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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

On Natural Law

EVERY now and again the believer in Deity finds himself face to face with what he calls the "Problem of suffering," or the "Problem of evil." If he were not a believer in God, the problem would not bother him, for the reason that it is the outcome of that belief. For under whatever form the question is presented, it ultimately comes to this: How can we reconcile the existence of a supreme Deity with the presence of evil in the world? And that is, obviously, the Theist's problem. It belongs to no one else. If a man does not believe in a supreme Deity, he cannot be called upon to reconcile his existence with anything. All he is concerned with is noting the facts, and interpreting them as he best can. His problem is to find a theory that will fit the facts. But if he starts with a theory, and with the inward reservation that come what may that theory must not be surrendered, his task is a very different one. He must explain the facts so that they will fit the theory. And by a judicious manipulation of the facts, that is always possible so long as the one to whom the explanation is offered is not over-critical or too well informed.

The problem is created by theology, it is made and kept obscure by infirmity of speech. Our terminology is the outcome of human consciousness, and of necessity reflects human needs and feelings. If we wish to express the bald fact that atoms of matter approach each other in a certain way, we speak of "Attraction" or, in dealing with larger bodies, of the pull of the sun on the earth, or of the earth on the moon. So we also speak of the moan of the sea, of the smile of sunshine, of a whispering breeze, and so on in numberless instances. There is nothing very wrong in all this, it is indeed a convenience to be able to express our ideas in a brief, picturesque, and vivid manner. But this language does possess the disadvantage of being set in a background of animism, and of carrying with it animistic suggestions that are often enough the cause of confusion. We personify nature, and then, forgetting that this personification is a purely mental creation, and does not exist outside us, we treat these personifications as real and independent existences. On that confusion the whole of theology rests. Destroy it, and theology everywhere crumbles into nothingness. I fail to see that nature has ever shown consideration to any kind of human life. Birth and death, sickness and health, the fall of a stone and the death of a genius, the elevation of an island and the birth of a monstrosity, all these and a thousand other things occur as facts in nature, and if we included the human group, we have smiles and tears, good fortune and bad fortune, good action and bad action, with the whole sequence of human passions and desires. But still nature appears indifferent as to which is produced. Viewed as natural phenomena, there is the same finish given to an idiot as to a supreme genius. The idiot is not a genius, but he may be, nevertheless, a perfect idiot, and given the circumstances, nature is just

as ready to produce idiots as geniuses, indeed, judging by the general population, preference seems to run for the first rather than the second, but once they are produced, one can see no greater care on the part of "nature" to preserve one rather than the other. She is equally indifferent whether either, or neither, lives or dies.

A fine illustration of this confusion is due to, or in the interests of, theology. In the one breath we learn that disaster is due to Man's non-observance of laws or to want of understanding. In the next they turn to natural laws "which nature must observe lest the whole world perish." But how on earth can laws be at the same time "observed" and broken? And how can nature be said to obey laws? Natural laws are only summarised expressions of the way in which natural forces operate. They do not rule nature, they are nature. And man does not break them, for the simple reason that he cannot break them. You can break a legislative enactment, because that always offers an alternative. It says, "Do this or that," "steal, or don't steal," and prescribes certain consequences in either case. But natural law is never broken, because that is only an expression of consequences. Nature never prescribes, she never corrects, she simply acts. There are those who think that "an examination of nature's observance of law will aid man's religious convictions." So it may, provided he examines nature from the viewpoint of primitive humanity instead of from that of modern science. And of course, if the examination chances to be unfavourable to religion, there is always at hand the anaesthetic that the subject has passed to that "circle of providence" which is "too distant for our vision to penetrate," this ensures that an examination of nature will strengthen religious convictions, because if the difficulties remain after examination you can always leave it to the Lord.

Shipwreck and disaster, we are told, are due to non-observance of laws or to want of care. As a matter of fact, the larger disasters of life cannot be attributed to other cause. It was not the want of care which created earthquakes, the sinking of large ships, the spread of disease, and the like. It is the same with nature's rewards for obedience. How often does it happen that the very fineness of a man's character exposes him to disasters from which men of a coarser texture are exempt. One man quick to respond to a call for help will rush out in inclement weather and, probably, lay the foundations of a life-long disease. That is the way nature rewards him. Another man, less responsive, more concerned for his own welfare, remains unmoved, and nature rewards him with continued health. It is one of the commonest of experiences, and the most easily verified of generalisations, that between personal work and any kind of reward there is but the most casual and capricious connection.

In reality, it is not the Atheist who raves against nature for either its indifference or its immorality. Neither term is applicable. A stone is not "indifferent,"

when it falls and bruises a man, the term is altogether irrelevant. We do not, if we are sensible, rave at natural forces. We only seek to understand them, and by understanding them, control them. Good and bad, moral and immoral, are terms that belong to humanity, or, at most, to intelligent existence, and have no meaning and no application in any other sphere. Good and evil are veritably no more than aspects of cosmic phenomena in relation to an organism, and their degree of "goodness" or "badness" is tested by standards created by the organism itself. I am not denying the reality of either one or the other, I am merely pointing out their meaning and their application. But if we did believe that nature had its own "Morality" then the outlook would be indeed black. For morality in nature means an analysis of the morality of the intelligence controlling. And this means that we are in the grip of an overruling intelligence, so callous to human suffering, and with standards of judgment so alien to human morality, that disease may as easily come from the consequences of a good action as from a bad one. Of course, these things do occur, but we can be, at least, without the depressing feeling that we are the mere sport of a supreme power that mocks our efforts, and sits unmoved.

To simplify what we have said. People of old saw visions, heard voices, and felt themselves inspired. Many concluded that at some time the stream of inspiration ran dry, and does not occur to-day. Not so, replies the scientist. The same signs that characterised inspired persons centuries ago are to be found among men and women to-day. Nowadays we do not credit visions or believe in their inspiration. We simply put it down to epilepsy, or some form of neurosis. And so with miracles, so with religious beliefs generally. The world is to-day as it always was, subject to the play of precisely the same forces, witnessing exactly the same phenomena. The world is the same, but human nature has grown wiser and better informed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

THE ORIGINS OF MORMONISM

III

FOR some years prior to the murder of Joseph Smith and the evacuation under the threat of mob-violence of their Illinois metropolis, the history of Mormonism had been a continuous movement on and beyond the Frontier to the then undiscovered West. The final exodus which led the "Church of the Latter-Day Saints" to the remote and hardly explored deserts of Utah, and which created a new metropolis on the arid shores of Salt Lake, was thus the logical continuation of their previous orientation towards the distant Pacific and the setting sun. Between September 1846 and July 1847, this epic march accomplished under the leadership of the Prophet's successor and former apostle, Brigham Young, a name destined to bulk large in the subsequent history of what has been termed the "Mormon Empire."

Nauvoo, the former capital of Joseph Smith, was abandoned and soon became the scene of a hardly less extraordinary social experiment that it had witnessed under the Mormon dispensation. For in 1848 was established there the socialist "Utopia of Icaria" founded by the famous French socialist, Etienne Cabet, the incongruous and most un-Utopian adventures of which form one of the most intriguing chapters in the long history of Utopian experiments in social living.

The Mormons in the exodus trekked far beyond the confines of what was then the United States into desert country sparsely peopled by Indians and buffaloes, to the

shores of the "Salt Lake," hitherto only visited by occasional white trappers and hunters. The momentous decision to break with civilisation and to seek a final resting place in the rugged wilderness was taken under the inspiration of Brigham Young, the Mormon "Moses," or rather the "Elisha" upon whom the prophetic mantle of the original "Elijah the Prophet" has fallen. For Brigham Young soon got rid of both the Prophet's own surviving relatives and his "Counsellor" and intended successor, Sydney Rigdon. The march to Utah was taken under his undisputed leadership, and for the rest of his long life (1801-77) he exercised dictatorial authority over the main body of the Mormon Church.

