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Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

New Light on Christian Origins

A RECENT discovery in the desert of Judea was reported not long ago in *The Times* (May 27, 1950), and seems worth commenting upon here, not only on account of its considerable intrinsic interest, but, also, because it may eventually be found to shed light upon the hitherto unsolved problem of the origins of Christianity. The document in question is one amongst a number recently discovered in the deserts of Palestine and its contents were, according to our contemporary, *The Times*, first revealed in a lecture to a learned society in Paris upon May 26 last, by a French Orientalist, M. Sommer Dupont. "His conclusions," declares *The Times*, "cast a flood of new light on the religious history of Palestine in the century before Christianity."

The MS. in question is a commentary upon the book of Habbakuk which is ranked in our Bibles as eighth in the list of the so-called "minor prophets," and which is dated by the *Encyclopedia Biblica* shortly before the Babylonian captivity of the Jews round about 600 B.C. The newly discovered commentary upon the prophecy of Habbakuk is dated by its French translator as having been written about 41 B.C., shortly after the Romans had first conquered Palestine under the great general Pompey in 63 B.C. This event, as also the subsequent murder of Pompey and of his great rival and eventual conqueror, Julius Caesar, is mentioned by inference in the text (47-44 B.C.), as the author of the commentary refers to the last High Priest of the Maccabean Dynasty, Hyrcanus, as still alive when he wrote, the date must be before 40 B.C., when this Maccabean High Priest died.

The author, writing in the first century B.C., was, naturally, not a scientific historian, and his commentary adds nothing to our knowledge of the Book of Habbakuk, but, as its French editor demonstrates, it does add a good deal to our knowledge both of the ancient Near East in general and of Jewish religious history in particular. For, following what seems to us, nowadays, the bizarre rabbinical exegesis, shortly to be imitated by the early Christian Fathers of relating ancient prophecies exclusively to the events of the commentator's own day, our unknown commentator, writing some six centuries after Habbakuk's original prophecy, applies it to contemporary events in the first century B.C. Thus, the "Chaldeans" to whom the prophet referred, were imagined by his commentator to be the Romans who, under Pompey, took Jerusalem on the sacred "Day of Atonement" in 63 B.C., and not the actual Chaldeans (or Babylonians) who captured it some five centuries earlier in Habbakuk's own day under King Nebuchadnezzar.

As a result of this curious delusion, the author gives us a detailed description of the Near East and its Roman conquerors in the first century B.C., which seems to be unique of its kind and may prove to add considerably to our knowledge of that stormy and little-known period during which Rome built up her world-empire.

Of still greater interest is the light shed by our document upon the religious evolution of Judaism in its author's own day. For he evidently belonged to an heretical Jewish sect, here described as "The New Alliance," which had recently been subjected to a severe persecution by the orthodox Maccabean High Priest. M. Sommer Dupont speculatively identifies this heretical sect whose historical existence is vouched for by the Jewish historian, Josephus, and also by the Roman author Pliny, neither of whom mention "The New Alliance." Our French savant is of the opinion that the MSS. just discovered in Palestine, including the commentary in Habbakuk, were buried in the Judean desert by the Essenes when they fled from Jerusalem before the Romans destroyed it 70 A.D.

The sect of "The New Alliance," had, apparently, been founded by a teacher, whose name was too holy to be mentioned, but who is here styled as "The Elect of God" and the "Master of Justice." This religious leader had been put to death, after being humiliated and tortured, by the Maccabean High Priest, Aristobulus, shortly before the capture of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 B.C. The author of the commentary regards the subsequent capture of Jerusalem and of Aristobulus by the Romans, as a divine judgment upon the (orthodox) Jews for this crime and evidently expects the martyred "Master of Justice" to play an important part in the Messianic Day of Judgment which the author evidently holds to be close at hand.

The mental "atmosphere," as, equally, the actual events mentioned here in this newly discovered document are evidently strikingly similar to those which are portrayed in our Gospels, documents written in the same geographical area and under broadly similar conditions of religious belief and culture as was the earlier commentary upon Habbakuk discussed above. The time, only a short period of, perhaps, not more than a century, separated our commentary from the earliest writings of the new sect of Nazarenes, or Christians, as they later came to be called. Their content is, also, very similar; both the commentary upon Habbakuk and our Gospels assume, broadly, the same beliefs, the humiliation, torture and eventual martyrdom of the Messianic Founder of the sect—in the one case, Jesus, in the other, the anonymous "Master of Justice." Again, in both cases, the Day of Judgment is conceived as imminent, with the recently martyred Messiah playing the leading role. The Jewish High Priest figures in both stories, with, in the later Christian story, a supplementary trial by the Roman governor. Finally, "The New Alliance" is described as a secret society, which is, also, how the early Christians were described by the Roman Pliny, our earliest surviving non-Christian witness, to the historical existence of the new religion (112 A.D.).

