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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Socialism, Materialist or Christian?

A WEEK or two back, an International Socialist Conference was held in Copenhagen, with the object of restating and redefining the ideology of Socialism and of the social democratic parties upon an international level. In so far as the Copenhagen Conference dealt with political ideology and the restatement of socialist aims on the political field, as distinct from professedly capitalist parties, on the one hand, and from the parties of the Cominform on the other, its deliberations necessarily fall outside the scope of this article and paper. However, philosophical questions were also raised at Copenhagen in connection with current socialist ideology, which are fully congruous with the aims which this paper and the National Secular Society exist for the purpose of promoting. These involve, in fact, the fundamental philosophical outlook and nature of contemporary socialism; is its philosophy anti-clerical and materialistic or is it religious and derived from specifically Christian sources?

*For, if we are to believe a report of the Copenhagen Conference which appeared in our Liberal contemporary, the *News Chronicle* (June 3, 1950) by its industrial correspondent, Ian Mackay, the controversy between Christians and Materialists formed one of the highlights of the Conference and may even have epoch-making consequences upon Socialist doctrine and practice in the near future.

Under the, in itself, significant title, "Labour puts Methodism before Marx," Mr. Mackay indicates the protagonists who expressed their view-points at Copenhagen upon the fundamental nature of Socialist philosophy, Christian or Materialist? As one might have expected from its past, the great champion of Christianity and of "spiritual values" (*sic*) was Transport House, the British Labour Party, represented at Copenhagen by its General Secretary, Mr. Morgan Phillips, who, according to the *News Chronicle*, appears to have upon this occasion been briefed by the Christian Evidence Society, for Ian Mackay reports him as stating: "He (Morgan Phillips) made no attempt to disguise the fact that, so far as British Labour is concerned, it will have nothing whatever to do with Materialism, and that if it comes to the choice, Transport House will follow the Methodists and not the Marxists," prior to which categorical affirmative, the General Secretary of the British Labour Party had gone on record with the weighty observation that British Labour owed its initial existence to "principles which the religious reformers in England fought for long before Karl Marx was born."

The anti-clerical and Materialist case, to which Mr. Phillips was replying, was put by M. Guy Mollet, who, as one might also expect, represented the French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.) which inherits the anti-clerical and Materialist tradition that has been so prominent a feature of French radical thought ever since Voltaire and the great French Revolution. The French party repre-

sents the "extreme left" of international Social Democracy, whilst the British Labour Party represents the extreme right wing and this applies to its philosophical, as well as its political outlook.

Upon the basis of some personal acquaintance with both the English and French Socialist movements, we may, perhaps, be permitted to specify here the fundamental difference between the English and French protagonists of, respectively, Christianity and Materialism, as the fundamental philosophical basis for Socialism.

The French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.) is, traditionally, anti-clerical and anti-Christian, like virtually all the parties of the Left in Latin and Catholic countries, where the fundamental enemy of Socialism (in all its forms) is, and always has been the Roman Catholic Church; and the two greatest leaders of French Socialism, its founder, Jean Jaurés, and its recently-deceased leader, Leon Blum, were outspoken anti-clericals in the authentic Voltairean tradition. The French Socialist Party, as Mr. Mackay goes on to indicate, is still strongly Marxist in its ideology though, we may relevantly add, its democratic and libertarian interpretation of Marxism, which follows the teachings of the great German Social Democrat, Rosa Luxemburg, and of its own founder, Jean Jaurés, differs widely from the totalitarian version of Marxism accepted by Russia and the Cominform under the inspiration of Lenin and of Stalin.

In the French and, indeed, in most other Continental Socialist Parties, Marxist Materialism fuses with the traditional European anti-clericalism and Atheism of the Left. Their point of view was put to perfection by an early French Socialist, Tridon: "Socialism expresses itself as Republicanism in politics, Communism in economics and Atheism in religion." (e.g.: The word "Communism" was, of course, used in its pre-Russian Revolution sense as simply common ownership.)

This is, broadly, the conception of Socialism which the French Socialists maintained, apparently, at the Copenhagen Conference.

The British interpretation is quite different. To start with, it has no philosophical theory, Marxist or any other, but is purely empirical; one might almost say that the only theory accepted by English Socialism is that all theory is futile! Whilst as for its current attitude to religion, let Mr. Phillips speak for himself as reported in the *News Chronicle*: "British Socialists," he said, "do not consider it a reproach or a weakness that their movement has been profoundly influenced by religious thought. The very organisation of our British working class movement embodies methods we have taken over from religious organisations."

As an alleged statement of historical fact, one can only gasp at the above suggestion that British Radicalism and Socialism spring ultimately from Christian sources. Most students would, we think, hold that the effective founder of British Radicalism was Thomas Paine, and whilst Paine was not an Atheist, we have never before

heard the author of *The Age of Reason* described as a Christian—of any kind! Whilst his great contemporary, Jeremy Bentham, who may, perhaps, be regarded as the co-founder, along with Paine, of British Radicalism, was an Atheist and a declared Materialist.

Whilst as for British Socialism, even Mr. Morgan Phillips's former chief, the late Ramsay Macdonald, himself a professed Agnostic, and certainly no Marxist, described Robert Owen as the ultimate founder of the British Labour movement, and it is common knowledge that Owen was an Atheist, a thorough-going Materialist and a bitter opponent of Christianity.

Similarly, Holyoake, the founder, along with Owen, of the British Co-operative movement, was a life-long unbeliever. Of outstanding modern British Labour leaders, few have been orthodox Christians, as, for example, the great orator, James Maxton, who expressed his disbelief in religion and his admiration for the work of Mr. Chapman Cohen personally to the present writer. One might also have thought that far from being Socialistic, official Christianity did everything it could to "keep the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate"—before the workers got votes and thus became a political force.

In the current controversy within the ranks of International Socialism, we hope naturally that the Atheistic point of view prevails. We think, however, that the episode underlines the current necessity for an independent Freethought movement which will continue to advocate the cause for Atheism free from the entanglements of Party politics.

F. A. RIDLEY

A NOTABLE BOOK

A RECENTLY published novel, *The Alabaster Cup*,* should do much to counterbalance these last years of cynicism, sentimentality, disillusionment and despair. Readers will be rewarded with as shrewd and well observed piece of writing as they are likely to encounter in a long while, and the refreshment to be derived from Miss F. Tennyson Jesse's unique story will do much to stimulate the mind as well as the senses. Here, indeed, is a criticism of the conventions, one that deserves to rank alongside the great novels of the past which have exposed the useless Orthodoxy of Church and the parent State, and blown aside the wind of hypocrisy. Unlike so many delicately written novels it cannot be called "charming" (what a word!) in view of the fact that it possesses bone and meat—an abundance of "meat," in fact—but no gristle. Miss Jesse knows better than most writers how to pare down to a minimum until just the essential thing remains. But despite its economy and lack of embellishment it has, at times, an almost Jamesian-like quality of unhurried exposition.