The world-wide fame which the "Second Founder of Mormonism" has come to acquire, and which has undeservedly overshadowed that of the original founder, has tended to give the man-in-the-street a rather misleading idea of the actual role of Brigham Young in the evolution of the Mormon Church. An older man than Smith, and a convert to his "revelation," Young had absolutely nothing to do with the fundamental ideas of Mormonism either in the sphere of theology or of church organisation: which seem to have been the spheres, respectively of Joseph Smith and Sydney Rigdon. Young's, contrarily, was a practical, an executive mind: that of a first-class business executive; not that of a speculative or mystical cast. In matters of theology he innovated nothing, believed blindly and did not claim any revelations for himself. Even the much-trumpeted institution of polygamy was only publicly announced by Young: the available evidence appears to make it quite clear that the Founder of Mormonism had accepted it in both theory and practice, and had only not done so publicly for fear of arousing "Gentile" hostility where it was still dangerous.

Brigham Young was, as one of his biographers remarks, "the Great Organiser of Mormonism." And what an organiser! His march to Utah was a pioneering masterpiece, his generation-long rule over the Mormon theocracy was a sociological masterpiece. What was the petty exodus of Israel across the desert of Sinai compared with these truly tremendous feats of social engineering? Those who call Brigham Young the "Mormon Moses" flatter the ancient Hebrew Patriarch. For, to again quote his biographer, "the settlement of Utah was a model of planned colonisation, of which he was the directing force" adding that "he attempted to realise all of Smith's doctrines and to build a strong empire capable of resisting all the persecutions of the 'Gentiles.'"

Nauvoo was evacuated September 17, 1846, and the Mormons moved westward, entering Utah July 24, 1847. They lost no time in settling down: within two hours of their arrival in the vicinity of Salt Lake City their ploughs were busily at work turning up the immemorial wilderness. At first, the daring pioneers experienced great hardship, but their difficulties were ended by the great trek westwards which followed the Californian gold-rush in 1849. The Mormons solved their economic difficulties by supplying the "49'ers" with surplus products, and by themselves purchasing supplies at most favourable rates of exchange. From the time of the discovery of the "golden tablets," gold had always been lucky for the "Latter-Day Saints."

The colonisation of Utah went on apace: 1,500 immigrants accompanied Brigham Young upon his initial "drang nach westen." By the end of 1848 the Mormon population numbered 5,000. During the early 1850's hundreds joined the sect: by 1853 Salt Lake City had 12,000 inhabitants and Salt Lake Valley about 30,000.

The remote deserts of the West were dotted with the "covered wagons" of Mormon immigrants.*

Social and political organisation developed along theocratic lines, Government in Utah from 1847 and 1849, was a pure theocracy, Church and State being completely fused. The rapid influx of "gentiles" made this eventually unworkable. Recognising the problem, the Saints organised the provisional State of "Deseret" in March, 1849. Its petition for State recognition was denied by Congress, which, however, authorised in 1850, the establishment of the "Territory of Utah." In Salt Lake City itself a Mormon Temple was erected and a stream of missionary propaganda, to which all adult Mormons had to contribute, radiated through the U.S.A. and even to England and Europe. Brigham Young had himself been in charge of the English mission in the early 1840's.

It has often been observed that primitive races are often capable of displaying simultaneously the grossest credulity in theory and the greatest practical ability. The Mormons who emigrated to Utah are excellent examples of this, at first sight startling incongruity. For whilst their theology is—to put it mildly—not exactly a model for rational thinking, the social organisation which they set up in Utah was a tremendous achievement. Upon this point historians of the highest competence are explicit: one such authority writes: "To make the arid Utah soil productive, the first scientific irrigation system in America was introduced."

Whilst the eminent American historians, Charles and Mary Beard, pay this enthusiastic tribute to the social order set up in Utah under the auspices of Brigham Young. The Mormon colony of Salt Lake City was, they tell us:—

"in some respects, the most unique among the many strange settlements planted on this continent. . . . All in all, the most successful example of regulated immigration in American history" adding that, "in no small measure the amazing outcome of the adventure was due to the economic system introduced by Brigham Young. Tested by the widespread prosperity which it eventually produced, in spite of all the difficulties, that system was in most respects superior in results to the methods adopted in any other American settlement on communal principles." They conclude that, "While the faithful were bound to strict obedience, there were no wretched outcasts such as were to be found in every other part of the civilised (sic) world, on one thing all travellers were agreed, even when they denounced 'plural marriages' in unmeasured terms, namely, that the ancient and persistent enemy of mankind, undeserved poverty, was nowhere to be seen."

Evidently the socialist and secularist Robert Owen had a steady influence upon this fantastic Utopia in the Far West.

Mormonism, like Christianity and Islam before it was a missionary religion. At a time when the broad spaces of America represented a perpetual invitation to the oppressed and poverty-stricken masses of an overcrowded Europe, the Mormon Utopia was not without its attractions. As our authors remark in this connection: "By way of support for this missionary work a perpetual fund was created and an economic argument was adroitly mingled with the religious appeal. To poverty-stricken peasants and struggling artisans of the Old World they offered security and prosperity as well as the consolations of a new faith."

In 1930, the centenary of the foundation of the Church, the total number of Mormons was 814,920, of which 654,920 belong to the majority Utah Church, and 160,000 to the "Re-organised Church," which claims to maintain the authentic doctrines of Joseph Smith, and repudiates Brigham Young as a "Heretic," charging that he added the doctrines of polygamy to Smith's original revelation.

And then this delicious comment, "to polygamous men they promised wives in abundance; to forlorn maids at least a share in a husband."

It was this last polygamous inducement which was continually getting the "Saints" into disrepute, and which was responsible, rather than its communism, which was more in the nature of an emergency regime than a settled theory, for the long struggle between the American Government in Washington and the Mormon theocracy in Salt Lake City. It cost Brigham Young the governorship of Utah. However, he retained his hold on the Church unimpaired until his death in 1877, when he left a substantial fortune and a still more substantial harem, including several of the Prophet's relics, who had been duly "sealed" to his successor. In his way, the Mormon dictator was one of the great men of American history, its most successful frontier organiser.

The long struggle between Washington and Salt Lake City ended with the 1882 "Edmonds Act" which prohibited polygamy under drastic penalties. Eventually, it was the Church which gave way to the State. When Utah was finally recognised as a State of the Union in 1896, polygamy was expressly forbidden. The Mormon Church has now discontinued it, no doubt as the result of another "revelation"?

With the end of the American Frontier, Mormonism ended what we may term its "heroic age," its once-dreaded "Destroying Angels," who were probably originally a defensive organisation against lynchers and Indians, have followed its "covered wagons" and its harems into oblivion. The evolution of Mormonism has, in fact, been rather similar to that of the Quaker sect which started in the great days of the English Commonwealth as a sect of revolutionaries and mystics, dreaded by all governments for their subversive designs, but now a pillar of respectable Law and Order. So the once-dreaded frontier sect founded by Joseph Smith in the New York backwoods, is now fast becoming a respectable pillar of the American "way of life" in a dollar plutocracy. Evidently the angel Moroni knew what he was about!