How far may we regard all this as coincidence? Or was there, perhaps, some actual connection between the sect of "The New Alliance" and the later Nazarene sect which was the original germ of Christianity? As we

have just seen, the outlook in both cases was very similar, apart from the close resemblance between the recorded teachings of the Essenes, doubtfully identified here with "The New Alliance," and those attributed to the Jesus of the Gospels.

Our New Testament, as we have it to-day, seems compounded of obviously fictitious legends, interested clerical interpolations of a later date and, perhaps, some authentic history. However, even upon this last assumption, it by no means follows that there was an actual historical Jesus. The authentic sayings and doings in the Gospels may well be composite, the recorded utterances of several men, who need not necessarily have lived at the same time. One such may have been the Jesus—Ben Pandira—mentioned in the Talmud as having been martyred by the Maccabean Priest-King, Alexander Jammaeus (103-78 B.C.)—perhaps the "Master of Justice," the founder of "The New Alliance," who was martyred, according to our document by Alexander's son Aristobulus, may have been another of the actual sources of the later Gospel story.

If so, and it does not seem to be unlikely, the new manuscript discovery in Judea may well prove to be an important contribution to the still unsolved enigma of the actual historical origins of Christianity.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE AFFIRMATIONS AND HERESIES OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell is Volume V of the Library of Living Philosophers, Evanston, Illinois, 1946. This work extends to 816 pages and mainly consists in analytical essays contributed by eminent experts, including Albert Einstein, which deal with the many themes embraced by Russell in his various publications. It also contains an exhaustive bibliography, while Russell prefaces the book with an attractive autobiography entitled *My Mental Development*, and he replies to his critics in the concluding chapter.

In his autobiographical sketch, Russell observes that his parents, Lord and Lady Amberley, died when he and his brother were children. Reared in the home of the first Earl Russell—his grandfather—the boy heard so little of his dead parents that they seemed shrouded in mystery. "It was not until I was twenty-one," he remarks, "that I came to know the main outlines of my parents' lives and opinions; I then found, with a sense of bewilderment, that I had gone through almost exactly the same mental and emotional development as my father had."

In accordance with family tradition, Amberley was expected to enter Parliament, which he did for a brief period, although he was too intellectually honest for political life. When of age, Amberley avowed his unbelief in Christianity and became a disciple of John Stuart Mill. Bertrand's parents not only shared Mill's Radical opinions, but also his advocacy of female emancipation and birth control. Then, at the 1868 Election, it was reported that Amberley, then a candidate, had asserted that birth control should be seriously considered by the medical profession. "This," Bertrand avers, "let loose a campaign of vilification and slander. A Catholic Bishop declared that he advocated infanticide; he was called in print 'a filthy foul-mouthed rake'; on election day cartoons were exhibited accusing him of immorality, altering his name to 'Vice-count Amberley,' and accusing him of advocating 'the French and American system.' By these means he was defeated." He never returned

to public life, but devoted his days to the composition of his invaluable *Analysis of Religious Belief*, which appeared after his untimely death.

Lady Amberley not only studied science but addressed meetings in favour of female equality, a doctrine highly unpopular in the Victorian 'sixties, while her husband scandalised convention when he decided that his two sons should be given a secular education "and appointed two free-thinkers as our guardians. The Court of Chancery, however, at the request of my grandparents," writes Russell, "set aside the will, and I enjoyed the benefits of a Christian upbringing."

Bertrand Russell's grandfather died in 1878, but his grandmother continued to influence the boy's training, although he rejected her Puritanical opinions. But even she had sceptical ancestry, for we learn that "Her maternal grandfather suffered obloquy for declaring, on the basis of the thickness of the lava on the slopes of Etna, that the world must have been created before B.C. 4004. One of her great-grandfathers was Robertson the historian of Charles V."

In his widow's estimation, Lord John, later Earl Russell, was a great reformer. He had energetically supported the Reform Act of 1832; encouraged Mazzini and Garibaldi in their strivings for Italian unity, while his activities for social betterment, as presented by his adoring widow, stimulated young Bertrand's ambition to do something to redress the grievances of the age.

In the home library he found volumes of Machiavelli, Swift, Gibbon, ever his best loved historian, and the works of Andrew Marvell. He was not supposed to read any of these authors, but he evidently perused and enjoyed them as virtually forbidden fruit. In any event, he tells us that his delight in historical studies was awakened and increased by "the fact that my family had been prominent in English history since the early sixteenth century. I was taught English history as a record of the struggle against the King for constitutional liberty. William Lord Russell, who was executed under Charles II, was held up for special admiration, and the inference was encouraged that rebellion is often praiseworthy."

Amid many heresies, when a boy, Bertrand clung to a faith in God, because a First Cause seemed indispensable. In his 'teens, he speculated constantly concerning free will, predestination, immortality and other religious themes.

