If Freethought were to attach itself to Rome (an inconceivable proposition) or, which is more credible, to Moscow, which is materialistic and atheistic in theory, at least, then it should disband its organisations officially and its members should join the Communist Party—they could hardly join "Catholic Action"—individually.

The above is, it may be relevantly objected, a "hard saying," and difficult to translate into action, for we live in an age the totalitarian tendencies of which are dominant and unmistakable. However, the very nature of Freethought is libertarian and the antithesis of authority. Freethought wherever it is *really* free, is a living protest against the "total state." In practical life to-day this implies that Freethought stands for the "Third Front" of Liberty against both the ecclesiastical totalitarianism of Rome and the secular totalitarianism of Moscow. In our submission Freethought, by its very nature as *free* thought must stand or fall with such a third libertarian alternative.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A NOVEL THEORY OF MAN'S DEVELOPMENT

THE doctrine of Darwinism and Descent is now accepted by all who are qualified to speak on the subject. But differences of viewpoint among experts exist concerning the precise factors involved in organic change. This discrepancy is strikingly illustrated in the eminent scientist, Sir Arthur Keith, whose important volume, *A New Theory of Human Evolution*, has recently appeared. This work, published by Watts in 1948, 21s., presents an unorthodox picture of man's genesis and development. Still, it is penned by a veteran who is not only a distinguished anthropologist but also an expert anatomist and embryologist whose historical researches have also been distinctly extensive. He is no way deterred by adverse criticism in his exposition of heretical opinions, especially as he avowedly bases them on study, observation and experiment. As he avers: "This book represents the harvest of a lifetime. I have bound my harvest into sheaves . . . And tiny sheaves when built together, form a rick of theory; not a complete one, I admit, but nearer completion than any that have gone before."

Nearly forty years since, when custodian of the Royal College of Surgeons' Museum in London, Keith had ample opportunity for study and research amid the countless treasures stored in that splendid temple of science which concern anthropology. Previously engaged in anatomical comparisons of apes and men, he then directed his attention to the problem of the emergence and subsequent evolution of the various simian and human stocks into the state in which we now find them. Thus Keith was compelled to conclude that the mental outlook and social structures of contemporary savage tribes are substantially those of evolving human groups who dwelt in the remote past. He urges that then, as now, co-operation prevailed within the progressing primitive group with mutual aid, loyalty, and other virtues, while the urge of competition with alien communities served to strengthen its defences, enlarge its habitat and strengthen its defensive powers. "In

brief," writes Keith: "I hold that from the very beginning of human evolution, the conduct of every local group was regulated by two codes of morality distinguished by Herbert Spencer as the 'code of amity' and the 'code of enmity.' The code of amity favoured the growth and ripening of all those qualities of human nature which find universal approval . . . Under the code of enmity arose those qualities which are condemned by all civilised minds." Yet both these qualities—good and evil—seemingly secured survival. As our author observes: "These two sets of opposite qualities must be balanced to secure continuous progressive evolutionary changes; an over-development of the elements which subserve the code of amity would make its group vulnerable to its enemies; an overgrowth of those which support the code of enmity would lead ultimately to the destruction of the group." This is not a picture of what things ought to be, but what they unfortunately are.

Keith contends that migrations which were common at the dawn of history have induced anthropologists to conclude that movement was a marked feature in pre-historic times. He, on the other hand, holds that primal man lived in isolated groups which were limited to the areas containing the food supplies which were the sole means of subsistence. Not until husbandry and the domestication of animals had been attained, were food supplies sufficient to enable Pleistocene groups to wander far. Indeed, local evolution is the only theory that will explain the restriction of the "Negro type to Africa, the Mongol type to Eastern Asia, the Caucasian type to Western Asia and Europe, the Australoid type to Australia and neighbouring islands."

Professor Keith of course adheres to Darwin's view that the simian stock which gave rise to the Old World apes and monkeys also gave birth to human kind. Reverting to our concepts of right and wrong, Darwin himself noted that in primeval ages sympathy was necessarily restricted to one's own group, and group consciousness served to sustain the tribe. Still, as he points out in the *Descent of Man*: "When two tribes of primeval man living in the same country came into competition, the tribe containing the greater number of courageous, sympathetic and faithful members would succeed better and conquer the others."

Our author estimates his primal period—the Pleistocene—during which *Homo sapiens* evolved from anthropoid forms as covering about one million years, whereas, if we assume that 7,000 B.C. reveals the first gleams of culture, then a duration of 9,000 years must be assigned to the entire term of so-called civilisation.