Mormonism is the most curious and bizarre of the Christian sects (if it is to be included in the orbit of Christianity at all). It is also the most characteristic of American religions, more so than its successors, the eminently bourgeois and urban "Christian Science" of Mary Baker Eddy, more original than the modern "Jehovah's Witnesses." Despite its claim, alluded to at the commencement of these articles, it does not tell "The Story of the American Civilisation," but none the less, it does throw a deal of light upon the stormy adolescence of a civilisation which, even to-day, is by no means fully mature.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE BASIC BIBLE

We give herewith two quotations from the Bible in Basic English with—we hope, a pardonable comment. From the Authorised Version, Gen. V. 32, "And Noah was five hundred years old and begat Shem, Ham and Japheth." The same verse in Basic English, "And when Noah was 500 years old he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth." Another quote: "Jesus wept," which in Basic English is rendered "And Jesus himself was weeping." Does anybody seriously believe that this change from the A.V. to B.E. will make converts?

MEMORIES OF AN OLD FREETHINKER

(1869-1949)

I WAS born at New Hall, South Derbyshire. Soon after I was 12, I started work as a bricklayer's labourer at 10d. per day, 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. At 14, I worked in a coal pit. When I was 15, I made *seven shifts* one week—five days and two nights—for this I drew my wages, 11s. Mother gave me *threepence* for pocket money. In February, 1886, came to live here in Hucknall. Started work in pit at 17, got converted—found Christ—to a sect called Church of Christ, became a clan leader. I did much religious reading. Strange, however, listening to "sermons" mostly by working men from a distance, I had "ma doots" about going to Hell all those who did not "believe in the Lord and get baptised." Without the latter you were "eternally damned." As Ingersoll said, "Either be damped or damned!" One day I was looking through a newsagent's shop window and saw a copy of *The Freethinker*, one penny, illustrated. I stared at it and wondered how anyone could be so wicked as to criticise the Bible and Christianity. Dare I buy it and keep it dark? I bought it, I took it home, under cover. Read it, next week bought another copy—sent for the *Bible Handbook*. Next week, another copy; sent for a few pamphlets, etc. Shaking my *faith* thereof! Another copy—edited by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler. I wrote to Foote telling him about myself and how I came to read *The Freethinker*. Before I was 18, Bradlaugh was coming to lecture in Nottingham—I went and heard him lecture. What a grand man, I thought. How he was greeted with rounds of applause! By the way, I walked to Nottingham, there and back—seven miles each way. Then Foote was coming to lecture, afternoon and evening. I was there, tea was provided for visitors. I stayed on for night lecture. Between lectures I talked with Foote, this was in an upper room in Beek Street. Then Charles Watts came to lecture in same room. I began to really enjoy hearing such lectures. I liked discussions following each lecture. I had a short chat with Watts—I thought a very nice man. James (Jimmy) Hooper was Nottingham's secularist lecturer in those days. Hooper was known as Nottingham's secularist "Brick." I went on Sundays to Smenton Market, where "Jimmy" would hold forth. He often debated with Jesus men in Hall, Beek Street; he also presided at Foote's and Watts' lectures. I often met Hooper in Nottingham, always wearing his top hat and limped—a club foot. When George Jacob Holyoake came, I heard him. The room (not in Beek Street) was well filled. After the lecture Holyoake came to book table and I had the pleasure and honour of shaking hands with him, what a personality! Again Foote came, but here is a story! The Jesus men got together to stop Foote from lecturing, going the rounds trying to persuade hall proprietors not to let their halls to Foote. Foote said in *The Freethinker* he would go to Nottingham, if he had to speak outdoors—in winter! Foote came and lectured in skating rink, platform stuck in a corner and he lectured in his top-coat! Hooper presided, mention was made about religious folk trying to stop him from lecturing. Actually, the police had been approached! I heard Mrs. Besant lecture and debate in Nottingham. Not only did I hear freethought lecturers in Nottingham—and walk both ways to hear them—but Christian exponents, too, Robert Roberts and David King—both met Bradlaugh in debates—Nottingham and Leicester; W. T. Lee, who debated with Foote, "Father Ignatius," who held a friendly debate with Bradlaugh. "The Father" drew large crowds to hear him

"thunder forth" against the "higher critics" of those days. I remember walking to Nottingham to hear a bishop preach! Also well-known lecturers and preachers. No one can say I was one-sided. And so life went on—never missed *The Freethinker*.

At this time my brother in U.S.A. sent me copies of *The Truth Seeker*. How delighted I was. Of course, I read *Literary Guide*, all so good. I went to Nottingham to hear a public debate on Christadelphianism—between Frank Jannaway and James Marchant.

But reverting to my first reading *The Freethinker*. I must relate a curious story. Once, when I called for my copy, the old newsagent told me this—the then Vicar of Hucknall called in shop and bought *three* copies of *The Freethinker*. Next week he bought *six* copies! Next week *nine* copies! Following week, *twelve* copies! The vicar could see the shopkeeper was ordering more copies each week! The "Man of God" then stopped buying! Asked what he was doing with so many *Freethinkers*, he replied, "Burning them. What I would like to do with its editor!" About this time Charles Bradlaugh's brother came on *Christian* mission in Hucknall. I went a time or two to hear him. He was all out anti-Atheist—trading on his distinguished brother's name. Telling his story how he was refused permission to see his dying brother! So afraid he would convert Brother Charles. I had a long talk with W. R. in chapel vestry. He struck me as being very poor indeed. Complained not one *Freethinker* in London would meet him in debate. I told him *why*! I was in correspondence with Arthur B. Moss and Mrs. Bradlaugh, Bonner re W. R.! In his next address, W. R. made no mention of his brother or any other *Freethinker*. But the climax was reached when he pulled out a copy of *The Freethinker* while in the pulpit and read from it Foote's reply to a question from me! The Baptist minister wrote me a private letter in which he told me W.R.B.'s addresses were "remarkably poor." And for him to have *The Freethinker* with him in the pulpit was shocking! W.R.B. left Hucknall with chapel folk glad to see him go; they regretted he ever came!

Well, here I am, 80. Never regret first buying *The Freethinker*. As interested in Freethought now as I was—or more so—62 years ago, or nearly 63 years ago. Am an old age pensioner existing on pension and my spouse is 81. Long live *The Freethinker*. Of course, I have heard McCabe and Cohen a few times and another name or two I well remember—"Saladin" (Stewart Ross), met him and talked to him. Robert Forder, Secretary, N.S.S., met him in his *little* shop in Stonecutter Street. Miss Vance was there, too. One more instance, when some 40 years ago I was seeking work, I inquired at a colliery office, the management—a local preacher who knew me—refused me work, for, as he said, if I set you on, the Lord would blow pit up—"No infidel will work here!" So there! But weathered storms—it's not all honey to be a *known Freethinker*. One must expect boycott and ostracism. Yes, but—*here am I!*

Re Chapman Cohen, I remember his first writing for *The Freethinker*. How *very good* were his *Freethinker* articles. About that time a good deal of passive resistance was going on, Christian ministers and others refusing to pay education rates. Our local newspaper was full of sympathy for the ministers. I took the Freethought view and I remember Cohen writing me letters—his arguments which I copied and were printed! Church of England and Nonconformists were writing. "A plague on both your houses," I wrote, yet not a single correspondent noticed my arguments—in print! Yet I *knew* they *were* read; no one replied—the discussion fizzled out!

Yes, Cohen was a worthy successor to Bradlaugh and Foote. Cohen wrote and spoke in plain language. With Mr. Cohen "a spade's a spade." He was fearless in debate, the better his opponent, the better was Cohen. All his views and opinions excellent. May he live long, enjoy life, go on giving us his best.