For a short time, he was able to discuss these problems with an Agnostic tutor, but he was soon dismissed "presumably because he was thought to be undermining my faith." So to prevent anyone from suspecting his thoughts he embodied them in Greek letters which no one else could decipher. He suffered from the despondency which so frequently accompanies loneliness of spirit during adolescence, especially among those endowed with superior mental power. This transient melancholia he erroneously attributed to his loss of religious belief. Still, he was determined to prevent his emotions overcoming his reason and, after an intellectual conflict of three years' duration, he arrived at conclusions concerning theology that have been more or less maintained ever since. He assures us that he "discarded first free will, then immortality; I believed in God until I was just 18, when I found in Mill's *Autobiography* the sentence: 'My father taught me that the question "Who made me?" cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question "Who made God?"' In that moment I decided that the First Cause argument is fallacious."

At this time Russell read very extensively both in prose and poetry. Ultimately, he became acquainted with Shelley, whom no one had ever mentioned, and this magnificent Freethought poet and social reformer became for many years one of his most cherished mentors. Mill's *Liberty* and his other writings impressed him deeply. But it was only when Russell arrived in Cambridge that domestic restraints were removed. By the Cam, he found unchecked freedom of thought and discussion among the young intellectuals. Dr. A. N. Whitehead, who afterwards collaborated with him in the composition of the important *Principia Mathematica*, introduced him to many Cambridge men whose friendship proved lifelong. It was a glorious time and the peaceful progress and prosperity of the Victorian era seemed assured. In truth, observes Russell: "For those who have been young since 1914 it must be difficult to imagine the happiness of those days."

Among Russell's intimates at Cambridge were the Trevelyan brothers—the statesman, the historian, and the translator of Lucretius—Lowes Dickenson, Dr. McTaggart, G. E. Moore and other heretics.

The idealist, McTaggart, persuaded Russell that the celebrated English empiricists, Hume, Locke, Mill and others, were crude, so Kant and Hegel were adopted as profound philosophers. Later, Bradley's *Appearance and Reality* was hailed as a philosophical revelation to be later discarded as inconclusive. Then, Kant was dismissed as an apostle of mystification, while Hegel was put in his proper place. In fact, throughout his whole philosophical career, Russell's search for certainty has led to weary wanderings. As Dr. C. D. Broad remarks with slight exaggeration: "As we all know, Mr. Russell produces a different system of philosophy every few years." Certainly, Russell's published opinions have varied very considerably from time to time; alike in social science, physics and metaphysics. Turning from absolute idealism he embraced and embraces neo-realism, while his attenuated religious concepts seem distinctly fluid. Verily, the speculations and assumptions of metaphysicians recall T. H. Huxley's tart saying, that philosophy is largely connected with the moon.

Contemporary Christian apologists sometimes excuse the existence of evil by divine inability to prevent it. On this Russell comments: "If a world which is partly bad may have been created by a wholly benevolent God, a world which is partly good may have been created by a wholly malevolent Devil. Neither seems to me likely, but the one is as likely as the other. The fact that the unpleasant possibility is never noticed shows the optimistic bias which seems to me to infect most writing on the philosophy of religion."

T. F. PALMER.

MODERN MIRACLE MAKERS

A MAGAZINE published this April in Prague, called *Czechoslovak Life*, brings vividly to the surface the tricks of Catholic Modern Miracle Makers. These pope-serving priests can have little hope of the Czech authorities casting a friendly eye on such occurrences; more especially when the case in question was so pointedly political.

It appears that one Sunday morning towards the end of last year, the Catholic peasants of a little township in Bohemia sat back in their pews as their parish priest, Josef Toufar, mounted the steps of his pulpit to deliver the sermon.

When the rustle of skirts and shuffling of feet had subsided the priest read out the church notices for the

coming week and announced the bans of marriage, placing each book as he finished with it in a little pile on the pulpit's edge.

"After a slight pause, he flung out his left hand towards the sanctuary in an oratorical gesture, announcing the text, 'Among you is standing He who you do not know, for here in the Sanctuary is our Saviour.'

"His tone and the flourish of his hand served the double purpose of directing the attention of his listeners to the altar and diverting it from himself.

"What happened next was vouched for by no less than 19 of the small congregation gathered in the Church of Cihost for Sunday Mass.

"These 19 people swear that the cross on top of the tabernacle in the middle of the altar swayed several times, making a more pronounced inclination to the west each time and finally coming to a rest, turned slightly from the front to face westward.

"And they were right—the cross had indeed moved, had in fact demonstrated that it preferred a western alignment to an eastern one.

"What these simple peasants did not know, what they could not conceivably think of at that moment, was that their parish priest, the man of God, had his right hand concealed by the pile of books, pulling on a wire.

"The wire ran along the wall in such a way that it was concealed by the electric wiring and passing over sundry bent nails was fastened to a piece of cat-gut, which in its turn was fastened to one side of the cross.

"The base of the cross was secured against any shifting of its position by elastic stretched across the base and a short spiral spring was tensioned to pull the cross out of perpendicular when the wire was slackened. All the fastenings on the cross, as well as gut and spring, were hidden behind a screen of artificial flowers round its base.