An imposing array of evidence is submitted to prove that tribal organisation everywhere preceded the appearance of national life. City States, medieval, ancient, and modern, were developed from tribal and village settlements into national States. From China to Peru, conclusive evidence of this transformation is furnished. England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales provide proof of earlier tribal grouping. Thus from these data collected from all parts of the globe, Keith relies for his conclusion "that mankind during the primal period of its evolution was divided into an exceedingly great number of isolated social communities." A section of Keith's powerful volume is devoted to *Patriotism as a Factor in Human Evolution*. Partiality, he avers, is the basis of patriotism and is an extension of feelings of family pride, with resentment of any imputation cast upon family integrity. "Group patriotism may, therefore, be regarded as an expansion of family partiality."

The combination of co-operation and competition

factors in human evolution lessens the severity of the struggle for existence. Keith concludes that: "Man has the capacity to co-operate far beyond that of any other social animal . . . and that the primal groups postulated in the group theory were independent co-operative units." Concerning competition, he declares that: "Man is the most competitive of animals; his spirit of competition outstrips that of any other primate just as far as his brain surpasses theirs . . . I regard the combination of co-operation and competition as the most potent of all the agencies which determine the evolutionary destiny of human groups."

Mental bias as an evolutionary factor is admirably discussed, and Keith coincides with Darwin's conclusion that altruism—to live for others—represents a wide extension of family affection. Still, like so-called Christian virtues, it is more honoured in the breach than the observance. Again, rivalry, greed and injustices of all kinds have been factors in human advancement. Keith notes that many of his anthropological contemporaries are indisposed to admit the evolutionary evils that menace the world to-day. "The actions of living nations lie outside their purview, yet to me the behaviour of nations now alive is very similar to that which I have ascribed to primal groups of humanity swallowed up in the past of so long ago. 'The profoundest of all infidelities,' writes Herbert Spencer, 'is the fear that the truth will be bad'."

So, in addition to mutual aid, resentment and revenge have played their part—however sinister—in human adaptation. Isolation also seems essential to group development, while the custom of blood revenge sustains a permanent barrier between tribe and tribe. Those who prove too supine to avenge an injury sink, not only in their own, but in their fellow tribesmen's estimation, and become an easy prey to their less scrupulous enemies.

As Keith sagely says: "We who live under the shelter of law may suppress our resentment and so escape, but the tribesman was given no such shelter; he had to be strong enough in mind and body to shoulder his own defence. The strong and resolute were thus favoured in tribal times."

Many other aspects of evolution are illumined in Keith's volume which must be reserved for a future review.

T. F. PALMER.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

I HAVE just been reading a little book called "Sixteen Self Sketches," by Bernard Shaw, published this year. No. XIII is entitled "What is my religious faith?" I think it incorporates a letter which he wrote to *The Freethinker* a few years ago on the same subject. He says, "When G. W. Foote became insolvent and his petition in bankruptcy raised the question of who was to succeed him if he had to resign his Presidency of the National Secular Society, some of the members headed by George Standing, placed me on a list of possibles, and invited me to address the Society and be judged as to my eligibility." After describing how the "Fundamentalists of the National Secular Society" went white with rage, at his word-juggling on the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, etc., he says "Mrs. Besant's conversion to Theosophy had not then shocked and shaken them." He does not say in what year Mr. Foote's

bankruptcy took place (I suppose it did take place, as he says so, but I being then about 20, and a keen reader of the three Freethought papers, *The Freethinker*, the *National Reformer* and the *Agnostic Journal*, knew nothing about it) but he is wrong about Mrs. Besant. She became a Theosophist before Bradlaugh resigned the Presidency to Mr. Foote in 1890, and had published a small booklet entitled *Why I Became a Theosophist*. He says, "My subsequent career has proved that I should not have been their worst choice." That is a matter of opinion, of course, but I wonder what would have happened to the N.S.S. if he had been chosen! And why did George Standing have to go outside the Society to a man who had done nothing for the Cause, when such a man as J. M. Robertson was available inside? Or, if the bankruptcy occurred after the split over the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall, and the resignation of Mr. Robertson from the N.S.S. was still carrying on his advocacy in the monthly *Free Review*? And anyway, what did happen about the bankruptcy, Mr. Foote having remained President up to his death? He goes on, talking about Rationalism, to say, "I knew that Robespierre, when he set up a Goddess of Reason, soon found out that reason is only a machinery of thought, and had to agree with Voltaire that if there were no God, it would be necessary to invent one." I have always understood that Robespierre was a fervent Deist, and that he took the earliest opportunity to "liquidate" the organisers of the Feasts of Reason, by sending them to the guillotine, and then attempted to supplant them with his worship of the "Supreme Being," with himself a High Priest.