Life is observed through the eyes of a little child (a life which is bounded by the Church, village "society," South Kensington and the Continent), with all its strange eccentricities and undercurrents, its unpredictable creations in the shape of human beings. And in childhood, surrounded by great big stupid humans, the child, Ginny de Lisle, grows to rely upon and love a woman. A very unimportant old woman, in a sense, who becomes the most important factor in little Ginny's life. The older woman from the "lower orders" was always there to amuse, guide and sooth whenever life became grey and complex for the daughter of the shortsighted, self-

complacent and dull clergyman and his pathetically inadequate and selfish wife. These three fully rounded characters are not seen too clearly until the child's eyes are fully opened, but they start out by being, and remain throughout the narrative, the three most dominating characters in the childhood. Nare, the "ordinary old woman,"

... knew practically everything. She knew how to be kind, and how to talk so that three-year-olds loved her, and that surely is knowledge worth having.

is earlier established than the parents. Miss Jesse wisely remembers the pattern of her story and doesn't allow the child's eye to grow larger just because the temptation is there. Reading these early chapters is like looking through a lovely mirror and at first seeing a blurred vision which is finally succeeded by a crystal clear view in perspective: the child is slow in consciously realising what motivates the actions of the grown-ups around her, although her natural instincts are rapidly developing and her assessments of people are a good deal sounder than are those of the "educated" priest or his wife, Enid, who discusses "Society" with her "friend" Miss Benson, as follows: "I really can't see myself shepherding Nare into Society." And then:—

What was Society? Ginny supposed it was the people you knew. Well, Nare was quite the nicest person she knew. Much nicer than Miss Benson who sat and gazed at Enid with eyes like those of a spaniel who hadn't had any shooting.

Later on childish doubt becomes an addition to her mental make-up which already has rejected snobbery. Taken to her father's Children's Service, her enjoyment of the hymn "All Things Bright and Beautiful" is marred for her by the lines she has to sing—

"The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, God made them high or lowly, and ordered their estate." Now that surely couldn't be right, and once she timidly asked Enid about it, but— "How dare you criticise, a little girl like you" was all the answer she got.

Her father was gentler with her but not much more helpful:—

"What is real, Papa?"

"Now you are asking something, my dear, Papa, that has never yet been decided. Schoolmen used to argue what was substance."

"What is substance, Papa?"

The child-mind, determinedly independent despite its background—or perhaps because of it—is at work; receptive, imaginative. How well does Miss Jesse understand the problems of Youth, with what sympathy does she range herself against Injustice and Superstition. Her awareness of the plight of chronic invalidism makes her memorable passages and the intense and dumb suffering experienced by the child recall to mind that vicarage Mr. Maugham's in *Of Human Bondage*. Miss Jesse's schoolgirl becomes more voluble, however, than Maugham's schoolboy and long before she has reached her twenties, worldly success as an artiste and a wealthy husband, she has become a self-sufficient girl-woman. The ending with the death of the faithful and long suffering old Nare is less turbulent than in Miss Jesse's previous masterpiece, *A Pin to See the Peepshow*, where we were introduced into the death cell of a condemned woman during her last few hours on earth. Then, we shared the poor wretch's mental torment, as well as the agony of mind suffered by those surrounding her.

* "The Alabaster Cup" by F. Tennyson Jesse. (Evans Bros. Ltd., 8s. 6d. net.)

old, blind, good Nare, slowly but surely fades away. Her epitaph is fitting:—

Her intellectual grasp may not have been great but her interest in other people and her affections were strong. Of very few can a better epitaph be written.

It is as much the story of the ordinary old stand-by as it is the tale of the sensitive creature who is caught in the mesh of parents who fail to understand and, because of this lack of affection and understanding between parents and child, turns to the one adult who doesn't suffer from infantilism.

A beautiful book, it has everything that the same author's *Act of God* (published by Watts in their Thinker's Library series) had—and more: in addition to the tilts at the believers in "miracles," mumbo-jumbo and the whole box of superstitious tricks which made this previous work so enjoyable to rational minds, *The Alabaster Cup* has, mixed up with its irony and wit, a greater degree of tenderness and truth than are to be found in most novels that point a moral. These cardinal qualities are vividly experienced and observed in a novel which has a slender make-up. There is nothing slender about the substance of a very exceptional work, the latest and perhaps the best creation of one of the wittiest, most human and profound novelists of the age.

PETER COTES.

EVOLUTION

THE doctrine of evolution, with the "fire-mist" origin, put forward as an alternative to Creation, has been accepted by theology. Yet it is still asserted as an answer to religion, though admitted questionable whether it is progressive, and so, gets us nowhere. As a matter of doctrinaire assertion, the term evolution is loosely used and may refer to the Hegelian doctrine of historic dialectic or to Darwin's theory, but in either case it involves vital conflict. To assert evolution as a fact, simply meaning change, is to put a poser and not a solution. To say things are in process of becoming invites the question, becoming what?

The problem is a perennial one. Evolution is the rock on which the ship of Ancient philosophy was wrecked. Nature was a paradox in a world of flux. As with Zeno's paradox, the Flying Arrow is not where it was nor where it will be and motion is an illusion. But to make it a matter of assumption and definition is to land in dogmatism. If, to primitive ignorance, anything is possible and everything happens by chance, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes could say there is nothing new under the sun, what is, is what was, and what is to be. The eternal astrological cycle is combined with apocalyptic prophetic vision.

The notion of mechanistic inevitability lends colour to fatalism, but the idea of prophesy does not rest upon prediction of the future; this can never be checked or tested, for tomorrow never comes; we are chasing rain-bows. In the Biblical Prophets we read of prophesying for and of being prophesied against. The invective and symbolism of apocalyptic vision involves human hopes and fears in the magic curse or blessing, of the wrath of God, and not a time sequence in memory, observation and anticipation. The fantasy of a past Golden Age or the illusion of a future New Jerusalem are Lands of Unfulfilled Desire.

The idea of evolution was not still-born with the Ancients, nor was it that the study of rhetoric led on to

apocalyptic prophetic declamation. For the notion of eternal conflict and illusion of change, in picturesque imagery, is typical of the Orient, craving the tranquillity of the Middle Way in the dream of Nirvana. The ancient mental equipment was inadequate. As in Plato's doctrine of reminiscence, ideas in memory are persistent, being pre-natal and post-mortem; so that change in past, present and future is bridged by an identity, a pure assumption, that gives no relation in a time sequence.

Inevitability gives fatalism, and persistence of ideas in memory and tradition gives certitude, and with infinity in space with no time relation comes conviction in eternity. This medieval notion lingers in Locke's famous essay on Human Understanding, in spite of the revolutionary assertion "nothing in memory not in consciousness" which means we learn from experience, for memory involves time which is "duration." Bishop Berkeley said he could form no concept of time, so his cloud of dust was of no avail, but the time factor again emerges in Hume's concept of causation as invariable sequence.

With Hume's empiricism and the emergence of new factors, dogma is inconsistent with change, and evolutionary doctrine needs continuous revision with new discoveries. Not only are basic assumptions questioned but the unreliability of memory and tradition even questions the direction of change in the concept of time. Evolution gives no surety, for our notion of evolutionary change is coloured by our concept of causation. As with the vagary of myth the diversity of interpretation and distortion of history is notorious. Instead of a forward process, we are in fact, as with memory, looking back into the past as a check in recognition of change.

The notion of development from the simple to the complex is a method of attempting to simplify complexity, and a method of classification in a time-sequence is a necessity of sane thinking. But to introduce moral questions as with Kant's categorical imperative or Hegel's causal historic conflict is to make a process purposive. If evolution simply means change, it is we ourselves who give direction, whether we look back into the past or anticipate the future. If space is three-dimensional, so also is time, with recognition in the relation of memory, observation and anticipation, in a time-sequence as a sequence of events.