"Certain members of the congregation, though, were not caught so easy, and after a few investigations the method of operation was soon discovered."

The priest, when questioned about the "miracle" admitted his part in the trick, but what the people of Cihost wanted to know was whose was the hand that guided the priest, who pulled the string that swayed the cross? It was the Holy Year hand of the Vatican.

This political gesture on behalf of Jesus (?) is equalled with one by another member of the clergy who recently declared that he saw the Virgin Mary on an American tank, waving the "Old Glory" above her head!

The article concludes by saying, "such old wives' tales caused quite a lot of laughter but always there are some who believe; and always, for a few days or so, confusion and doubt hold sway where the 'vision' has been seen.

"It is true that common sense quickly prevails—but the purpose is serious. This so-called miracle at Cihost, like the Virgin Vision, is a trial cast to test the waters of disturbance and disintegration.

"The methods employed are an index of the bankruptcy of ideas among those who seek to undermine a regime which is bringing to the working people a measure of progress and peace hitherto unknown in Czechoslovakia."

Such are the tricks of a few Catholic Czechoslovaks, and if there is any moral to be gleaned from the story it is surely "Vigilance—Eternal Vigilance!"

J. CORBETT.

LIFT UP YOUR HEADS, An Anthology for Freethinkers. By William Kent. Price, cloth 5s., paper 3s. 6d.; postage 3d.

MATERIALISM RESTATED. Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.

ACID DROPS

An R.A.F. Chaplain has something to say about the abolition of compulsory Church Parades in the Air Force, and very instructive it is. He writes to the *Church Times* pointing out that "it was expected that the fruit of carefully planned teaching would be an increased attendance at church services," but it did not work out like that at all. Week-end leave played havoc with these services, and "many of those in authority are disquieted by the small effect that chaplains are having on personnel in the Service." Little opportunity is given for "corporate worship," and little progress is made in religious instruction. And in the end, this particular chaplain has to confess that "present day Christianity cuts no ice," and "too long have the vagueness and sentimentality of Anglicanism been reflected in its mode of worship." But perhaps the real reason for the complete failure is that the R.A.F. personnel has found out that Christianity is not true.

Communists have well established the singing of the "Internationale" at all or most of their meetings—so it is particularly interesting to find a large section of Poles, who are not Communists, also singing it with gusto and religious fervour. The particular verse which denounces—according to a religious journal—tyrants who brutally oppress the masses, is the favourite verse. Rather ironical, if nothing else.

For the first time, the "Sacred Host" was carried through the city of Bootle the other Sunday, with nearly 2,000 people helping to perpetuate one of the grossest superstitions in religious history. Plenty of similar processions are now going on regularly throughout many towns calling themselves Protestant, with Protestants looking reverently on. Any religion is better than no religion, say our Protestant friends, and so they watch this Catholicising of England as placidly as possible—in the interests of religious "freedom." If this country ever really becomes Catholic, the word freedom will become obsolete—and Catholics admit it.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is reported as saying, "that if it were a choice, he would accept some worsening of children's education as a price to be paid in order to keep their education within the concept of the family." What he means, in plain language, is that religion must come first in State schools, even if the child's education suffers. There is nothing new in the Archbishop's attitude towards education, it is the common clerical recognition that education is a cure for Christianity.

A writer in the *Fulham Chronicle* (London) was horrified because not a church in Fulham gave any support to The Fulham Peace Committee. Well, why should they? The Bible tells us that the Lord is a man of war, Christianity has poured out torrents of human blood in religious warfare, and during the two world wars the Christian clergy were second to none in fanning the fire of war by their sermons and speeches. We congratulate the Fulham clergy on being consistent for once—Christianity and war have always been close companions.

The Rector of St. Edmund's, Exeter, advised clergymen at the Exeter Diocesan Conference at Barnstaple, to visit public houses regularly and hold services therein. The Rector has something there that should rapidly attract new recruits to the ministry.

"The Sabbath killjoys (Lord's Day Observance Society) have sufficient power to make many M.P.s toe the line irrespective of their own views on the subject," writes *Reynold's News*, in answer to a correspondent who queries whether the M.P.s who have pledged themselves against Sunday entertainments represent a majority opinion. Like the Negro slaves who, even when the threat had passed, cringed automatically when the whip cracked, so do some M.P.s at the slightest threat of the loss of a few votes.

The Rev. W. H. Elliot grumbles because people pay large sums to go to a cinema, yet object to paying a little less for a seat in church. Until Jesus has the drawing power of a Clark Gable, and Mary the attraction of a Betty Grable, the "Radio Parson" will have to go on grumbling. There seems no doubt that God needs some Hollywoodian boosting.