It would be interesting to know what really did happen in this connection between, say, 1891, the year of Bradlaugh's death, and 1900.

A. W. DAVIS.

[Readers will find a discussion of some of the points raised by Mr. Davis in *Essays in Freethinking*, Fourth Series, page 14, where they are dealt with at some length.—Editor.]

LAMENT OF THE "LIFE-FORCE"!

I'm a little "Life-force"
Popping here and there.
I'm a lively little cuss—
Catch me, if you dare!

Someone says I'm O.K.
Someone says I'm not.
Wish Wood wouldn't pick on me—
Puts me on the spot!

VITALISM! Cursed word!
Down with fancy titles!
People thinks it's *Baby Food*—
Stap me in my vitals!

W. H. WOOD.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 2½d.

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

THE MOTHER OF GOD. By G. W. Foote. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

HENRY HETHERINGTON. By A. G. Barker. A Pioneer in the Freethought and Working-class Struggle of a Hundred Years Ago. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

A woman was trampled to death and 19 were injured in Lublin (Poland) in a stampede to see a portrait of the Virgin Mary which was said to weep tears of blood. This could be put down to the sheer ignorance and credulity of the Roman Catholic population of Poland, but what are we to infer from the action of the priests who allowed a picture of the bloody-weeping Virgin to appear with their blessing in all Polish newspapers: "an obvious fake" as one paper termed it. It is obvious that the Catholic hierarchy are deliberately promoting the tension between Church and State, and they want to be sure of an unthinking, credulous mob in the almost certain conflict that is developing, with "miracles" a sure winner. All the same, 25,000 people demonstrated, demanding punishment for all those responsible for such an unmitigated imposture as this Weeping Virgin—and the Church may find it difficult to convert them, and those who think like them.

Poor Mrs. Gilchrist! She was on her way to Lourdes but collapsed before leaving England and died. There must be, every year, hundreds of similar sick people who delude themselves that going to Lourdes will cure them, and they die before getting anywhere near the "shrine." What a tragic farce it all is—that intelligent people can be fooled through religion in this way. Yet even such deaths will not shake their "faith."

But what will they now say to Archbishop Downey, who has been insisting that people should not look at Lourdes as a hospital for the healing of the sick? Miraculous cures have taken place there, but cures are not the object of Lourdes. People who go should pray for peace and an end to the Communist persecution of religion. We are sure that there must be millions of Catholics who will pay their fare to Lourdes and have other expenses merely to achieve these two aims for their money! Perhaps Archbishop Downey knows his foolish sheep, though.

Two nuns, four girls, and 13 other people were killed when their lorry overturned near Turin. We would not have noticed this but for the fact that these poor people had been visiting the Sanctuary of Raconigi. Their tragic fate is again one of those mysteries which God alone can solve. There would have been no difficulty in the matter had the lorry contained a party of Freethinkers visiting a beauty spot on a Sunday. Mr. Misery Martin would have answered that one without hesitation.

The atmosphere surrounding the Methodist Conference was extremely gloomy, when speaker after speaker expressed his concern at the sparse church congregations. "Apathy," it was said, "is the greatest enemy to Methodism" and seemed to be the keynote of all the speeches. Many and varied were the schemes suggested for the enticing of the "erring sheep" back to the fold. One thing seems to have been forgotten, the real problem is not how to get people back to church, although this is a problem in itself; the real difficulty is to get them to believe in Christianity, the church attendances will settle itself once that is accomplished.

A new organisation, The Brighter Sunday Association, has been formed in London and one of its objects will be to secure legislation to enable people to choose in what

way they should spend their Sundays. We wish the new organisation all success, and sympathise in advance; we know what a task they have before them.

Oh, sweet is the service of the Lord, and its reward is commensurate. Harry Harwood Simon, a tithe collector, was sentenced to three years jail for converting cheques belonging to the Tithe Redemption Fund. According to the *Daily Express* there are between 50 and 60 collectors. Mr. Simon's salary was £2,000 a year. After that, even Christians should not be surprised that farmers, who feel the heavy hand of tithe collectors mostly, should kick now and again. Sir Stafford Cripps may perhaps see in tithes an untapped source of revenue.