ERNEST SMEDLEY.

EXISTENTIALISM*

MOST people probably imagine Existentialism to be some new pagan philosophy coming out of France in the post-war period and having as its high priest the internationally-known playwright, Sartre. While this statement contains an element of truth, it can hardly be described as either accurate or comprehensive. First of all, Existentialism is not a philosophy in itself but an attitude, an approach to life's problems, much as Marxism is. It is neither pro- nor anti-Christian; its foundation, in fact, is attributed to Kierkegaard, a Danish Protestant pastor, who, though abjuring the organised religion of his Church, remained to his death a devout Christian, while among its contemporary exponents is a Frenchman, Gabriel Marcel, who is a Catholic. It would seem, too, that the author of this work, Paul Foulquié, is of the same persuasion as Marcel, since he displays a highly critical attitude to Sartre's Atheist Existentialism and a bias towards Marcel's Catholic variety. From its original home in Denmark, Existentialism passed into Germany through Husserl and Heidegger, the latter a contemporary of Sartre's and Marcel's. Its main modern exponents in France are Simone de Beauvoir, Henri Bataille, Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre for the Atheist school, and Gabriel Marcel and Louis Lavelle for the Theist school.

It would be difficult to convey an adequate idea of this attitude to life in a few paragraphs. Indeed, its founder has stated that Existentialist thought cannot be communicated; it is best expressed through character and fictional writing. Hence its prominent exponents are playwrights, like Sartre and Camus, or novelists, like Simone de Beauvoir.

Existentialism sees man as existence and essence. But whereas Plato and his Christian adaptors, such as Augustine, considered that essence preceded existence, the fundamental human content, "human nature," in short, the existentialist reverses the process. One has to exist before one has an essence, hence the essence must be coincident or subsequent to existence, and human nature is what we make it.

"Existentialism is a violent reaction against the movement of thought from Descartes to Hegel." The objective world is an illusory spectacle, for "to be" is not synonymous with "to exist"; existence it not a state but an act, whereby what "is" is called into existence. Existent entities are a series of appearances, their "being" is precisely what they appear to be the reality of the thing being replaced by the objectivity of the phenomenon. This is, it may be noted, a variant of the scientific attitude, that the position of the observer is a material factor in the thing observed.

We are born, or as the existentialists put it, we are "engaged" in this world; we have no choice in that fact. But having come into existence, the faculty of its operation, consciousness, puts us into "determinate

relationship with the world and other conscious beings"; for, says the German Husserl, to exist does not mean merely *sein* (to be) but *dasein* (to be present) in the world. Consciousness is not a thing of itself, it has no significance apart from existence; but it cannot operate unless we are conscious of something distinct from ourselves.

Existence must be continually adapting itself to circumstances. From this Sartre derives a peculiar meaning for liberty and choice. Man is free, he says; he cannot choose things that are fact but he can choose how he will regard them, he may "assume" them, to use existentialist phraseology. I choose to be myself, declares Sartre, not in the manner of my being but in that I can transform myself. Here Foulquié, our author, intervenes to point out that in rationalist reasoning there can be no freedom except in an act determined by motives and that this free act is based on reason. Sartre rebuts this, asserting that freedom consists in setting up, *without* motive, the motives that will afterwards dominate us unawares. Choice always precedes deliberation—"conscious deliberation is always faked!"—for though we are obliged to choose (even if it is to choose not to choose) the fact that we do so means that our act is a "free" act, which is absurd, because it is beyond all reason, Sartre winds up. The fact that our choice is free, is substantiated by the fact that we are obsessed by a feeling of "anguish and responsibility" in regard to the results of our choosing. "We do not do as we like and yet are responsible for what we are; that is plain fact." Furthermore, our acts are for the whole world and our awareness of this predicament can but increase our sense of anguish and responsibility. Which is absurd, says Sartre, repeating Euclid's famous phrase, but to which he adds, unlike Euclid: "nevertheless it is a statement of the facts."

Sartre admits there is something that is of itself (*l'en-soi*) but that one's consciousness interprets that for oneself (*pour-soi*). In his book *L'imaginaire* he writes: "when I imagine, I nullify what I perceive and, inversely, in order to perceive, I must reduce to nothing my imaginary representations. Otherwise I shall confuse image and perception." Yet this is just what man would like to do; he wants to be *en-soi* and *pour-soi* at one and the same time. But the two ideas are contradictory and he is, therefore, condemned "to a pursuit without end, which is absurd again." (Sartre is fond of the word absurd!)

And so we come to the inevitable poser of all such speculations. If life is absurd and one long frustration, should we not end it in suicide? The existentialists have at least the advantage that they haven't to be rational and can answer, "No." Man's greatness, according to Camus and Bataille, consists in his attitude of revolt against the absurdity of the world.

Such is, briefly and inadequately, the approach to life's problems by these people calling themselves existentialists. To me it appears more than a coincidence that this movement should reappear, first in a Germany defeated in the First World War, and then in France after her defeat and occupation in the Second World War. It is the philosophy of a proud and cultured people impotent in the face of a foreign invading power. It is a form of super-escapism, an endeavour to preserve human dignity and spiritual integrity in the face of military defeat and political servitude. And its absurdities? Is not the servitude of man, mental and physical, an absurdity and is there ought else to do but to rebel against it, as one may?

* "Existentialism," by Paul Foulquié translated by K. Raine (Dobson Ltd., London).

ACID DROPS

There will be no booze for Methodists, not even in moderation, if their Annual Conference gets its way. Just the same, the Rev. J. Brazer Green must have embarrassed his colleagues when he asked, "Is this Conference 100 per cent. total abstinent, and if not, where is the consistency in directing our people in that respect?" Why this sudden heart-searching, particularly as the Bible—the Methodist strong point—can almost be taken as the "Boozer's textbook," as G. W. Foote so succinctly termed it. We will guarantee to find as many texts in the Bible in favour of the cup that cheers (not tea) as any Methodist can find against it, and we promise not to take up the Rev. gentleman on his gaffe of "100 per cent. total abstinence."

As is well known, one of life's little mysteries is the way the Lord persists in letting a church be bombed or struck by lightning or destroyed by fire while a nearby pub or cinema or even a race track gets off scot-free. Rain leaked through a church hull the other day spoiling a number of religious exhibits and flooding it out. Even a priceless piece of embroidery on a "Helpers of the Holy Soul" stall was badly damaged, and some things are irreplaceable. Why the efficacy of prayer was not tried out to stop the flood we simply cannot understand; but what about getting a Fatima statue blessed, and then holding it in readiness to proceed anywhere to stop the rot? Surely God Almighty could never resist such a supplication from the Virgin?

The U.S. Ambassador to Egypt wanted to become a convert to Catholicism but had to make sure by inquiring as to "certain implications" of passages in Genesis and what language "our Lord" spoke. Needless to say there was no difficulty whatever in persuading him that the Church's decisions on such points are always right. Mr. Caffery "was received," and no doubt will duly "venerate" the wooden statue of "Our Lady of Fatima" as all good Catholics must do. Fantastic?—of course it is.

The old idea, "Believe or be damned," is not quite what Prof. T. M. Knox of the St. Andrew's Chair of Moral Philosophy believes for he quite openly states that "religion must be taught by argument." This is a little different from the old idea, believe "or else"! The Professor added that "As knowledge of the Bible can no longer be taken for granted, people will have to be taught from the pulpit." We doubt whether it will go as far as questions and answers in Church, nor do we think that any well-known Freethinkers will be invited to address a Church congregation. But even the Church has to move with the times, and a "Thus saith the Lord" is no longer the answer it was a few centuries ago.