As the "Teachers' World" discovered that many of the teachers who buy this journal were more or less ignorant of Catholic theology, an expert was called in and the following is its explanation of the term "Immaculate Conception":—

For members of the Roman Catholic Church the doctrine (of the Incarnation) is of such primary importance that they declare Mary also to have been born of a virgin; and this doctrine is called the Immaculate Conception.

Cardinal Griffin and his galaxy of Bishops all probably fainted when they read this remarkable—but, alas, totally wrong—explanation.

The International "inter-faith" Commission which is to be set up to safeguard the shrines in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, has met with some opposition. In fact, the Rev. W. M. Kelly was very emphatic when he told the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that so many of these holy places are of such doubtful authenticity and cluttered up with tawdry superstition and the grossest form of commercialism, that the Commission should be rejected. Mr. Kelly is much too optimistic if he thinks that superstition and particularly commercialism can be avoided where "holy places" indeed where Religion in general is concerned.

The Archdeacon of Nottingham in an address to young parents said how difficult it was to help children in the formation of their ideas about God. Of course it is, but only because the Archdeacon has a prehistoric mind. Would it not be very difficult to convince workers the use of prehistoric flint implements is to-day necessary for good workmanship? Freethinkers who leave their parents and children are better for having missed a less difficult.

Many of our devout Christians deplore the godlessness of men and women to-day and bleat nostalgically of the good old days. They may have been good old days for the nigger-drivers of employers who were free to exploit their wretched wage-slaves. In *They Also Serve* by P. Hoffman, published by The Porcupine Press, we learn a little of those good old days. Mr. Hoffman cites the case of a Glasgow Grocer whose men employees worked 80 hours per week and the women 74 hours; and in busy seasons this was often increased to 100 hours per week.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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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.

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.

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

The Manchester Branch N.S.S. is having some rowdy interruptions at its open air meetings. The corrective for that is a well supported platform, and champions of free speech and fair play are asked to lend their support for that object. The meetings are held as follows: Sundays, at 3 p.m. in Platt Fields; 7-15 p.m. at Blitzed Site, St. Mary's Gate. Weekday lunch hour, 1 p.m. at Blitzed Site. Messrs. McCall, Smith, Woodcock and Billing will be the speakers, and, given a fair hearing, the message of Freethought can be delivered and questions invited.

Will any readers in Hull, Yorks, willing to co-operate in the formation of a branch of the National Secular Society there get in communication with Mr. W. Fraser, 11, Penzance Terrace, Providence Row, Beverley Road, Hull. There is nothing like active Freethought work to give one a stimulating interest in the movement, so why not become one of the original members of a Hull Branch of the N.S.S.

That indefatigable worker for Thomas Paine, Mr. Joseph Lewis, who managed to get one statue of the author of *The Age of Reason* erected in Paris, will soon see another one put up, this time in New Jersey. It has taken the sculptor, George J. Lober, two years to finish. Originally cast in bronze, it is now to be gold-leafed, an operation which will add about £1,000 more to its first cost—about £17,500, all subscribed by the public. So far, nearly £14,000 have been raised. It is a fine achievement, and Mr. Lewis is to be congratulated on his splendid work to perpetuate the memory of one of the world's greatest citizens.

Religious pilgrims can now go to both Rome and Lourdes for 67 guineas—a quite insignificant sum when one considers the "spiritual" advantages obtained. It may even be possible to see the "Holy" Father who, while he may be a most estimable person, is about as "holy" as the average railway porter. Rome and Lourdes even may well be worth a visit as historic places of interest, but the "holy" year business is—just a business stunt to rake in money for the Church; and perhaps a good many pilgrims are fully aware of this.

"HOW TO HANDLE AN ATHEIST"

ALTHOUGH Charles Bradlaugh has been dead for nearly 60 years, so strong was the impression he made on the Christian Church that it is not surprising to find his name constantly creeping up in tracts and parish magazines as well as more authoritative Christian works. If a lie can be worked in to the detriment of the great Iconoclast, even a threat of boiling oil would hardly stop a thorough believer in Jesus Christ from using it; in fact, where Bradlaugh is concerned it is nearly always a thumping big lie when uttered by the average clergyman.

For example, somebody sent us a leaflet advertising the 75th Anniversary of St. Stephen's Church, East Twickenham, and I certainly would not have noticed it but for the fact that it contains a short article, "How to Handle an Atheist," on Bradlaugh and the late Hugh Price Hughes—the name of a Methodist clergyman better known to the older readers of this journal than to the present generation.

It appears from this that Charles Bradlaugh challenged Hughes to debate with him, "the validity of the claims of Christianity," and that "London was greatly interested."

Now, how true is this yarn it is impossible to say, for no dates or any references are given, and I cannot check-up the story. There is no mention anywhere of the name of Hughes in the *Life of Bradlaugh* by his daughter, and if there is any reference to this challenge in the *National Reformer*, I should like to be given the dates. I cannot categorically call this story a lie—but I certainly think it is.