The *Church Times* is very, very angry. It always prefers attack to being ignored—to be in the limelight is the very essence of Christianity. Here then is a King Penguin publication *Life in an English Village* which "contemptuously denies any real significance of the Church to the countryside to-day" and the parson "is criticised as having in general forfeited his influence on village life." It goes even further for it denies "any positive contribution by the Church to the values or virtues of the rural community." Perhaps the author has been reading *The Freethinker*—in any case, we congratulate him on his accurate observation of village life.

"Trimmer" of the *Church Times* after acknowledging his error in describing *The Freethinker* as the journal of "North Country Atheists" is now "improving his acquaintance with the English anti-clerical press" and has discovered that we are, for the most part, "surprisingly old-fashioned." And he goes on to tell us that "Atheism has been exposed as a dogma," and is therefore "repudiated" by the more "sophisticated sceptics." In fact, not being able to answer any of the old-fashioned arguments, "Trimmer" sets about writing a long paragraph of drivel, knowing quite well that the old ladies who read him won't recognise it as such.

Whatever Freethought may be, it certainly is not so "surprisingly old-fashioned" as Christianity which is "repudiated" now and has been repudiated in the past by most of the great minds in the world. We challenge "Trimmer" to give us one great scientist, now living, who has, in writing, declared his belief in the absolute veracity of Genesis, word for word. And if the Fall of Man is not true, what becomes of the necessity for a saviour?

Renee Martz, the nine-year-old Chicago preacher, has come back to England to have another go at converting us, her first visit was rather a flop, and her father lost quite a sum of money; but that doesn't worry him, for money does not mean a thing to him, and he relies on the collections at Renee's meetings. We doubt whether the established firms in the same line as the Martz's will look with benevolent eyes on this young preacher, and that, despite the alleged "12,000 converts to church-going" that Renee claims. Marshall Aid may, or may not be necessary, we have, however, no doubts about the Martz family, whose peculiar talents would be more in harmony in the Middle West Bible Belt, or even Father Divine might be persuaded to put the Martz circus on a financial footing. We think this is a case of America for the Americans as we have enough troubles of our own.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

S.T.—We have an article on Ingersoll on hand—we noted it was 50 years since he died.

E. SUDLEY.—Thanks. Will appear.

SUGAR PLUMS

English Freethinkers will be well represented at the International Freethought Congress in Rome in September. Unfortunately, owing to holidays and personal conveniences they cannot travel as a party but all will join forces at the Congress. Mr. R. H. Rosetti will be the official delegate from the N.S.S. The Congress will open with a reception on Friday evening, September 9, and close on Monday evening, September 12. This will be the 29th Congress of The World Union of Freethinkers.

The General Secretary of the N.S.S. will be leaving for a short vacation on August 13, and during his absence only matters of pressing importance will be dealt with. It will help if all items needing attention before that date will be sent to the offices of the Society without delay.

The South London Branch N.S.S. held its first meeting in Brockwell Park, Herne Hill, since 1941, when Mr. F. A. Ridley addressed an appreciative audience on the aims and objects of the National Secular Society. One could, however, sense that the break in the meetings from 1941 has not helped Freethought, and it is obvious that the branch will have to start from scratch once more. Sunday evening meetings will be continued throughout the summer and we hope that South London Freethinkers will get in touch with the secretary who will appreciate all offers of help.

The Manchester Roman Catholic Evidence Guild at its Tuesday evening meetings at Alexandra Park Gates will not allow N.S.S. opponents on its platform. So notes are taken from the Catholic speakers' remarks, and the next evening (Wednesday), the Manchester Branch N.S.S. hold a meeting on the same spot and Messrs. Kay, Smith and R. Billing reply to the statements made from the Roman Catholic Platform the evening before. The Manchester Branch N.S.S. meetings begin at 8 p.m. All members of the branch can enter into the active work of the movement by giving their support to the platform.

The Rationalist Press Association are holding their Fourth Annual Conference on "Science and Society" at Magdalen College, Oxford, from Friday, August 5, to Tuesday, August 9. Applications should be sent to the Conference Organiser, 4-6, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.4.

We note that there is a likelihood of Sunday Cinema polls in Prescott, Hitchin and Shifnal. As usual, the parsons have been busy prattling about the desecration of the Sabbath: "undermining the morals of the young" and the Sabbath as a day of rest. The truth is, of course, that the parsonic concern for the weekly day of rest, etc., is a purely selfish one, and what they fear is a loss

of the priestly monopoly, the more recreational facilities on a Sunday may mean that they will have to shut shop. If any readers of *The Freethinker* in the above-mentioned districts would get in touch with the General Secretary, N.S.S., he would be pleased to forward a supply of leaflets dealing with the Sunday Cinema question, for distribution.