Edwin Orr of the *Christian* puts forward a very childish argument in support of the compatibility of Religion and Science, and uses a whole column in that worthy paper to "prove" that no branch of science contradicts the idea of God or Divine revelation. We don't know the qualifications of Mr. Orr as a scientist, but such stupid statements are the sort of thing one expects sometimes from Christians. Religion has retreated step by step before the advance of science and it never takes into consideration the unknowable God. The atom is split, bridges are built, corn is grown, aeroplanes fly, and so on, and all without cognisance of God. Of course, "science does not contradict the idea of God"—it ignores him.

Noah received his final set-back the other week. Just like the English expedition in search of the Ark, the American expedition has not been allowed to go up Mt. Ararat and settle the problem once for all. Such an expedition was far too dangerous from the military point of view for Russia and so, like a good many historical mysteries, the question of the Ark must for the time being remain unsolved. It is a pity. We would dearly have liked to see the way in which Noah managed to house the pairs (or is it the sevens?) of each species now inhabiting the world, to say nothing of the cooking and sanitary arrangements in the Ark. Let us pray that Russia's ban be lifted.

We note that Mr. Maurice Thorez, the leader of the French Communists, has been offering "the outstretched hand" in friendship to the Roman Catholic Church and "referring to the Vatican in a spirit of appeasement rather than hostility." This does not look as if, after all, the Communists are the only people who know how to deal with the Roman Church, and that therefore, the non-political attack favoured by so many Freethinkers is so thoroughly useless. Some of us, in fact, still believe that the attack on the Church should be from the point of view of science and history, and that violent "liquidation" is morally and ethically unjustifiable. And we have seen nothing to change our opinion.

The Portuguese Ambassador, his wife and eleven children, have just presented a statue of "Our Lady of Fatima" to Cardinal Griffin, and it is now going to be taken to every R.C. Church in Westminster. The statue was "blessed" at Fatima, and fervent believers and converts will now be allowed to "venerate" it—surely about the most stupid example of primitive superstition we have in our midst. What a pity it is that we cannot have a film showing us what people like Compton Mackenzie, John Rothenstein, Evelyn Waugh, Pamela Frankau, and other equally eminent converts look like "venerating" a painted piece of wood. "Venerating" actually means "worshipping" here, but Catholics as a rule are far too ashamed to admit it.

Fr. Martindale, S.J., is very angry that the B.B.C. has allowed a speaker on "The Pattern of the Future" to suggest that "Scientific Humanism" should succeed Christianity as the "religion" of the future. He wants it to be his own brand of Christianity, and nothing else. In his angry denunciation, we can see what hope the "other side" would have of getting on the air were the Roman Church to be in charge of broadcasting. Just as much chance, in fact, as Russia would give if one of its own broadcasters were to denounce Marxism. It might be opportune here, however, to interject a plea for a little less hurry in some of these broadcasts. One, by Dr. Alex Comfort recently, appeared to us as a hopeless jumble of words uttered at breakneck speed. We haven't the ghost of an idea as to what it was about.

During the early part of the Second World War, the Conscription Act called to the Forces all able-bodied men and women with the exception of men over a certain age, women, children, lunatics—and clergymen, which was always thought was not exactly flattering to clergymen. Their ego must have suffered even further when the Soviet authorities in Eastern Germany "de-graded" them in regard to food ration categories; previously they were considered in the higher category, of "Intellectuals," but now they receive a "lower grade" ration card.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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London, W.C. 1.

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ROBERT G. INGERSOLL (1833-1899)

IT would not be unfair to say that the lectures and essays of Ingersoll even at this day are among the most popular and the most readable in the whole of Free-thought literature. He is far less "dated" than many of his famous contemporaries, and though he may not be "profound" in the sense of, say, Kant or Hegel—for which I thank the gods that be—his arguments are so clearly put and so unassailable that I am disposed to believe that his influence for Freethought still stands almost without a rival.

Ingersoll died just fifty years ago and I remember well the shock I got then, though hardly more than a school-boy. It was the habit of an American under whom I worked, to read out long passages from those American newspapers which had the courage to print the incomparable essays, and these made a strong impression on me—indeed, they made me once for all a Freethinker. I still remember the famous opening lines of the lecture on the "Mistakes of Moses"—"Now and then someone asks me why I am endeavouring to interfere with the religious faith of others, and why I try to take from the world the consolation arising from a belief in eternal fire. And I answer, I want to do what little I can to make my country truly free. . ."

What a world of thought there is in those simple words! What genuine wit and irony there runs through the whole of this splendid lecture!

From what both his friends and enemies say, there can be little doubt that Ingersoll was perhaps the finest orator America has ever produced. He was a great lawyer and had an extensive practice, but few speakers ever drew the crowds he did. His success on the platform was phenomenal, and he made large sums of money, most of which he gave away with unparalleled generosity. He loved his home, his wife and children, his fellow men. Never did he sacrifice his principles for any gain. It is notorious that if he had kept his Freethought under lock and key he might have become President of the United States. Indeed, he would have become the Governor of Illinois if he had refrained from Freethought propaganda. His reply to those who asked him to be their candidate was:—

Gentlemen, I am not asking to be Governor of Illinois . . . I have in my composition that which I have declared to the world as my views upon religion. My position I would not, under any circumstances, not even for my life, seek to renounce. I would rather refuse to be President of the United States than to do so. My religious belief is my own. It belongs to me not to the State of Illinois. I would not smother one sentiment of my heart to be the emperor of the round globe.

No Freethought writer has left so many quotable passages as Robert Ingersoll. I could fill page after page of this journal with his wit and wisdom.

Every birth cries "Whence?" and every death asks "Whither?"

It is far cheaper to build school houses than prisons, and it is much better to have scholars than convicts.

"Justice" should remove the bandage from her eyes long enough to distinguish between the vicious and the unfortunate.

There can be little Liberty on Earth while men worship a Tyrant in Heaven.

To plough is to pray, to plant is to prophesy, and the Harvest answers and fulfils.

Miracles belong to the far past and the far future . . . the present belongs to common sense, to the natural.

Love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. It is the morning and evening star . . . Love is the magician, the enchanter . . . the perfume of that wondrous flower the heart . . .

The laugh of a child will make the holiest day more sacred still . . . Laughter, rose-lipped daughter of joy . . .

TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. RADFORD.—Pleased to hear from a real Atheistic shoemaker.

W. KEANE and MRS. C. BEALES.—A design showing a "baptismal syringe," made for baptising unborn children, and in cases of difficult birth, is given in *Devils, Drugs, and Doctors* by H. W. Haggard, M.D.

Would Mr. ROBERTS (author of the *Gloria in Excelsis* article) be good enough to communicate with the Editor.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

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 debate between Mr. J. Clayton and Mr. E. Corcoran, R.C., on "Is the Design Argument Sound?" in Platt Fields, Manchester, attracted a big crowd which remained interested all through, Mr. Clayton appears to have made an impression and in response to requests will visit Manchester on August 14 and lecture in Platt Fields at 3 p.m. The local branch's Wednesday evening meetings at Alexandra Park Gates at 8 p.m. also attract a good audience. At these, replies are given to the Roman Catholic Tuesday speakers, because no N.S.S. opponents are allowed on the Roman Catholic Evidence Guild platform. The Manchester Branch N.S.S. is rapidly growing in activity and influence, and unattached Freethinkers are invited to taste the satisfaction of membership in an active branch of the N.S.S.