It is plainly absurd to apply an astrological cycle or a mechanistic principle in human conduct. Even the application of the geological principle in biology needs the addition of the notion of adaptation. The compulsion of magic or the submission of religion only have meaning in human affairs in concern for social and psychological relations. But, like memory and anticipation, the physical and the psychological are opposite in character. As Freud said, if superstition is physically false, it is psychologically true, and in a world of change there is nothing more fleeting than our changing moods, whims and wishes.

The analogy of a Book of Life is false. Presumption and certitude of beginnings and ends, like the illusions of the Garden of Eden or the New Jerusalem, cannot face doubt in the backward search in memory. The problem of evolution, as with memory, calls for a concept of time as a social convention to counter dogmatic certitude and prejudice. If we learn in memory, forgetfulness in doctrinaire assertion is either a blissful dream or the terror of nightmare. Anticipation involves conscious awareness in actual experience.

H. H. PREECE.

CHURCH PARADES

UP till the first world war compulsory church parades were part of a soldier's life in this country. The magic words, "King's Regulations," could be applied against any plea for exemption, Christianity in the hands of Christians is such a miserable thing that wherever it has the power, rights and principles of non Christians become scrap. We have a typical example of that attitude in the B.B.C. Christian little mindedness at work that will not allow the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society to be included in the list of Whitsun conferences announced over the radio; yes, Christianity in the hands of Christians is a miserable thing.

The introduction of conscription during the first world war brought citizens from every walk of life into the armed forces. One result was that a problem arose over the question of compulsory church parades for which the magic words "King's Regulations" was no solution. Character and intelligence strongly resented an official pretence to a religious belief that had been discarded. The matter was taken up by the National Secular Society, and others, and the authorities conceded the point that a man's own statement of non-religious belief would be accepted, and recorded on his papers. But the practice of compelling a man to adopt a religious label continued in many directions. It was so in my own case during the first world war. Asked by the N.C.O. in charge what religion? I replied none. Much argument followed, with temperature rising in the N.C.O. He demanded, you must have a bloody religion in the British Army. Courteously I asked, what was the difference between a bloody religion and a religion that was not bloody. That caught him on one foot, he glared at me in silence for a few seconds, then said, I am going to put you either R.C. or C. of E. I replied, if they are the only two bloody religions you have got they are no use to me, you put either no religion or Atheist, any substitute will be your responsibility. He left the decision to an officer and I was recorded as of no religion. But I knew my case whilst so many others did not.

The second world war brought the re-introduction of conscription and the religious question again became a problem. Again the National Secular Society took action and we received official information from the War Office, Admiralty and Air Force that a man's own statement of non-religious belief would be accepted and recorded on his papers. We never had any trouble or quibble from the chiefs of those respective departments of the armed forces over the recognition of the rights of non-religious members of the services. There was trouble, but it was always from lower down, perhaps not always deliberate; but we never appealed in vain to the War Office, Admiralty or Air Force to get a wrong corrected or rights recognised.

Two world wars in one generation, with prominent clergymen banging the war drum and delivering vicious war sermons and speeches shocked many of the better type of Christian believers and has no doubt helped considerably in the post-war slump in religion.

In 1946 compulsory church parades were abolished, certainly not because they were too popular with the men. The *Daily Telegraph* of June 20, 1946, reported, "Compulsory church parades in the South-Eastern District have been stopped. It is stated that at the first Sunday morning service after the order was received by units, the congregation at Chatham Garrison Church consisted of only two officers and a lance-corporal, normally 300 troops would be detailed to attend."

In religious matters Christians believe in freedom, providing it leads into the churches, but a reversed traffic is immediately met with a Christ-like urge for compulsion into church attendance.

Preliminaries for a return to compulsory church parades in the armed forces are already being tried out. *The Times* has opened its columns on the question, with the usual methods of newspaper discussions where religion is concerned. By some strange fate letters from outspoken critics of religion trickle to the bottom of the bag and get overlooked. It was, of course, quite a fluke that a letter from Mr. Ernest Thurtle was in the line of capture. Maybe that as Mr. Thurtle is a well-known M.P. his letter refused to associate with the small fry and in that way managed to get inserted. Mr. Thurtle's letter was opposed to the return of compulsory church parades as one would expect.

At the time of writing this article seven letters from other writers have appeared in *The Times*. All are more or less favourable to the compulsory church parades, and it is interesting to note that of the seven, two bear Vicarage addresses, one a Rectory address, one from a retired Bishop, one from a retired Brigadier, and one from a retired Lieut.-Colonel; only one plain citizen.

Then note that Jack and Tommy Atkins do not come in at all, anywhere, until the good Christian uncles, if they get their way, will once more force battalions into church every Sunday whether they like it or not.

To-day it is compulsory church attendance for men in the armed forces that is being nibbled at, add to that political purges, and a leading Trade Union official linking the movement to an 18th century Christian sect mentality, and the extension of compulsory church attendance to the civil population may have come a definite step nearer.

R. H. ROSETTI

THE HEAVENLY TWINS

I

IN a preceding article it was stated that the inhabitants of the hot zones genuinely dread the Sun; their benefactor is Rain. In China this heavenly water is represented by the dragon, in Africa through the crocodile (the holy emblem of the BaNtu tribes which is the proper spelling. "Ntu"=man, whilst "Ba" denotes the plural); there are Secret Societies of women all along the West coast who worship the crocodile as the Fertility Goddess *Nimm*.

The BaRi (along the White Nile) consider continuous sunshine as a curse or the result of malediction; a Nuba tribe calls the Creator Kalo=Rain. Within the whole of East Africa the sky god, the supreme deity, is the giver of rain, and rain magic is the essence of their religion. Excepting a small enclave at the Abyssinian border there is no Sun cult in the Sudan. There are, however, certain relations between water and the Moon; the Nile is his servant. *Maria, regina coelis*—the Queen of Heaven standing on the crescent—is, at the same time, the virgin ascending from and ruling the waves. Moses, the Moon God, and therefore leader of the 12 constellations (the ecliptic was thought of as a dam made of stones=râqî'â) beats water out of a rock, such as Ramesses II, the great Pharaoh, does, whilst he cuts a slice of B.D.T., the symbolic wafer of wheaten flour (mazzôth) consecrated to Min, god of heavens, who grants fecundity.

The supreme sky god was represented by sun and moon (cf. Jud. viii, 21, 26; Jes. iii, 18), sometimes referred to as his two eyes. The consecrated wafer lies in a receptacle called *lunnula* (little moon); the first Christians added to the cross Sun and Moon in human shapes (sometimes

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with the Netherworld Snake at the bottom). In ancient times, it was expected of a king that he could grant rain (and fertility); this involved a temporary eclipse of the heavenly light. Therefore it was said that those mythical kings (and Homer) were blind; Horus, Wotan, etc., lose an eye in their struggle against drought; Mhorthy-n-irty, the predecessor of Horus, was the "One-Who-Has-No-Eye." African negroes protect their eyes in front of "Rain Stones," some tribes even put out one eye of their "Rainmaker."