For one thing, Bradlaugh was not in the habit of going about challenging people, though he was always ready to meet a representative Christian if a debate could be arranged. He held a large number of debates, some of them with very competent men like the Rev. Mr. Westerby; others with fools and liars who merely discredited the Christian cause. One thing could be said about Bradlaugh, and that is, he never shirked a debate, and a man with the reputation of Mr. Price Hughes would have been very easy meat for him. But the fact which cannot be denied is that the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes was a convicted liar of the worst kind. The first editor of this journal, G. W. Foote, convicted him in his two pamphlets, *A Lie in Five Chapters* and in *The Atheist Shoemaker*, of about the worst piece of deliberate lying I have ever come across in the course of many years of hard reading.

Hughes published a little work called *The Atheist Shoemaker*, purporting to give the life story of a well known Atheist who had lectured before Atheists at the old Hall of Science and elsewhere and who, while lying ill, had become convinced by both Mr. Hughes and some Wesleyan women that only in Christ Jesus was there any hope for him in the other world, and he was thus "converted." Hughes claimed that this story was true, "and not fiction," that it was in sober fact "a literal illustration of the spirit and work of the West London Mission." The convert himself insisted that Mr. Hughes should publish his sad story and the magnificent work for Christ accomplished by such fervent workers—though, strangely enough, the real names of the Atheist Shoemaker and his family and the relevant witnesses were most carefully concealed. With that fine modesty which all true Christians embrace so eagerly, the only non-fictional name in his book is that of the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes.

Footo bluntly called the story an impudent lie—at first claiming that there was even no convert. There was no Atheist in the Freethought movement who corresponded to the poor young fellow dying so young, who had caused such enthusiasm when speaking for Atheism that his voice was often drowned by “continuous cheering.” None of the members of the N.S.S. could remember such a speaker on Clerkenwell Green, or in Victoria Park or the Hall of Science.

A number of Hughes's fellow Christians, like Spurgeon, urged him to give the name of the converted Atheist, for even they were not ready to stomach a deliberate lie for Christ's sake; and Bradlaugh, in the *National Reformer*, inserted this paragraph:—

“The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes publishes, as if true, a story of a converted Atheist shoemaker. As Mr. Hughes repeatedly mentions me by name, and as many of the incidents in his volume are clearly untrue, I invite him in common decency to give me the means of judging for myself how far he has been misled. I hesitate to suppose that he can be the wilful misleader.”

Footo, of course, had no such qualms. He called Hughes a liar, and proved it in his pamphlet, *The Atheist Shoemaker*. And Bradlaugh was later to insist that Hughes's story “contains some incidents which I know to be untrue, and contains other statements which I believe to be untrue.”

In the end, though Hughes did his utmost not to reply to this criticism, he was forced to do so, almost whining that we had no right to ask for particulars.

Goaded into action, he turned to George Jacob Holyoake, as a Freethinker himself, and without giving anybody a hint what had happened, or how it happened, got him to write the “truth” for the benefit of the readers of *The Freethinker*. Now Holyoake, in his younger days, was a great asset to Freethought, but his intense jealousy of Bradlaugh, and his passionate toadying to prominent people, later made him quite the worst “unipire” possible for testing the truth of this particular story; and one has only to read his silly *apologia* to see how sadly Holyoake had fallen from the great days when he was editing the *Reasoner* and writing his *Trial of Theism*.

Briefly, he was completely fooled by Hughes—as that wily Methodist knew quite well Holyoake could be fooled. He appears to have believed everything that Hughes and “Sisters Beatrice and Ethel” could tell him. As Footo pointed out, “Holyoake simply interviewed the concocters of the Atheist Shoemaker story and asked them, ‘Is it true?’ They said ‘Yes,’ and he gave it his certificate.” Hughes was in raptures, of course, but Footo soon afterwards found out the *real* story, for the parents of the “convert” got into touch with him, and that settled the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes for ever.

The “convert” not only never was an Atheist, but he was actually a member of the Salvation Army, and his “conversion” was merely a change to Methodism. His wife was always a fervent Christian, and he never had lectured anywhere. The story was such an impudent lie that Hughes eventually withdrew his book from circulation.

And this is the man Bradlaugh is supposed to have challenged to debate and, “in great discomfiture,” we are unctuously told, “and chagrin, publicly withdrew his challenge for the debate and London smiled.” Why did Bradlaugh thus withdraw? Because Hughes wanted to bring 100 men and women “redeemed from sin and shame by the influence of Christianity,” and challenged

Bradlaugh to do the same for Atheism. He was willing for Bradlaugh to bring 10 only; and as even this was too much, “Bradlaugh publicly withdrew his challenge.”

I cannot test this story unless the exact dates are given and I cannot so far declare it to be a lie. But I ask the writer of the article, or the Vicar of St. Stephen's Church, to supply the information. The columns of this journal are open to him, and I hope that he will have more courage in defence of his creed and his reputation than that Prince of Liars, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes.