The "long awaited" publication of the Bible in Basic English ends a twenty year task of a committee working under the direction of Professor S. Hooke. The *News Chronicle* comments that "in spite of the limitations of the vocabulary one can sense the influence of the Elizabethan English of the Authorised Version." We are a little tired of the continual boosting of the Bible as glorious literature, that seems to be all that can be said as God's authorship and its miracles are questioned, but we are doubtful if any Elizabethan Englishman ever spoke the language of the Authorised Version. The main problem is to iron out a few of the inconsistencies and all the Basic English will not make God's word any more intelligible to rational men and women.

COMMONSENSE

THE philosophic controversy over Idealism and Materialism gives place to Ideology and Phenomenology, with Existentialism and a revival of Thomism. The question begging and logic-chopping of Epistemology falls flat since Kant's failure to discover the "thing in itself." But some assertions in a voluminous literature seem remarkable: We are told that we have no direct knowledge or immediate apprehension of reality; and even that we have no knowledge of the physical world. And that, by reputable logicians.

But if reality is transcendental or unknown then the question concerns sense of what is beyond the senses or knowledge of the unknown; an absurdity. True, our world of physical theory does not resemble the physical aspect of our experience. But the notion that we are not in actual contact with a physical world may have seemed logical in the days of Locke or Berkeley, but the air is no longer spiritual but material, even chemical; and to-day, light, heat and electro-magnetic radiation is physical. And to mistake theory for fact is to live in a world of illusion, for the purpose of theory is to explain our experience, not to deny it.

But is it really asserted that we do not actually feel or touch concrete objects in sensation? That would make nonsense of such analogies as, grasping an idea, of holding an opinion, the touch of sympathy, or the feeling of conviction in judgment of values. That "naive realism" or "commonsense" cannot be sustained is based upon a mis-statement of the case. Despite Aristotle's idea that seeing is believing, sight is not the primary sense, for biology shows that the various senses develop from that of feeling or touch, and that our ability to grasp and handle objects is a major factor in man's evolution.

That this sense of concreteness is not apparent in vision is no more remarkable than that we cannot describe the colour of a smell or feel what something looks like. Out of the darkness of ignorance, often with picturesque imagery, in mystical enlightenment we make sense of our experience in analogy. Whereas the philosopher has a point of view and sees an argument, the religionist hears a call, the musician or artist has taste; but for what is disliked, all cry stinking fish; so expressing dislike in feeling as well as like in similarity in more elaborate co-ordinating theories, abstract ideas or symbols.

Considering vision, Berkeley showed that our conceptions of the objective world are as abstract as truth, beauty, justice; of individual objects as of motion, space or time; and Hume replied that the same applied to self, reason, cause. The same may be said of mind, thought, will, as of matter, existence, being; and the infinite regress involved in our inability to find intelligible definitions of such terms has led to Bertrand Russell's notion of "ostensive knowledge." That is, we avoid definitions with the existential "is" by pointing and saying "this" or "that." It is like old Doctor Johnson kicking the ground and saying, "it is."

Thus, we virtually admit the bankruptcy of our method of analysis, of our persistent use of analogy, and of antiquated terms. So also the concept of knowledge. Knowledge is only probable, and is considered in terms of belief, as degrees of credibility. We might retort that belief may be conceived as degrees of credulity. Is this any advance on the idea of knowledge as degrees of probability from possibility up to certainty? But this introspection and analogy leads back to feeling, and to personal feeling in like and dislike, with certitude expressed as feeling in conviction as if judgment involved condemnation.

So, this ostentatious sophistry points the ostensive finger of accusing scorn at scepticism and solipsism, fatalism and relativism. But it is now customary to use the terms public and private instead of objective and subjective. These are social terms and the physical world is replaced by the other fellow; and introspection leads to the "inwardness" of "religious experience" and not to a social reality, for not only have we ostensive exhibition but also casuistic inhibition. And analogy reads egotism into the social realm in identification and projection of personal feeling.

Logic is not analogy, for this gives only similarity, not difference. Commonsense is what we have in common, and with dislike or disagreement expressed as a criticism, logic has a corrective function. It is a social extension of biological elimination, whether in dialectic argument, the systematic criticism of Aristotelian logic, or the check and countercheck of modern scientific method. With an appreciation of the social function of critical logic we can also see that knowledge is not an individual but a social accretion. The accumulation of scientific knowledge is the result of "organised commonsense."

But we can also see both the futility of philosophic phenomenalism and the danger of political realism. For the first seeks a subjective impression of physical reality and the second gives physical expression of subjective reality. It would seem that we need to appreciate the reality of illusion in both phenomenology and ideology; and that the metaphysical drift needs the social corrective of commonsense.