Religion is a survival of primitive notions; when the first missionaries introduced their Oriental creed in Europe with persuasion, sword and fire, the native mythology was forced to go underground, yet amongst the peasantry it persisted in the guise of traditional fairy tales. The difference between the Holy Bible and the *Volksmärchen* collection of Grimm is, that the one was elevated as a Varsity subject of "learning" whilst the repressed beliefs were banished to the nursery, as it proved impossible to destroy them as a whole.

For the student of religion, it is essential to become familiar with the meandering of the Oriental mind; as one whose childhood was spent in the Far East, I will try to explain some of these queer speculations.

Light, it will be remembered, was viewed as something apart from sun and moon; these "heavenly bodies," on the other hand, were each split up into opposite aspects which could blend, viz.:

1. The "Red Destroyer" principle of the Summer-Autumn Sun of the Desert, the universal malefactor, with Mars as its planetary representant.

2. The "Soft Benefactor" or Saviour principle of the Winter-Spring Sun. In India this is Vishnu against Shiva, the destroyer; in the New Testament, John, the desert dweller, preceded Jesus by a half-year. The benevolent principle is represented through the "fiery" constellation of *Aries*, the divine Lamb, whilst the Scorpion stands for Number 1.

A. The "Black-Moon" principle, i.e., the moon eclipsed by the sun, with Saturn as its planetary representant.

B. The "Mesa" principle, i.e., the gentle moon as friend, mentor and tutor of mankind. His delegate is *Taurus*, the Heavenly Bull.

Now principles 1 and A go together as symbols of death, the only difference being that Saturn stands for a quiet eclipse of life, whilst Mars accounts for violence and blood. In the same way Numbers 2 and B can fuse to represent the idea of the lofty sky with the Heavenly Twins as deputy. One such twin is Hermès (Mercury), the ithyphallic god of the ancient Pelasgians; sun and moon being male and female principles respectively, the twins sometimes appear as Hermaphrodite or a bearded woman. If conceived as males only, they can be complemented by Venus, the brightest amongst the heavenly bodies and therefore, next to sun and moon, the one most conspicuous.

Hermès, the bringer of sailing winds, is the liaison officer between day and night; he is Psychopompos, who guides the soul to Hadès. The cock who announces day-break and the end of the night, is his symbol. His Teutonic counterpart is Wuotan, the storm-god and leader of the dead, in the New Testament he is Simon-Petrus, the heavenly caretaker, with his crowing cock—the weather-cock. The bright sky which grants the relief of occasional thunderstorms — Sanskrit "dyaus" — was called "Father" (dyaush-pitar, Zeus-patèr, Iupiter) and finally evaporated into the Father in Heaven.

The Greek *dioscuri* have Helena as their sister, but whilst Zeus himself begot Castor and Polydeikes, Helena's father was Tyndareos—another form of Jupiter tonans, the weather god.* In this, he is a foster-father like St. Joseph (=He increases, makes grow) whose day, as a patron-saint, must always fall on a Wednesday (i.e., day of Wuotan or Mercury). Properly speaking Jesus is not "conceived" of the Holy Ghost (Matth. 1, 20) who, with the dove as representant, is the female principle; Mary IS the Spirit (or rather his earthly residue) which accounts for the "unity" of the Trinity Father-Son-Spirit (Virgin).

(To be concluded)

PERCY G. ROY.

* Max Müller (*Natural Religion*), in a footnote, p. 453, draws attention to Prof. Schrader's proposition that Yahvè may be the "breather," if derived from a cuneiform root for "wind." The BaGhirmi in Central Africa use the same name for Storm and Deity. The Akra people on the Gold Coast of Africa say "Will God come?" meaning, "Will it rain?"

BABY-TALK

About the time he tries to walk,
The human infant learns to talk,
To exercise his tongue;
They teach him baby-words at first,
He all his life with them is cursed,
Those relics of the young.

"Mummy" first, of course, then "Daddy";
If a Scot, they call him "Laddie";
Or "Junior" in the States;
Of "pussy-cat" and of "bow-wow",
Of "gee-gees", and of a "moo-cow",
The infant duly prates.

The child grows, as we all must,
Attains to manhood, love, and lust,
Religion, politics;
The man, equipped with nursery words,
And baby-thoughts, like wooden swords,
His quag-set path now picks.

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"
Once his baby-mind beguiled;
This image lingers now;
The man who now goes with a tart,
Was brought up on "The Sacred Heart"—
Sacrificial moo-cow!

An infant's solid food is pap,
And baby-thoughts the little chap
Is taught at home and school;
So when he comes to deal with life,
Employer, government, and wife,
He often acts the fool.

There's nothing wrong with human-kind,
Save that it has a poisoned mind,
Which keeps it Peter-Panish;
If adult minds the childlike guide,
This nursery-thought is thrust aside;
The fear of Hell will vanish.

God, Santa Claus, Hell, Angels, all
Are baby-words that hold in thrall,
As drunkards are by drink;
We must in pity help the man
To be an adult—for he can—
And teach him how to think.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

ACID DROPS

An article in the *Newsweek Magazine* (New York) describes the "Red" Dean of Canterbury as the biggest burden that Dr. Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, has to bear. The obvious biblical text that flashes to mind is "Come to me ye that are heavily laden," but judging by recent Press photos showing the Archbishop, with the Red Dean, welcoming Princess Margaret to Canterbury Cathedral, the burden is not so heavy.

Once upon a time a football team went to church to ask God's blessing on an important football match which, with His help, they won. The idea is a good one and is spreading, for Italy's team for the world football cup title in Brazil were received by the Pope and received his blessing and prayers for a win. Of course, they ought to win for what hope would an atheist team have against such divine opposition? But supposing they lose. . . .?

That very religious newspaper, the *Christian*, is very sorry that compulsory church parades were abolished, and suggests that not only the officers "but the rank and file all feel that much was lost by the abolition." The average soldier, states the *Christian*, objected not so much to attending church, but to the parade that was bracketed with it. We fail to see how the newspaper could ascertain the feelings of all the rank and file, but in actual fact, the average soldier did not attend church when it was voluntary. This sort of Christian lie is too well known to impress anyone, except readers of the *Christian*.

Douglas Warth writing in the *Sunday Pictorial* last Sunday steals our thunder and he really uses it to good effect. His article is packed with the anti-religious arguments that we have been using for years; the existence of evil, the intolerance of religions, the "loose thinking and stupidity that masquerades as religion," the role of religion in war and politics, etc. But, nevertheless, the pill has to be sweetened for *Pictorial* readers and the pathetic picture that Douglas Warth gives of himself still in search of that ghost of a God, is rather pitiful when he says "I can neither believe in God nor believe that there is no God, and I would desperately welcome any evidence that there is one, it would completely revolutionise my life." Sorry Mr. Warth, we do not think it would!

Canon T. P. Stevens of Wimbledon Park is a lucky man. Owing to the work of Freethought, he is allowed to criticise the Bible freely these days. In the grand old times of Christianity, he might have been plunged into boiling oil, or racked to bits, and even burnt at the stake for heresy if he had then said what he is now saying about the Bible. His Bishop had recommended him "to teach the Bible continuously." And Canon Stevens replied, "If the dear bishop had recommended the teaching of the Gospels and Acts, well and good. But the Bible as a whole! God save me from such superstition. . . . Some of the stories quite often deal with rape and murder, lies and brutality, exaggerated nationalism and war. . . ."