H. CUTNER.

TWO VIEWS OF HISTORY

ONE of the most rightfully respected of all Christian thinkers is Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Even those who disagree with everything for which Dr. Niebuhr stands will admit his eminence as a scholar and a theologian. When such a man sets out to analyse the facts of human history as he would interpret them, even the most rigid of Freethinkers cannot forbear to cheer.

Faith and History (Nisbet; 18s.) is, therefore, a really important book; Christian thinkers would probably say that it is one of the most important books of our era. I am not at all sure that I do not agree with that myself, for it seems to me to be one of the most acute analyses of the Secularist outlook that I have ever read.

Expressed in the briefest possible terms, Dr. Niebuhr's position is that there has been held, in the past century or so, a fairly general belief that man was gradually getting closer and closer to perfection, in the economic, political, and moral world; the feeling usually held was that the route to perfection lay largely through political and economical changes. No one, of course, who looks at the two World Wars through which those now middle-aged have lived, and at the growth of the various totalitarianisms of both the Right and the Left, can have any belief in the *automatic* progress of mankind towards perfection. The events of the past thirty or forty years, in fact, have considerably disturbed what Dr. Niebuhr calls “secular optimism.”

Over against that view of existence Dr. Niebuhr sets the Christian view as he sees it—a view that accepts the evils of the world and to some extent attributes them to a stubbornness at the heart of man. Dr. Niebuhr's book is a long book; it is extremely closely argued in detail, so that I cannot possibly summarise it here as it really deserves. The main point to make in this note is that all who pay attention to the climate of opinion in our time should come around to a realisation that this is a genuine division of thought, and that there is something to be said on both sides. As Mr. Gerald Bullett pointed out over ten years ago, in his still stimulating book, *Problems of Religion*, the real division of opinion is not merely between Atheists and Agnostics on one side and Christian believers on the other; it is really between those who apprehend some kind of mystery at the heart of things and those who think that with the growth of scientific knowledge and political planning the progress and wisdom of man will steadily accelerate.

Dr. Niebuhr, I think, would agree with Mr. Bullett's analysis, and would say that the ideal Christian thinker is the man who sees that mystery as something at the heart of history. And, however much readers of these columns may disagree with this diagnosis of things, it is difficult to assert that the Christian philosophy of

history, as set out by Reinhold Niebuhr, is not consistent and reasonable. Naturally, one does not expect a Christian theologian to produce books with which Free-thinkers can agree. What one does expect (and so rarely gets) is an unambiguous statement of a point of view and a frank facing of facts.

JOHN ROWLAND.

The Cambridge Union passed a resolution, after a debate, in favour of increased aid for voluntary schools—which meant, in fact, that it was in favour of helping Roman Catholic schools out of public funds to teach its religion. To his credit, Dr. C. E. M. Joad opposed the motion—he was in favour of parents, he insisted, "determining the kind of education their children should receive," and even in favour of Marxist Communists seeing that their children are taught their beliefs but, "I don't like being asked to pay for it," he added. We welcome these discussions, for the more there are, the more these religious squabbles will in the end pave the way to Secular Education, the only fair and possible solution.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Sir,—In the May 14 issue, under the above heading, H. Cutner truly writes: "Marx himself declared that he was not a Marxist." But when he states the late Prof. Harold Laski was rightly considered one of the intellectual heads of Marxism, if Marx could return he would surely again claim he was not a Marxist if Laski was a Marxian. Just imagine what Marx would have thought of Laski who is quite sure that Marx never thought of a commodity having a use value. If we turn to Marx's *Capital* the very first chapter and the second paragraph of that chapter we read: "A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference."

Then Marx devotes a great deal of space and time to elucidate the use value as well as the exchange value. Marx says the wealth of Capitalist society presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities. Its unit being a simple commodity, Marx shows its two-fold aspect, "that of use value and exchange value." Laski also mixes up what is now called the middle class with the middle class between the landlords and the serfs who have historically become the ruling class.

Again, where Marx shows the political state is a reflex of the particular economic basis of a given society, Laski has the political state a reflex of the ideas of that epoch. He credits Marx as an exponent of the "Idealist Conception of History."

In spite of Marx's careful demonstration of the twofold character of commodities, the use value and exchange value, that wheat, glass, paper, have all their own distinct use values realised in the process of consumption and have different measures such as a bushel of wheat, a yard of cotton, a quire of paper, Laski asserts Marx never mentioned that commodities must have a use value.

Laski was a falsifier of Marx either because he did not understand Marx, or did he have a special reason for doing so?

One writer puts it, that Laski's understanding of the Marxian Law of Value is about as perfect as the Choctaw Indians' understanding of the theory of relativity.—Yours, etc.,

PETER T. LECKIE (Canada).

CONTRACEPTIVES

Sir,—I think the article by Mr. S. E. Parker in your issue of May 14 was effectively criticised by Mr. Kenyon on May 28. Mr. G. Whit. Libby has since written on similar lines to Mr. Parker.