Parents wishing to withdraw their children from religious instruction in schools should write for a printed form, very simple to complete, to be sent to the headmaster or headmistress of the particular school. Freethinking parents should accept it as a duty to protect their children from the wiles of priestcraft.

We understand that a party of 26 Mormon Elders have arrived in Clapham, London, from Utah. We further understand that their average age is twenty-three and all are "good-looking heart throbs." We are further given to understand that polygamy is the one thing they will not talk about. Consequently their "news value" so far as the daily press is concerned, drops by at least 75 per cent.

It is difficult to stop quoting Ingersoll. As a controversialist he was in the first rank. I know of few better debates—if any at all—than those he held with Manning, Gladstone, and Judge Black. Urbane, witty, and devastating, his opponents had little left when he had done with them.

Himself a great debater, Huxley's letter to Ingersoll on his discussion with Gladstone should not be forgotten. He wrote:—

... You are to be congratulated on your opponents. The rabbi is the only one with any stuff in him—though, by the way, I have not read Manning, and do not mean to. I have had many opportunities of taking his measure, and he is a parlous windbag, and nothing else, absolutely. Gladstone's attack on you is one of the best things he has written. I do not think there is more than 50 per cent. more verbiage than necessary, nor any sentence with more than two meanings . . .

But Manning and Gladstone were world-famous figures in their respective ways and not all Ingersoll's opponents were so well known. He was ever being attacked by priests and parsons whose lucubrations appear to me now as exceedingly comical though they were written or delivered in dead earnest. Father Lambert, Prof. Swing, the Rev. W. F. Craft, Dr. Lorimer, and many other quite forgotten "men of God" were always on the warpath assailing him with astonishing ignorance and stupidity. Ingersoll must have laughed heartily at some of these opponents ignoring in the main their vast pretentiousness and conceit.

Many of their attacks were gathered in one volume by J. B. McClure and published in 1892 under the title of *Mistakes of Ingersoll*. It is a volume which all Free-thinkers should have on their shelves to be dipped into as a comic relief from more serious reading. Mr. McClure blandly assures us that:—

A religious faith at present so generally pervades the civilised world that it seems almost amazing that any one should dare speak as Mr. Ingersoll does in his several lectures about the Bible. It is this singularity, no doubt, rather than intrinsic worth, which gives any significance that may attach to his words. That the Bible is in the least endangered is out of the question. It is too late for that.

I am by no means sure that the collection of mediocrities gathered together by Mr. McClure to give the *coup de grace* to poor Ingersoll would have quite endorsed this confident assertion about the impregnability of the Bible against the assaults of the redoubtable Free-thinker; but their golden words were worth preserving as wickedly funny examples of religious bosh and twaddle.

Ingersoll attacked the Bible relentlessly for he rightly saw in the Holy Book the greatest enemy to liberty, the greatest enslaver of the human mind. Even in this year of grace, 1949, the Bible is defended in many parts of America with a fanaticism worthy of a better cause as true in every word and comma. Those of us who have emancipated ourselves from its thralldom can hardly credit that millions of presumably sane people believe in its miracles, its devils, its hells, and its gods, as absolutely necessary for human salvation. It is fantastic.

Against such human stupidity, Ingersoll turned on his batteries of wit, logic, scholarship and contempt, and he made belief in Hell, Heaven, Devils, and Angels, ludicrous. His simple but passionate language was understood by all. I used to believe that one reading of, say, *About the Holy Bible* would for ever dispel any belief in it, but it is difficult to assign limits to human stupidity. Still, millions of people must have been influenced by his unceasing war against the doctrine of Eternal Punishment; and progress, real progress, can never be anything but slow—even against religion.

Ingersoll learnt a lot himself during the years of his unrelenting advocacy and in *About the Holy Bible* will be found an attack on Jesus and his philosophy as bitter as anything written even by Evan Powell Meredith in the *Prophet of Nazareth*. Our very reverent Rationalists have not, even in the past fifty years, yet caught up with those clear-thinking chapters.

Like his great contemporary, Charles Bradlaugh, Ingersoll was a hard-headed politician, but on that side of his career space forbids me to dwell. But looking back on his wonderful lectures and essays, I cannot help wondering how many of our present day Freethinking writers will be read and can be read fifty years hence, how many of us have contributed to the deathless glories of Freethought, as well or as much as Robert G. Ingersoll?

H. CUTNER.

A LITTLE CONTROVERSY

The following letter appeared in *The Times* for June 14, 1949:—

SIR,—Your Special Correspondent quotes Mr. A. W. Turing, of Manchester University, as saying that "the University was really interested in the investigation of the possibilities of machines for their own sake. Their research would be directed to finding the degree of intellectual activity of which a machine was capable, and to what extent it could think for itself."

If one may judge from Professor Jefferson's *Lister* oration, to which your correspondent refers us, responsible scientists will be quick to disassociate themselves from this programme.

But we must all take warning from it. Even our Dialectical Materialists would feel necessitated to guard themselves, like Butler's Erewhonians, against the possible hostility of the machines.

And those of us who not only confess with our lips but believe with our hearts that men are free persons (which is unintelligible if we have no unextended mind or soul, but only a brain) must ask ourselves how far Mr. Turing's opinions are shared, or may come to be shared, by the rulers of our country.—Yours, etc.,

ILTYD TRETOWAN.

In reply, Mr. Leslie N. Carruthers sent the following:—

DEAR MR. ILTYD TRETOWAN,

Those real Britons who hate the R.C. Church as deeply as I do always chuckle with glee when it makes an arrant ass of itself in public, as you have done in your comment on the electronic "brain."

Evidently you desire to deprive mathematical investigators of slaves to do their sums for them (which is churlish and curmudgeonly of you), and this because actually you dread lest the "brain" might develop "hostility," hence (by logical implication) the capacity of feeling. This fear of yours is startling to the beholder. It was the great Catholic historian, de Tocqueville, who remarked that persons who dread the loss of their religious faith have already lost it.

If you really believe that a physicist playing with wires and valves can evoke a sentient consciousness where none previously existed, this is an arresting exposure of the threadbareness alike of your philosophic faith in Idealism and of your mother-wit. The very hardest-boiled of Dialectical Materialists, or even of the Neutral Monists, boiled harder still, would scoff at this *reductio ad absurdum* of Mechanism. If you accept this Hypothesis of the workshop, this *Deus ex machina*, then you ought, logically speaking, to prostrate yourself before Its inventor as Almighty God, Who has breathed into It the breath of life.

It escapes your analytic acumen that the "brain" is no automaton such as we are, for it can originate an activity; still less can it reproduce itself, add one cubic to its stature, or shuffle its components into a new structural pattern. But we can still perform all these operations upon it. Your letter of June 14 in *The Times* seems to exhibit you as an entity displaying less clarity of thought than the electronic "brain" does, but

whit more ingenuity than it. I marvel to watch the Temple of Idealism collapsing in so weak a fashion.—
Yours, etc.,

LESLIE N. CARRUTHERS.

In forwarding the above, Mr. Carruthers commented as under:—

To the Editor of *The Freethinker*.

Sir,—Doubtless you noticed in *The Times* of June 14 a singularly idiotic letter from Dom Trethowan, of Downside Abbey, Bath, anent the "electronic brain"; which the writer feared might get "hostile" if taught and developed too far. I was reminded of *Aepyornis Island*. He was also anxious lest persons sympathetic to the further development of these electrical calculators might one day enter the Cabinet.