H. H. PREECE.

WHERE WAS GOD ?

TWICE lately the country has been shocked by tragic disasters causing many casualties. On April 6, '72 persons lost their lives in a Catholic hospital fire at Effingham, Illinois. On Palm Sunday, April 10, an explosion in St. Mary's Catholic Church, Marion, Minn., took a toll of six killed, some 40 injured, of a congregation which had assembled to do homage to the supposed Son of God.

In view of the fact that both institutions involved were of a religious nature, Catholic at that, whose

dignitaries claim to be the sole genuine representatives of God, the pertinent question is:—

WHERE WAS GOD ?

If at any place God could be expected to be, it is in a church and religious building. But where was the Perfect Shepherd at the time and why did he fail to come to the aid of his faithful? Why did he remain so mercilessly silent and inactive, while they were crying out to him in despair? Think of the shock to the survivors of that explosion, who had come to pay their respects to their Saviour! Could anything be more cruel, more ironical than that?

These two sad events are so glaringly contradictory of God's wonderful protection, that the feature of His relationship to them was hush-hushed by the Press, apparently for fear that the people might get to thinking and conclude there is no such thing as Divine Providence.

As in all events, so in these, there are but two ways of explaining God's attitude toward them. He must either have willed it so, or at least have given his approval. Any attempt to absolve God from the responsibility involves denying his sovereignty.

Under the belief that all is under the control and supervision of God, we are compelled to say, as many do, it was God's will. But this does not harmonise with "God is love." Try to find in those sad events some of the tender mercies about which we hear so much. It can't be done. They seemed to have been consumed by the flames of the fire, and scattered to the winds by the explosion.

It is impossible to make an interpretation, favourable to God, of such disasters. However, a rational interpretation can be made by leaving God out of the picture.

Atheistic philosophy explains such events as acts of nature. Nature is a play of blind forces which create and destroy things. Create without an apparent purpose and destroy without compunction. Following immutable laws, it is ever destroying existing forms and creating new ones. Matter combines with matter and produces effects. When the stage is set, the act goes on.

In that hospital, inflammable material ignited at the lowest level and, aided by favourable draughts, soon became a roaring inferno, which consumed everything in its path, without any concern for human life.

The church had become filled with gas and when the boys struck matches to light their candles the gas exploded, as it must, regardless of any consequences. No consideration or any compassion was shown for those in its path, nor was there any warning from God on high. Just a blind action of fatal necessity.

Nature is no respecter of any particular church, for the latest report tells us that a pastor and his daughter lost their lives when the church (a Church of Christ) and parsonage were destroyed by a Texas cyclone.

Columnist Geo. E. Sokolsky, commenting on the ethical course taken by the school-board of Los Angeles, says, "I was particularly interested in the outline of the subject, 'Faith,'" to wit: "Our boys and girls need to understand that no life can be complete without faith in God. We need not all define God in the same terms, but at least can agree that faith in God means faith in a greater power than ourselves, and that is the important thing."

What good did all the faith in God do these people connected with the two tragedies of this subject? None whatever. Some became victims of faith, while the

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held 21st July, 1949

The Acting President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Seibert, Morris, Griffiths, Ebury, Hornbrook, Woodley, Barker and Mrs. Venton.

Minutes of the previous meeting read, and the business transacted in the record endorsed. Financial Statement presented.

New members were admitted to Manchester, Kingston, and to the Parent Society.

Lectures arranged and in course of arranging were noted and decisions made. Mr. F. A. Ridley to be invited to lecture regularly for the Society.

Grants were made to Halifax and Kingston Branches. Help in the form of speakers to Merseyside Branch approved. An offer of help to The Brighter Sunday Association was made. The following resolution was passed and ordered to be sent to the Home Secretary:—

“That the Executive of The National Secular Society draws attention to the intolerable circumstances under which an organisation like The Lord's Day Observance Society can invoke ancient Sabbatarian Laws to prohibit on Sundays various forms of entertainment which are legitimate and lawful on other days of the week.

The Executive of The National Secular Society is of the opinion that all entertainments that are legally permissible on six days of the week should be equally legal on the seventh, and asks that the Government introduce a measure with that object in view.”

The question of a pamphlet on the Sunday question was discussed and is to be proceeded with. Advertising the N.S.S. in the Sunday Press was agreed upon.

Correspondence was dealt with from Glasgow, Manchester, Chester-le-Street, Halifax, Broadcasting Committee, 1949, and London areas. The chairman, who will attend the Rome Congress as the official delegate of the N.S.S., reported details in connection with the Congress.