For a hundred and fifty years Thomas Paine has been vilified and attacked—even by Rationalists—for saying the same thing with Canon Stevens always thirsting for his blood. Only through Paine and his followers is the modern Canon Stevens allowed, without harm, to say what heretics in the past have been tortured for saying. And we are not astonished to see that he recognises that the whole Church is against him. Of course. It could not be the Christian Church if it were not.

But are the Gospels and Acts any better than the rest of the Holy Bible? After all, in the Old Testament the Lord limited his punishments to this life only; Jesus Christ introduced Hell and eternal torment, the ridiculous nonsense of cutting your hand off if it "offends" you, and emasculation to get into the "Kingdom of Heaven." Things are bad enough in the rest of the Bible, but not quite so bad as in the Gospels and Acts which the "dear" Canon is so ready to teach to little children.

Mr. Adam Marsh is one of those brilliant Catholic writers who happily knows exactly what God thinks and what moves God to action or non-action. For example, he is asked why did God allow the horrors of war? And he assures us with his hand on his heart that God never, never has anything to do with the "growing threat of war." And here we are heartily in agreement with him. A non-existent Deity simply could not have caused any war, let alone its horrors.

But this is where Mr. Marsh goes another way. The cause of war is because "our hearts were hardened by materialism" and what can any Almighty do when Materialism has full sway? No, "we cannot blame God," Mr. Marsh tells us almost with tears, "God is not mocked. . . . Are not two such lessons enough?" So let us return in all humility to believe in Devils, in Angels, in Hell, in Heaven, in Miracles, in the sanctity of our marvellous priests, and as an "after," plenty of grovelling. And won't God be pleased!

The best thing to do with empty churches is to scrap them, says the new Congregational Chairman, Dr. Lovell Cocks, and "hire a room over a shop and begin all over again in the apostolic way." It is extremely doubtful, however, that Dr. Cocks expects his advice to be taken seriously. Even though the "plums" in the Congregational Union are not so rich as in the Anglican Church, we hardly think that there will be a rush of ministers to start again from scratch—at scratch stipends.

Week after week the Rev. Bryan Green churns out columns of twaddle and sentimental rubbish in the *Daily Graphic*. For example, a recent article opens with the statement, "Christians are not killjoys, and our religion is a religion of happiness. It was Jesus himself who said 'be of good cheer.' I have overcome the world with its evil and misery." The Rev. Bryan Green should re-read his Bible to find out how really cheerful was Jesus; he could also study the history of Christianity to see what "happiness" Christianity has brought to mankind. As for "killjoys" he need go no further than Fleet Street to find the finest set of killjoys in existence, and "Misery" Martin, their secretary, is a Christian, so he says.

A puzzled inquirer in the *Universe* is much disturbed because the Holy Shroud shows that Jesus was crucified by the wrists while famous painters always show him to be nailed to the cross by the palms. And even worse. The various stigmata shown so proudly by people like Theresa Neumann or Fr. Pio are, of course, always on the palms. Something seems to have gone wrong here, and we are left wondering how the Pope can answer our quiz. We naturally give it up—except by piously suggesting that deep, reverent Faith has an answer to all Biblical puzzles.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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41, Gray's Inn Road,
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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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.

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The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (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), DON BASILIO (Italy).

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.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

SUGAR PLUMS

A coach tour of Shakespeare's country with a visit to the Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon for a performance of King Henry VIII, is being arranged by the Birmingham Branch N.S.S., on Saturday, July 15. The tour will start from the Hall of Memory at 3 p.m., with an interval for tea and theatre at 7 p.m. Return fare 8s., theatre seats extra. Full details will be supplied by T. C. Millington, 6, Hesket Avenue, Birmingham 32 (Phone: Woodgate 2410), who asks that 5s. deposit be sent with applications as early as possible.

The scene was Blackpool sands, with a Christian preacher proclaiming the virtues of Christians, and the vices of non-Christians. A quiet, respectable fellow strolling along the front, stops, listens, and after a while opens out as a speaker, all alone. The preacher rapidly changed into a threatening bully but only to receive a pointed lesson on the necessity for good manners, even in a Christian. The quiet respectable fellow soon had a good audience listening to his address and replies to questions—and his name was Mr. J. Clayton.

Thirty Italian Holy Year pilgrims on their way to Tivoli, near Rome, were seriously injured when their bus overturned. A bus full of members of The National Secular Society had an after Conference outing on Whit-Monday without mishap. It shows the doubtful advantage of being a holy pilgrim, but no doubt their faith in the mercy of God will be strengthened. After all, some people are far too stupid ever to become Freethinkers, but you never find a man too stupid to be a Christian.

At Hendon Court a widow told the magistrates that she had given £1,000 to a spiritualist medium who then "dematerialised it for use in the spirit world." A fool and his money are soon parted, and a religious cloak makes the parting not only easy, but a pleasure and a duty.

THOUGHTS ON RELIGION XII

THE excessive heat and humidity of India have helped to produce its overpopulation and its metaphysics and its religions of resignation just as the poverty, barrenness, and disease of Palestine helped to produce Christianity. Ignorance, of course, is involved in the development of every religion. One of the principal jobs of Christ was healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead; this is a reflection of the poverty and disease of the Jews of Palestine during the period of their subjugation by the Romans; for a prosperous and sturdy people would not be greatly interested in a healing Messiah. In contrast to the preoccupation of Christians with disease the Koran is silent on the subject of healing; and this may be taken to mean that the Arabs of Mohammed's time were a healthy people. History shows that they were a cruel and warlike people; and some degree of health is necessary to wage war. The affirmation of life of Mohammedanism is also in contrast to the weariness of spirit found in Buddhism and to the asceticism of Christianity.

The interest in religion which people in middle life and in old age sometimes develop is probably due to the fact that common men come to see that they must die only when they are in middle life or old age. Before then, they scarcely know that they are subject to death.

Nearly everyone who thinks a little but not enough to be wise likes to have a theory about life which explains all and puts other people to shame; and this is especially true of religionists, since few men study philosophy. The members of each religious sect have their theories of which they are jealous and whose truth is certain and which are contrived so as to condemn to hell all the rest of the world who think differently. It seems to me that the most ardent enemies of sin and the most ardent supporters of religious systems are often those who are the least capable of ethics, humanity, and reason; of course, if they were ethical, humane, and reasonable, they would not be religious. Intolerance is a mark of bad character; and the intolerance for which the Christians are famous is an index to their characters.

Why are such matters as life after death, spirit, divinity, etc., uncertain? Which is to say: Why are matters pretended to be the most important of all matters uncertain and, the fact is, unsupported by knowledge but rather by opinions, frauds; and lies invented for the profit to be derived from deceiving men? Another question could be asked, since it is pertinent in all cases of spiritual things: Why are dishonesty, trickery, knavery, mendacity, obscurity, and intolerance usually connected with the religious and the spiritual?

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost."—Matthew, I, 18. It is difficult to see why the history of the Saviour of all men must begin with the suspicion of adultery; and it is also difficult to see why his conception had to be performed by a power unknown to all men, the Holy Ghost, and whether or not this explanation of his conception is satisfactory. The reason why this bald fiction and the other fictions of the Bible have influenced and still influence so greatly the thoughts of men is because of the slight attention which they give to religion and they are universally bad reasoners too lazy to investigate even the truth of small, practical matters, not to talk of religion and metaphysics where anything can be affirmed and, under favourable circumstances, be believed for thousands of years since men believe because they do not know what they believe.