This sort of outlook recalls the treatment of Galilee and reeks of Inquisition faggots; illiterate and of abysmal ignorance and incomprehension, it represents a horrible threat to civilisation: a threat enhanced by the fact that Dom Trethowan's Church is the foremost instigator of a holocaust which would extinguish civilisation.

I wrote the above answer to the Dom. I know that *The Times* would not print it; indeed, they have just ignored a studiously moderate letter I sent them on religious education in support of my old friend the headmaster of the City of Westminster School, J. C. Dent.
—Yours, etc.,

LESLIE N. CARRUTHERS.

THE MOSES MYTH

I

READERS of this journal who know the explanation of the Scriptures as an astro-symbolic manual will, I am sure, appreciate the differing viewpoint of Dr. Gabriel Abt, the Slovak Orientalist who worked for many years among the Palestinian Arabs.

Over the course of many years we have exchanged views on subjects dealing with the Ancient Orient, and his latest essay to me may prove to be interesting to readers and certainly be more interesting than the vain disputes of we two Orientalists. The following then is a summary of his opinions on the Mosaic myth.

Whilst I deny the historicity, or even the necessity of founders of religions such as Moses and Jesus, Dr. Abt is convinced that some "hero" did exist, but as the silk-worm in its cocoon which has become so entwined in its meshes of silk, so has the "hero" been so spun into ritual, fables and myths, that there is no little difficulty in unravelling the fact from the fiction: the wheat from the chaff. The great mass of traditional misunderstanding and linguist errors uncritically accepted by pious scholars does not make the task easier.

Moses, who is depicted as the great prophet and founder of a mono-theistic religion after the pattern of Ekhantou's imperial reform in Egypt, is said to have started his work in Mazrayim (new Hebrew "Mizrayim"—Egypt). No traces have been, and it is doubtful if there ever will be, found of Israelites having lived in Egypt. As early as 1832, C. T. Beke, and later E. Schrader, Heinrich Winkler and Fritz Hommel, *inter alia*, had proved that the various forms of "M-Z-R" did not always mean Egypt but originally referred to various parts of the Arabian world, particularly South Palestine and Xydjas (Hidjas—"X" is pronounced as Scottish "ch"). A highly cultured tribe, the Minaen of Southern Arabia, maintained colonies in an important oasis of the Hidjas—now called the Oasis of Al'Ola—and even as far as Ghazza on the Mediterranean.

From the former colony we have several pertinent inscriptions giving "Ma'in-Mazran" as the name of the territory. In 1910, Grimme discovered that the Old Semitic root M-Z-R was an appellative for "Border March," similar to the German "Mark" or Slavonic "(U)kraina."

Dr. Abt doubts that there was any Hebrew term for Egypt as a whole; Upper Egypt—Pe-To-Risi (Southern Country)—was called "Pathros," whilst Kham—after Hieroglyphic Kemi = Black Soil (agricultural land)—was the name for Northern Egypt. Mazrayim denoted the outer provinces in Asia which were under the Colonial Administration of Egypt. The meaning of "Ma'in-Mazran," therefore, is "Minaen Border March" or "Protectorate of Minea"; and in particular *Arabia Petraea* was such a Border March. Therefore Sara's "handmaid," Hagar, was not an "Egyptian" (Gen. xvi, 1-3, et seq.) but the mythical ancestor of an Arabian tribe, the (H)agarens, originating from the oasis of Al'Ola; the territory in which it is situated is still called *Hidjr* (ancient name: Hegra).

In these barren lands the nomadic Beduins are periodically forced to find a living with tillers of the soil; yet they hate the "degradation" of having to work—particularly for others—and with the first signs of an easing in the living conditions they return to their freedom in the deserts. This shifting took place in the agricultural Border Lands and these types of nomads who, forced through a temporary crisis, had to take up, for a time, the "different way of life," were called "Hebrews." The Five Books are full of instances of their "degradation" and slavery until Israel was led out of the House of Bondage. The Hebrews were not the people who "crossed" the Jordan (in fact, they lived on both banks of the river) nor is it a metathesis from 'aribu (desert man=Arab), but a deserter who went over; that is, had to "Pass-Over" to the life of cultured settlers, but celebrated his Initiation Ritual, his *ver sacrum*, the Feast of Passover, when he could pass once again from the House of Bondage to his Land of Freedom.

Therefore, the "Lord God of the Hebrews" (Ex. iii, 18) is the Deity of the Deserters who, prior to the rebellion of the Maccabæans, was correctly termed by the last High Priests as "Zeus Xenios," the Alien God.

This then, was the god of Moses, the ancestor of the Levitic clan of Mushi (who settled in the East of the River Jordan, hence the tradition of Moses never having crossed the Jordan). Moshe—as is the Hebrew spelling—must have been an historical figure, Dr. Abt contends, but owing to his nomadic origin we can know little about his life which is overgrown by a maze of myth, particularly the Ritual Myth of Exodus. The Pesax-Haggadah—the Passah Story—has remained the most attractive and popular fable for simple minds, yet in fact this was the Mystery in which the Young Men were initiated when accepted as full members of the tribe. The first to recognise this was Dr. Theodor Reik, the Vienna psycho-analyst (in his book *Probleme der Religions-psychologie*, 1919); S. Freud took this subject up in two studies (published in 1917), but proved less fortunate than his pupil in tackling the problem. It was to the merit of Sir J. G. Frazer to have unfolded the deep significance of the Ritual of Initiation under the conditions of Patriarchate and its tribal religion; similar rituals are the Roman *ver sacrum*, the Jewish *Bar-Mizvah*, the Christian Confirmation. The Exodus myth served as the first catechetical initiation of the young generation of Hebrew lads; after settlement and the deuteronomic reformation (c. 622) it was superseded by the cult of the Temple after the destruction of which the celebration of Passah, or Easter, lost its importance in relation to that of the old semitic "All Souls' Day," the Feast of Atonement. The reading of the Pesax Haggadah became restricted to the family circle, circumcision (with the Arabs not restricted to a certain age of

life) was undertaken on children, whilst at the age of 13, the young men were initiated through the confirmation ceremony of *Bar-Mizpah* (becoming a Son of Duty). This inaugural ceremony shows all the usual motives of initiation: examination of the candidate in the knowledge of tradition and tribal laws; the stay outside the tribal land, the passing over dangerous borders (particularly in its symbolic meaning), menaces and trials and lastly revelation of the sacred traditions of the tribal religion so far withheld from the immature. Actually, circumcision was the sealing with blood of a "Covenant" between the new member of a secret society of male initiates and their tribal ancestor (patriarch, idol, tribal god). The fragment, Ex. iv, 24-26, corrupted though it is, is the phylogenetic report of Yahvæ, the tribal god, initiating Moshe, the human First-Initiator. Circumcision becomes the Blood Covenant with the primo-patriarchal deity, the *Ba'al berith*, the Treaty-God (cf. Gen. xvii, 10-14).

Apart from the Moshe-haggadah for Pesach, there were various popular haggadahs, the heroes of which were Abraham (Abram), Lot, and most probably also Bal'am ("Devourer"). There is also the cycle of tales dealing with Joseph and that of Isaac (Yizxâq). The latter is rather archaic but had been cut and corrupted so as to embellish the tale of Abraham, though in the first place all those popular heroes had nothing to do with each other. Still, the pattern can, in every instance, be followed: they all have to dwell, temporarily, in a foreign place—be this Mazrayim, or Gerâr (ger = alien) in "Philistæa." This place of bondage is, symbolically, the "Other World," whence, after a time of testing, the hero, knowing the holy secrets after initiation, returns and gains glory.