In view of the Secretary's vacation and the Rome Congress, the next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, 22nd September, 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. SHARPLES and ROTHWELL.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Car Park, Broadway).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- Hapton.—Monday, August 1, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Kingston Branch (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. KAY, SMITH and BILLING.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Ranelagh Street, bombed site, Liverpool).—Sunday 7-30 p.m.: Mr. G. COLEBROOKE.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- Preston (Market).—Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barkers Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
- Worsthorne.—Friday, July 29: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park).—Sunday, 6 p.m.: Messrs. E. BRYANT, C. E. WOOD and E. PAGE.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S.—No meeting.

OUTDOOR

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

SECOND-HAND BOOKS. Wants List Welcomed. Michael Boyle, 30, Parliament Hill, N.W.3.

LONELY?—Join Victory Friendship Circle, 34, Honeywell Road, London, S.W.11. Details 1s.

Survivors were grievously disappointed. All faith was ignominiously, even contemptuously ignored.

Faith in God is not a truth, however much believed so. It is just a false belief, based on wish, which collapses whenever challenged.

Yes, there is a greater power than ourselves—there is Mother Nature, to whose ways we are all subject. Even that Heavenly Father must remain silent when she speaks. She is real and verifiable. He is fiction and has never been and cannot be seen.

It would be far better to teach the truth about nature and her inexorable ways than to delude the mind of youth with hopes of protection, which doesn't exist.

Teach them that God cannot be depended upon, that He will leave them stranded in a fire even in a Catholic Hospital, or in an explosion in a Catholic Church. Divine protection is worthless.

GEO. P. STAHL.

(From *Secular Subjects*, U.S.A.)

CORRESPONDENCE

TRIBUTES.

DEAR MR. COHEN,—The Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society at their meeting held on the 9th July last send their best wishes to you on your retirement from the Presidency of the National Secular Society, which you have so well filled since 1915.

The Manchester Branch wishes me to convey to you their deep affection, and trust that you will continue to feel you have loyal friends in Manchester, who will keep you in their thoughts and that our friendship will help you to enjoy many more years and feel that satisfaction “to leave a worthy footprint on the sands of time.”

Wishing you and Mrs. Cohen the best retirement can give.—Yours, etc.,

ROWLAND BILLING, Hon. Secretary.

Sir,—Very glad indeed to read the well-deserved tributes paid to Mr. Cohen on his “laying down the spade” with which he has dug so deeply and well into superstition and ignorance for so many years. During the time I have read his articles and books, I never remember him calling a spade by any other name. Readers of “The Freethinker” should feel grateful to Mr. Cohen, for he gave us his best—and a good deal of it. How good, how cheerful, is “The Freethinker.”—Yours, etc.,

ERNEST SMEDLEY.
(Aged 80.)

A CATHOLIC “HUMANIST”

Sir,—Whatever Dr. Charlton Hayes's record may have been, and according to Mr. Ridley's account, it is a sad one, that historian's “Evolution of Modern Nationalism” is a work that a good Humanist might have written. It is entirely free from sectarian bias; it is distinctly fair to the French rationalists of the Era of Enlightenment, while its appraisal of the great merits of our own Jeremy Bentham is far more judicial than that of Leslie Stephen in his “English Utilitarians.” An author should be judged by his work, especially the one under review and, so far as is humanly possible, without passion or prejudice. It is, of course, unfortunate that I do not possess that intimate acquaintance with the sinister activities of the world's Foreign Offices with which my critic seems so familiar. Still, my nescience enabled me to notice Dr. Hayes's volume on its merits alone.

With Mr. Ridley's article entitled “Catholic Action and the Belgian Election,” I am in substantial agreement. But he completely forgets the fact that women voted in this election for the first time. Now, as the tender sex everywhere succumb more readily to the wiles of the clergy than their menfolk, the real wonder is, not that the clericals secured a slender majority, but that it was not considerably larger. For years past, Parliamentary majorities in Belgium have been meagre. Indeed, in that densely populated little country not twice the size of Yorkshire, clericals and anti-clericals appear almost equally divided.—Yours, etc.,

T. F. PALMER.

THE LIGHTLESS FLAME

I thank Mr. Wood for his courteous reply to my criticism of his ideas about the life-force, and his kind regards for me personally.

There is no important dispute between Mr. Wood and anyone as to what happens when a candle is snuffed; the elements of matter which constituted the flame undergo a change of form, but they are not annihilated. Mr. Wood thinks such an occurrence is suitably described as a partial destruction of the flame. I think the description flagrantly incorrect.