The immaculate conception of Christ which is a cardinal Catholic doctrine is a dull, superstitious controversion of nature and is a fiction based on the popular idea of the sanctity of virginity. In Christianity this idea is somewhat in contradiction to the Old Testament in which God is said to have made everything good and to have commanded man to multiply and be fruitful. Virgin births are not uncommon in the religions of the world. Zoroaster is said to have been born of a virgin fifteen years old. Mithras, the sun god of the ancient Persians, was born of the Heavenly Virgin or Heavenly Goddess; and his birth was celebrated on December 25. The reason why men have believed that virginity is pure and holy, and have honoured some of their divinities and religious men with virgin births is no doubt to be found in the fact that sexual desire and sexual relations have universally been considered unclean and sinful. If life is good, its source might reasonably be expected to be good; and the virginity of women is a foolery except as far as it may contribute to an orderly society.

We have heard much of the *Imitatio Christi*. Who would want to imitate Christ? What possible profit could be derived from such imitation? If his renowned virtues were imitated, should his bigotry, spleen, and ignorance also be imitated? He thought that he was God and that he alone was right in his beliefs; should this be imitated? He evidently believed that the earth was flat; should this be imitated? An intelligent man might want to benefit from the teachings of the philosophers who have lived; but his first task would be to be himself with little or no imitation of anyone.

It has been said that Christ never existed. I do not know whether he existed or not; and the silence of the historians regarding him can be explained by one of two explanations: either he existed but was little known in his time; or he did not exist. I have always favoured the view that he did exist just as Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, and Mohammed are supposed to have existed. It seems to me that the evidence contained in the New Testament, in the Apocrypha, and in the works of the church fathers indicates that a man named Christ lived in Palestine at the beginning of our era. If it were contended that he lived five thousand years ago, we might expect all accounts of him to be so mythical as to make his existence completely doubtful; but he is said to have lived less than two thousand years ago at a time when the Greeks and the Romans, in whose civilisations Christianity developed, were not primitive; and it seems improbable, although not impossible, that the worship of a man who never existed would have become widespread among them. Of course, it must be remembered that Christianity started among the lower elements of the people among whom any fantasy could gain credence.

Mohammed, whose existence is better supported by history, thought that Christ had lived and regarded him as an apostle but not as God. Mohammed lived some six hundred years after Christ; and, while he was not a man of high intelligence, it is speculative that, if there were doubts concerning the existence of Christ, Mohammed as the founder of a rival religion would no doubt have capitalized on them if he had known of them and that at that period of history more oral legends about the existence or non-existence of Christ would have existed than exist to-day nineteen hundred and fifty years after his birth. Mohammed denounced the Christians as infidels because they said that God was Christ; and, if he had had reason to think that Christ never existed but was an imaginary god, the Koran could be expected to contain denunciations of the Christians as infidels who worshipped an imaginary god.

The only direct written evidence of the existence of Christ is in the New Testament and the Apocrypha both of which are unreliable; yet, when the fabulous in these writings is set aside, they establish the existence of Christ about as well as some Greek and Latin writings establish the existence of men accepted as having lived. The passage regarding Christ in the history of Josephus has long been admitted to be interpolation. When the evidence for the existence of Christ is weighed, it is seen to be inconclusive but it tends to show that he lived, that he became obsessed with the traditional Jewish belief in a Messiah, that he had disciples as ignorant as he, and that, as sometimes happens in religious affairs, his cant took root, grew, and spread over the world. The ignorance and barbarity in which the Jews lived, the rarity of writings and books, and the political insignificance of the Jews in his time are sufficient to account for the obscurity surrounding him. However, if he did not exist, the loss is small and the effects of Christianity on the world are the same.

Christ and his apostles must have been misanthropes, or else they would not have railed so vehemently against sinners, which was in effect nearly the same as railing against all mankind since the elect are few and the damned are many. The writings attributed to Paul are not redolent of a love of humanity; for in Romans, I, we have obloquies against men, in Romans, III, against the Jews and the Gentiles, and in Titus, I, against the Cretans about whom he quoted the Cretan poet Epimenides, who said that, "The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy bellies." These mild words are illustrative of the true spirit of Christianity.

WILLIAM RITTENOUR (U.S.A.)

DESIGN OR ACCIDENT ?

MANY Freethinkers would probably say that the most doubtful of all the many arguments in favour of a belief in God is the argument from design—i.e., the argument that the universe bears all the marks of a central plan, and that any sort of belief in a plan necessarily involves a planner. And it is undoubtedly true that many of those who have supported this argument have tended to use facts in a somewhat arbitrary manner, accepting as true some points that, to say the very least, are not firmly established.

I have written here previously of the writings of Dr. R. E. D. Clark, and have pointed out that he is a scientist of some standing, who accepts the position of the broad-minded Churchman, and who has a profound belief that the scientific and the religious views of life's problems are not necessarily opposed. His new book should, I think, be required reading for everyone who is trying to make his mind up on the question of the relationship between science and religion, since, while written from a religious standpoint, it nevertheless accepts the outlook of modern scientific discovery.

The title is *The Universe: Plan or Accident?* (Paternoster Press, 6s.), and it deals in a straightforward manner with some of the most difficult of philosophical matters.

Dr. Clark, of course, considers that the universe, living and otherwise, bears signs of being deliberately planned, and takes the attitude that the Freethinker or the Rationalist who does not agree is, consciously or unconsciously, shutting his eyes to some of the more obvious facts of the situation. He has some forthright criticism of unorthodox writers like Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane, and he makes out a very strong case in favour of his point of view. In fact, this is one of the

rare volumes, written from a religious standpoint, which Freethinkers with open minds can read with pleasure and (I think) considerable profit. It is, I am sure, an important volume, which may well be ignored by the ordinary Press, but which merits careful reading and close attention.

In a previous book (of which I wrote here about a year ago) Dr. Clark set out in some detail his view of the bearing of the problem of entropy on the theory of evolution, and his first argument in favour of design is again the argument from entropy. I cannot deal with this in detail in the space at my disposal; but I think that all that it is necessary to say is that entropy is really a mathematical expression denoting randomness. As Sir James Jeans noted long ago, the fact that the entropy of every system of which we have knowledge is continually on the increase—i.e. that the universe is gradually getting more and more random—is at any rate a pointer to a time when the whole universe of earth and stars was in a more organised condition than it is to-day. In other words, within a finite time (though it may be thousands of millions of years back) there is some reason to suppose that there was a creation. It is like as if we were faced with a clock that is slowly running down. The fact that this is so is a suggestion that there must have been a time when the clock was wound up and set going.

That is Dr. Clark's first point. The next is the biological evidence. He suggests that there are many indications to the effect that living beings (especially human beings) were deliberately planned to fit in with a planned environment. He produces interesting facts regarding the rare elements of which traces in the human organism do special tasks. For instance, a tiny trace of cobalt in the human body enables the marrow of the bones to manufacture red corpuscles; and, without this trace of cobalt anaemia develops. It may, of course, be validly objected that this is something which has come about by the processes of natural selection; but to this Dr. Clark advances the answer that evolution does not account for the production of a change in an organism, unless that change is advantageous at every stage. A partially developed eye, for instance, would be no better than no eye at all. It might even be a disadvantage unless the being using it was able to get the better of his neighbours—much there is no reason to believe. Consequently, which has been said in favour of evolution is not as easy to believe as might have been thought.