Abraham and Yizxâq have, in this way, to dwell in Gerâr, yet the Yizxâq variant is the more ancient one, despite the fact that the Philistines only settled there after 1194 B.C.; the Hebrew "Patriarch" is called a "foreigner" (Gen. xxvi, 3). The English translation of his "sporting" with his wife (verse 8)—*nezaxxôq*—literally means that he was cohabiting with her in the broad street or the market place).

Joseph, going to Mazrayim has his life imperilled; cf. Gen. xxxvii, 12-36, but this story had obviously been modelled according to Egyptian patterns, as is his new name. *Pôtiphera*—*Potepl-Rê* or *Pûtifar*—was a priest of the Sun God of On-Uru (Héliopolis), Asnath is his daughter as Zipporah in Ex. ii, 16-21 (Yahvist) was the daughter of a priest in *Madyan* (Ex. ii, 2-10, Elohist). It can easily be seen that both the wife of Putifara, the Governor, and Asnath (Gen. xci, 45), daughter of Potifera, the priest, are identical, but who overlap two versions. Still, despite the Egyptian make-up, the original version transpires: Joseph is sold to the Ismaelites, i.e., Northern Arabs (Gen. xxxvii, 27), particularly to men from Madyan (verse 28a Elohist) who were merchants from ancient Mizir or Hydjaz!

PERCY G. ROY.

THE R101 DISASTER SEANCE

MR. WOOD appears to have been recently impressed by the Eileen Garrett seance nearly twenty years ago, two days after the R101 disaster at Beauvais, in France, when she appeared to transmit a message from the dead Commander Irwin who gave a highly technical account of the immediate prelude to the crash. I would commend Mr. Wood to one or two broad considerations in connection with this much publicised "Spirit return" of the Commander in question before he comes to a final assessment of the evidence.

At the time of the seance two days had elapsed since the disaster which was of so tragic a nature as to stun the world, and if as Harry Price states in his report of the seance, "no one was thinking of it at the time," almost every civilised man on earth had thought about it a great deal during the previous 48 hours! During the two days previous to the seance, whenever flying men, mechanics, scientists and journalists met, there would be few other subjects discussed. And every technical detail, diagnosis and theory must have been thrashed out to the utter limit. At Cardington, in the homes of innumerable of the airport staff the technical terms mentioned in connection with the seance must have been currency night and day.

Thus to suggest that the "medium" could on no account have consciously or unconsciously acquired the few technical expressions noted in the "message" would be palpably absurd. Also that the subject of the seance should in fact be that uppermost in the minds of almost everybody at the time, completely robs the conclusion of any unexpected and obscure information suddenly coming from the unknown.

Mr. Wood should remember that in spite of the remarkable circumstances of the seance, nothing was said or suggested that was not previously known in aviation circles, and any imaginative pilot or engineer could have dramatised Irwin's last moments and thoughts with just that technical touch which appeared to come from Irwin himself.

Where a natural explanation remains available in assessing a miracle, the cautious and reasonable man will seek to apply it. Such an explanation was clearly at hand in this case, without even impugning the honesty of the medium, who presumably would not be responsible for the pronouncements of her unconscious mind.

Had the message revealed some entirely new, unknown and unlikely factor, later verified by examination of the wreckage, the mystery would have been more worthy of consideration. But there was nothing of this kind. Speculation as to the air worthiness of the airship was rife even before it crashed, and it was seen by many people staggering far too low over the countryside beaten down by rain a few minutes after its release from Cardington. The residents of Hitchin (Herts) were very alarmed at the way it lurched over their roofs, and it left the Kent coast far too low for safety.

Several of the "technical" scraps in the message are odd and unreal. The strange reference to "carbon and hydrogen" and the use of the term "bore capacity" instead of "horse-power," for instance, have a muddled amateur ring about them.

"Dr. Eckener was the constructor of the Graf Zeppelin—Irwin would know this." But Mrs. Garrett could not possibly have known it. But why? Thousands of educated people and all flying men had known it for years, and his name had been mentioned frequently in

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connection with the R101 for years before, and must have been mentioned time and again during the vital two days before the seance.

Spiritualists will, of course, continue to hold that the message in question came in fact from the dead Commander of the ill-fated airship. It may have done. But speaking for myself, there would have to be much more satisfactory evidence before I believed it.

J. STURGE-WHITING.

ALL ABOUT SHAKESPEARE

I KNOW that I shall be in a sense thrusting my hand into a hornets' nest when I say in these columns that I see no reason for supposing that the Elizabethan actor called William Shakespeare did not write the plays which have come down to us under his name, and that I certainly see every reason for believing that his glorious poetry could not have been written by the dull and prosy gentleman called Francis Bacon who wrote some platitudinous essays. But I give due notice that I shall not reply to any of the distinguished gentlemen who write for this journal but who do not share my views in this matter. I do not consider that the Shakespearean problem is a thing that is of any great importance; it is a purely literary problem that will probably never be finally solved.

My reason for writing of it here is the publication of Mr. Hesketh Pearson's "A Life of Shakespeare" (Carroll and Nicholson; 9s. 6d.), which gives as good a picture as is available from the somewhat scanty data that are all we have. As an appendix Mr. Pearson has included his own personal anthology of his favourite lines from Shakespeare's poetry—an anthology that picks, as it were, the brightest jewels from the master's treasury.

Naturally, the evidence of Shakespeare's early life is comparatively scanty. Few, if any, people have put into writing their impressions of the early years of a man destined later to become famous, the more especially if his childhood and youth were obscure. But Mr. Pearson is a skilled biographer, and has succeeded in extracting the last ounce of evidence from the plays as they exist.

The sonnets, too, he draws on, though he does not mention the popular theory that the "Dark Lady" was Mary Fytton, that young daughter of a Cheshire aristocrat. But he does provide, all in all, a picture of the Elizabethan stage which is valuable and which, I think, can be enjoyed even by those who will not agree with his assumption that the actor, Will Shakespeare, was identical with Shakespeare the poet and playwright.

Readers of these columns have usually some literary interest. It is for that reason that I have devoted this note to recommending the book. There are few enough volumes of serious interest which make their mark every day; I feel that this work of Mr. Pearson's may well make its place alongside his works on Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and other literary figures of modern days.

JOHN ROWLAND.

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THE PRISONER

(From the Russian of Valentina Belueva)

My room is light, of windows there are four,
Three now are open wide, and one fast closed;
A bumble-bee the shut one is before,
A thick glass pane by buzzing insect nosed.

Stubbornly, hour by hour, the livelong day,
Eternally, that panicked captive flies;
The raging prisoner can find no way
To freedom, which the jeering glass denies.

Through that transparent cliff-face the poor bee
The colour of each garden flower sees;
Though wings and strength be worn, it still can see
The fragrant blossom on the linden trees.

Are we not all, nose pressed against the pane,
Confining us, as wearily we rage,
Blind to those paths our freedom to attain,
Seeking an outlet from an open cage?

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE BELGIAN ELECTIONS.

Sir,—I don't see why you should be so concerned over the so-called Catholic successes recently in Belgium. On the Continent the political issue seems to be between Communism and anti-Communism, and the Catholic Church serves as a handy and ready-made rallying point for the anti-Communists. It does not follow that because the Catholic vote has increased there is therefore an increase in the numbers of Catholics. Communism has no more use for Freethought than Rome has, and is more dangerous to Freethinkers because more efficient and ruthless. It is a paradox of our age that a Freethinker may quite logically support Rome against Moscow. I am of the opinion that on the Continent many have done and continue to do so, on the grounds that of two evils it is advisable to choose the lesser.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. NICHOLSON.

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