I gladly surrender the idea that life is a function of a living being, not because I agree that a thing must exist before it functions, for I cannot conceive of a functionless being. I give it up, because on further consideration of the word "function," I would prefer to limit it to the particular activities of living beings such as running, or kissing, and not extend it to that general characteristic of all the functions of beings that are alive.

Mr. Wood, whose life-force now clearly appears as a synonym for life, for it is, he explains, merely the force that is life, regards life as an entity, something other than those actual beings we describe as living. Possibly this is the crux of the matter, and we should then need to consider what is meant by the term "life," and what evidence there is for his view that life can come away from material living beings, and exist without them.

The expression "life" seems to me merely an abstract term denoting the mode of activity of living matter. We become accustomed to the word being used very loosely in common speech. The Minister for War, for example, calls on our lads to join the army and see life. He means that they should join the army and see living things other than those in the U.K., or even inanimate things, such as beautiful churches, magnificent mountains, or dumb blondes. We see living matter; we see it move, but who has seen "life."

Mr. Wood regards life as a force. This idea, if true, and since force is indestructible, would bear the conclusion that life always was, and always will be. He also thinks, for he is favourable to spiritualism, that it might help to justify the affirmation of the continued existence of human beings, and possibly of lions, snakes and fleas.

I have hitherto considered the idea of force as applicable only to something of a simple nature, as meaning the energy that is in elemental matter, or is that matter. The precise physics of the case is, I think, not presently important. But all the living things we know, possibly all the inanimate too, are complex. They are combinations of matter, or of forces. Considering only living things we can understand, and we observe, that the combination can be undone and then the living thing does not exist. The elements remain, but a thing is not its elements; it is its elements in combination. The forces that in combination were the thing, still exist, but they exist now separate and simple. None of these separate elements resemble the thing. Water, for example, does not resemble either hydrogen or oxygen; by the combination of these gases something new emerged; and when the bond of the gases is broken the water is no more.

I see, therefore, no reason to call life a force, but I should call life, whether it is to be regarded as the living thing, or the mode of the thing's activity, the resultant of a composition of forces.

If Mr. Wood can analyse his candle-flame into its chemical constituents, and see that each constituent, which, in combination, was part of the flame, in separation has its particular force, and that over and above

these there is no force which is the flame, he would be helped to what I think the better view, but he has postulated an eternal candle-flame, although without a light. The world must be now well-stocked in this kind of things.

Mr. Wood goes along making much mystery of things. No one knows, he writes, what electricity is. Possibly he meant that no one knows all about electricity but no one knows all about anything. People know very well what electricity is. They know it as Mr. Wood knows it; as a potent force, that is manifested in lightning, and in artificial illumination, driving of machines, and in the crackling which a man hears when he combs his hair. What more does Mr. Wood require before he would own to knowledge of it? Must he have a little packet of it, with a colour and a shape? Must it have to be recognised by some appearance other than its present known appearance? Is Mr. Wood the dictator of the phenomena of existence?

No one needs to be able to explain the mechanical or chemical nature of the universe before affirming its existence, for the statement "the universe exists," is tautologous. The "universe" means the sum of all existences, so that if only one thing existed that thing would be the universe. It is, however, necessary to define the terms used in propositions that are not tautologous, so far as they are not understood. Mr. Wood has, by stating that the life-force is simply the force that is life, sufficiently defined it for me, and enabled me to show and I hope plainly, why his belief in the indestructibility of life is not mine.

If my view as to life prevailed in Mr. Wood's mind, he would no longer be looking for life's meaning or purpose. I am not sure that I know what is intended by "life's meaning," but to have a purpose is clear enough. Purpose signifies intelligent aim at a target, so that the "life-force that is life" is intelligent, like a human being, possibly like the great George Bernard himself.

This reminds me that even Sir Arthur Keith has spoken in this way, for he has postulated a purpose in evolution, as if a movement intended to move, and aimed at, let us say, the perpetuation of the class of man that is combined in a national group. The great are not always wise! I see no purpose in life other than the particular purposes of the sentient beings we all know.

I would not mind living for ever, provided I had a guarantee of eternal health, but I think that James Thomson wrote well when he treated the idea of immortal life as a horrible one to those who lived miserably. The same poet expressed, I think, the true character of the universe also in his verses:

"The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will."

"Man might know one thing were his sight less dim,
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him."

"Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death."

J. G. LUPTON.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball.
Price 3s.; postage 2½d. Ninth edition.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1d.