What I have written here is in some respects unfair to Dr. Clark; his book is well conceived and closely argued. And so no review of a book of this kind can possibly do it full justice. But it should be added that he does not evade any of the arguments. He faces boldly the matter of earthquakes, volcanoes, and such-like natural calamities. He does not attempt to get away from the arguments of those who would say that nature is red in tooth and claw. In fact, most of the stock positions taken up by Freethinkers are accepted as arguable, and are in most cases neatly countered. Sometimes the average Freethinker is liable to say that the Christian does not argue; he merely states what he believes. This is by no means so with Dr. Clark. His book is one which is a first-rate piece of philosophical discussion, and, even if it will not succeed in convincing everyone who reads it, it will certainly give them grounds for considerable study. I do not think that I have read any book of this type for many months which has seemed to me to be so stimulating a piece of work. I hope that what I have written will drive many readers of these columns to its pages.

JOHN ROWLAND.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND AMERICAN FILMS

IT is not my habit to go and see American films, at least the straight story sort, as, with few exceptions, the characters are false in human values; in short, as stories they are rotten. No doubt the American can tell a story as well as an Englishman or any other national, but the operation of his censorship usually stultifies any ideas the author may have. To anyone who has tried his hand at scenario writing and had, therefore, to study the restrictions of American censorship, the dead hand of these tyrants must seem to him little different to a like embargo on art forms in the U.S.S.R. To take an instance, though divorce is an action sanctified by American law, and thousands of people who have got divorces and married again lead exemplary lives, the American censors choose to regard divorce as "immoral." You have to kill off the less sympathetic hymeneal partner in order that the surviving widow or widower, as the case may be, can marry the hero or heroine and live happily ever afterwards; and usually an Irish or Mexican priest is introduced to tie the sacred knot.

Where Christian tenets have set up inconvenient standards they have been quietly but effectively jettisoned. If we accept the gospel story as that of an actual peasant reformer of the Jewish province in the first century, we must be struck by his pacifist philosophy of "forgiveness" expressed in such texts as, forgive unto seventy times seven, he that is without sin among you let him cast the first stone, turn the other cheek, etc., etc. This policy of non-retribution, however, has never been adopted in any general sense by professing Christian communities. On the contrary, they have adhered to the old Jewish law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in modern parlance, the law of retaliation. It is true that at times they have gone beyond this. Thus, in the debate in the House of Lords on capital punishment, my Lord Bishop of Truro not only wanted its retention but, further, its *extension* to the execution of those found guilty of crimes of violence. But it is only fair to say that Truro's bloodthirstiness is not generally shared by his confessional brothers. They confine themselves to the eye for an eye principle and do not urge the poking out of a dozen eyes for one.

I was reminded of this on being, somewhat unwillingly, lead to witness an American film called *One-Way Street*. While not wishing to usurp the function of dramatic critic to *The Freethinker*, some description of this story is germane to my subject. The story is a rather trite variation of the gangster theme. James Mason, as usual the strong, silent hero, was being stronger and silenter than usual. Those who enjoy this sort of stuff may like the film; personally, I prefer my characters to indulge in intelligent conversation rather than put over an imitation of a human camel. Mason, the gangster's tame medico, double-crosses his comrades in crime, pinches the boodle and the local Dillinger's girl friend into the bargain. The couple make for Mexico City, but their private plane develops a defect and has to make a forced landing near some out-of-the-way Mexican village, where the only representative of the leech's trade is a female witch-doctor. In this back-to-the-simple-life atmosphere the hardened gangster's medico and gangster's ex-moll suffer a change of heart and become the saviours, in a medical sense, of the Mexican peasantry. Everybody loves them except the female witch-doctor, who has, of course, lost her job. Meanwhile the disappropriated gangsters, way back home, have got on to the erring medico's tracks and discovered his hide-out. Dr. James Mason decides to return and have it out with them.

taking his little black bag of \$200,000 loot, so far of conspicuously little use to him. By one of those fortuitous and felicitous accidents, so common in the thriller type of tale, the gangsters had been shooting one another off, so that there remains but one of them when Dr. James Mason arrives on the scene. He has, of course, little difficulty in disposing of this survivor, and walking down "the one-way street" joins his lovely, the ex-moll, who has been sipping a coffee while he completed his little business.

At this point the artistic ending to the story would have been for him to return to the noble work of combating disease in Mexican villages. Having got rid of a worthless set of crooks and left the ill-gotten sponduliks for collection by the local cops, a life of self-sacrificing devotion to the Mexican sick would seem an act of redemption in accord with the best Christian principles of repentance, forgiveness and reparation.

But not so, according to American censorship principles; in their code, it would be "immoral" and bad for U.S.A. youth, who must be taught that you can't get away with killing unless you are dressed in khaki and the other fellow is a Jap, or in blue and are a properly authenticated cop. As the special constable said to the burglar: "If I kill you, it's just in the ordinary prosecution of my duty; but if you kill me, by God, it's murder!" So Dr. James Mason has to cross the road and get run over by a taxicab. Thus even the conventional happy ending has to be sacrificed to the imperious needs of moral conventions.

For, the law of forgiving is all very well for the pulpit, but in practical affairs the eye for an eye, life for a life, principle is what the, no doubt, Christian-professing censors of American films demand. Christian ethics must conform with the demands of society, not society conform with the demands of Christian ethics. There are few Christians, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Archbishop of Canterbury downwards who believe, let alone practise, the pious utterances of the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the gospel ethics. The practice of modern Christians has as much resemblance to them as a bawdy camp ballad has to a Beethoven symphony. It is an interesting, if highly hypothetical, speculation what modern society would be like if the Nazarine's philosophy had been taken seriously. One thing would seem certain: we should not have to endure American films of the "One-Way Street" variety.

P. C. KING.

CONTRACEPTIVES AND SLOT MACHINES

ON reading Mr. Buller's third article in your issue of May 28, I am bound to say I agree with his aim—to avoid disease. But the slot machines and their effect upon youth are the stumbling block.

Are we now to give up the idea of persuading youth to avoid sexual intercourse until marriage, and put under their noses a safe method of indulging in it? What a staggering change he advocates!

If there is an increase in such intercourse, is it to be wondered at, with the steady increase over recent years of the kind of literature and stage plays which throw all minds in that direction? Bookstalls and shop windows full of books with lurid covers, showing women in various stages of undress and with inflaming titles, magazines with suggestive pictures and jokes, and the publications of so-called psychologists who always appear to lean towards more freedom in sex relations.

How can we expect our girls to pass unscathed through a barrage of this description?

For many years there has been amongst intelligent people a notion that sex education should be given to all when old enough to understand it. The idea behind this was to make sex understood and respected, and its responsibilities realised and to prevent the young from the pitfalls of earlier generations.

Not much progress has been made in this direction, but what has happened is that the door has been opened to the writers of "sexy" stories and plays—the opposite of what well-meaning people intended. Even the B.B.C. appears to accept these plays as sex education.

A short time ago I read over a play which had a good run in London, which young amateurs are performing, and which has been broadcast. In it a young girl is quite pleased with her brother because he is manly enough to be carrying on an affair with the maid, and she has seen him emerge from her bedroom.

And now, when as a result of this whirlpool of vicious propaganda, our youth are more puzzled than ever as to whether sexual intercourse for them is right or wrong, along come the advocates of contraceptives in slot machines, to settle the matter for them. The final touch!

I would like to add that though I now oppose these machines the time may come, if the present trend continues, when they may become a dire necessity.

Religionists have always told us that with the decline of religion, and the rise of freethought, would come free love and a careless attitude to marriage.

I begin to wonder if there is something in this, when I find freethinkers accepting the notion of sexual intercourse amongst youth without any qualms and simply talk of protecting them against dire results.

Personally, I am all for progress towards mental and physical perfection, and consider that uncontrolled sexual passion vulgarises and weakens moral fibre. The aim should be to frown upon it altogether in the young, and exercise control upon it when manhood and womanhood are reached.

Mr. Buller, in his defence of the people against V.D. seems to me to have selected a particularly dangerous double-edged weapon—the slot machine.

W. O. BOWER.

FREETHOUGHT DICTIONARY

GOD. The Supreme Being, Unknowable, Unimaginable and Incomprehensible, ranging from an anthropomorphic being to a mathematical symbol.

In dealing with Gods, Devils, Cockatrices, Unicorns, Dragons, and similar imaginary Biblical creations, one of the most important considerations is to arrive at a correct estimate of their birth, or, to be more exact, their origin. In the case of the Jewish and Christian god this is particularly the case, because a full understanding of his origin gives a full understanding of his continued existence—or his demise, as the case may be.

A study of anthropology will show that none of the gods was born. Just like man, they evolved. The evolution can be traced from the earliest primitive man, surrounded by beneficent or hostile forces; the same forces being beneficent at one time and hostile at another. To such a man these forces were actual entities. They had personality and could smile or frown. What more natural than an attempt to keep on good terms with them, to propitiate them in order to get more smiles and fewer frowns? This is possibly the earliest

beginning of the gods; not in the intellect, but in the emotions.

To keep on good terms with his neighbours, presents were useful; therefore to keep on good terms with the sun and rain presents would also be useful. Here we see the origin of sacrifice, soon extended from the individual to the family, the tribe, the nation; because all suffered or prospered equally.

In such a community all knowledge was traditional. If a burnt offering in the year dot had resulted in a good harvest, it was logical that a bigger and better burnt offering many years later would be at least equally efficacious. If the sun and the rain did not consume the roasted mammoth, prepared at the cost of much time, trouble and probably loss of life, it certainly should not be wasted. Perhaps the elements are not hungry to-day and we certainly are. Let us partake with the elements. Here is the beginning of communion.

It is now easy to see how these elemental forces become of heroic stature and then evolve into supernatural beings or gods. They are in all cases extensions of the human personality. When men slept they dreamed and those dreams were real. If a man could have marvellous adventures in his sleep, he must certainly possess an alter ego, a spirit or a soul.

We have to-day a great concord of agreement that God, should He exist, is utterly indifferent to man—an infinite force carrying out incomprehensible processes without the slightest regard for the welfare of man, or just about as much as man has for the ants on which his number nine boot has just trodden.

F. W. RENNIE.

CORRESPONDENCE

METAPHYSICS

Sir,—While one can appreciate Mr. Simmons' attempt to spread "gaiety, sprightliness, and cheerful good humour," one can do so with the limitation that there is a time and a place for everything, judging from the usual tone of *The Freethinker* it would appear that Mr. Simmons would find more congenial company in the pages of "Stories for Little Arthur" and in contributing to *Comic Cuts*. Freethinkers are not usually associated with "cheerful good humour"; on the contrary, I find them for the most part appallingly respectable, taking themselves much too seriously. Just as firmly entrenched behind their own prejudices as the more ignorant believers.

If, as he admits, his annoyance has nothing to do with the validity of my arguments, why did he mention the fact of his annoyance? Mr. Simmons is under an illusion when he thinks that I am either annoyed or that I am "foaming at the mouth."

Mr. Simmons' justification (for what is perhaps his inability to appreciate the thoughts of others) for his superior instrument, i.e., home-made criteria, is indeed pathetic. I note that although he is contemptuous of "thoughts out of a book," nevertheless that does not stop him from using them. One is perfectly justified in asking him how much of his present knowledge was arrived at through entirely independent reasoning, and how much was arrived at from the thoughts and suggestions of others. After all one must not live too much in a vacuum—and thus become vacuous. Let there be no mistake about this, unless one is exceedingly solid and full of one's own self-importance, together with a complacency which would make a cow look worried, one must acknowledge the superiority of the mental faculties of others.

When Mr. Simmons does read books of a philosophical, logical, or metaphysical nature, that will be the time for him to favour us with his opinions about the same. Sufficient it is to point out that the anti-metaphysician is a—metaphysician.

Mr. Simmons' criteria for judging the truth of a proposition is really naive: "An event is true for me if I judge that it will probably happen." He illustrates his doctrine of probability as follows: (he states) "There is a world of difference between the possibility and the probability of my (his) dying rich." Allow me to remind him that "probability" is a term of modality and, as such, cannot be applied to events. That is to say, events do not probably occur.—Yours, etc.,

VERNON CARTER.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

Report of Executive Meeting held June 15, 1950

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the Chair.

Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosetti, Ridley, Johnson, Ebury, Woodley, Page, Corstorphine, Barker, Mrs. Quinton and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read.

Financial statement presented. A report on the Annual Conference in Sheffield included appreciation for the local arrangements made by the Sheffield Branch, particularly the Secretary, Mr. A. Samms. Conference report to be re-printed from *The Freethinker* and circulated to branches and members. Conference resolutions sent to the Home Office and Labour Party acknowledged. An article based on "The Inquisition" was ordered to be printed in leaflet form for distribution.

A pending legacy of about £375 from a sympathiser in Ceylon was reported. Arrangements for indoor lectures were discussed and decisions made. Mr. F. A. Ridey will attend the International Summer School in Brittany during the autumn on behalf of the N.S.S.

Mrs. M. Quinton and Messrs. Griffiths and A. C. Rosetti were elected as the Benevolent Fund Committee. Mr. F. A. Hornbrook was co-opted to the Executive. New members were admitted to Glasgow and Kingston Branches and to the Parent Society. The Executive is alive to the case of the Member for Belfast West and his seat in the House of Commons; a decision to pass and forward a resolution of protest was deferred pending the result of the matter raised by the Member for Hornchurch.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, 27th July, and the proceedings closed.

JOHN SEIBERT, General Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Burnley Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
 Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
 Enfield.—Saturday, June 24, 5-45 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
 Hapton.—Wednesday, June 28, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
 Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. BARKER.
 Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, June 21, 8 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK. (Bombed Site, St. Mary's Gate).—Lectures every Lunch Hour, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.
 North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—12 noon: Messrs. F. A. RIDLEY and R. A. CALVERLEY. (Highbury Corner).—7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.
 Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Messrs. T. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
 Rawtenstall (Irwell Bridge).—Friday, June 23, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. CLAYTON.
 Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
 West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Euripides—A Great Greek Rebel," Mr. H. LENNARD.
 South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1.).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Inspiration of Sacred Music," Mr. JOSEPH McCABE.
 West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Loco. Men's Institute, 62, Forest Lane, Stratford).—Tuesday, June 27, 8 p.m.: A Meeting.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION. By Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

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

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