It is rather amazing that although Freethinkers have always claimed that morality had nothing to do with religion, as soon as a Freethinker says he is in favour of a high standard of sexual morality, he is accused of being a reactionary and a Religionist!

So that some Freethinkers have just as much difficulty in separating morality and religion as the Religionists have.—Yours, etc.,

W. O. BOWER.

MARX AND SURPLUS VALUE

Sir,—In your issue for June 11, Mr. Percy G. Roy quotes with approval Prof. Morgan's assertion "Marx's theory of Surplus Value for political economy" has the same significance for primeval history "that Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology."

Whatever may be claimed for Marx's application of Surplus Value, the theory was not his. He did not originate it, but took it over without acknowledgment. It was first put forward by William Thompson in 1824. *Das Capital* (I, 4, xii) has a citation from the Irishman's book, but omits any mention of the anterior theorising. Whether Marx was "jealous" of Thompson's priority is a matter for Mr. Roy and his friends to argue. The facts are as stated.—Yours, etc.,

"GOTH."

AMERICAN FILMS

Sir,—Mr. P. C. King does not make it quite clear if he approves of the "Christian" ethic of giving "the other cheek" and if he loathes the "Jewish" an "eye for an eye," etc. If he approves of the "actual peasant reformer" then, at least as far as his teaching is concerned, Mr. King is as Christian as most of the B.B.C. parsons who concentrate on Christ going about "doing good," and say as little about Christ's miracles, devils and angels as they can.

Personally, I despise the "give the other cheek" teaching, and much prefer the "eye for an eye." So do the majority of sensible people. And I thoroughly enjoy most American films.—Yours, etc.

H. CUTNER.

OBITUARY

H. J. V. TEMPLEMAN

With sorrow we announce the death of an old, sincere, and generous member of the N.S.S. and reader of *The Freethinker* in H. J. V. Templeman, of Bristol, which took place on June 11 after a short illness. He was a fine specimen of manhood in physique, character and principles, with a deep interest in the work of the National Secular Society and Freethought movement in general. His remains were cremated at the Bristol Crematorium and the ashes scattered. There was no religious ceremony.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: MESSRS. ROTHWELL and SHARPLES.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. H. DAY.
- 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.: MESSRS. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, G. WOODCOCK and R. BILLINGS. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Sunday, 7-45 p.m.: MESSRS. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, G. WOODCOCK and R. BILLINGS. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday, 8 p.m.: MESSRS. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, G. WOODCOCK and R. BILLINGS. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch Hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: MESSRS. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, G. WOODCOCK and R. BILLINGS.
- 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.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park, Herne Hill).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. L. EBURY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Mr. C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "The Centenary of Robert Louis Stevenson," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST. An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 9d.; postage 1d.

INFIDEL DEATHBEDS. By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

WHAT NEXT ?

I.

EDUCATION as embodied in our State and rate aided schools is at the parting of the ways. Which to choose must be decided swiftly and definitely.

Gone or going is discipline as meaning control of pupils by teachers, the former doing and learning what their teachers tell them to do, with punishments for failure and slighter praise and lesser rewards for obedience and competence in set tasks. These were mainly mechanical; mathematics, writing, reading, spelling, grammar, drawing, history, geography, science, chiefly chemistry and physics, with accuracy, technical proficiency and memorisation as ideals to be achieved.

Notably since 1919 those ideals have undergone more than revision or modernisation. They are being abandoned. Now prevailing are music in all forms, singing, playing instruments, choruses, dancing, miming, acting, debating, sketching, modelling, decorating, illustrating, swimming, games, sports, visits, journeys, film shows; anything and everything to make schools attractive, pleasant and agreeable; whilst work, effort, targets, drudgery are kept out of sight and thought, better discarded as not being liked by the pupils.

This is approved and encouraged by the authorities. Inspectors, Directors, Organisers, Supervisors, Educationists and Educationalists—a subtle difference between these last two—Psychologists, Child Welfare and Child Guidance Experts; all are agreed to give the child full scope for his personality, fling for his idiosyncrasies, outlet for his energies.

That being so we should go the whole logical course and abolish schools, because schooling means training, shaping, controlling, directing, and that is not to be done to children anymore. It is bad for them.

Not that they are to be kept at home, or allowed to play in the streets or elsewhere, or sent to work. Any of these is unthinkable, especially the last, which makes all lovers of juvenile rights shudder in horror.

II.

Instead schools should be re-opened as Clubs. This would be economy because the older buildings could be retained, well lighted and decorated in bright colours. Equipment would not cost more or be more difficult to get than that now installed in schools. Billiards, table tennis, bagatelle, chess, draughts, darts, airguns, quoits, bowls, ninepins, ludo, snakes-and-ladders, dice and every sort of indoor game which the taste and ingenuity of youth requires or demands from infancy up to the end of teens will be provided.

Adjacent would be playing fields for football, rugby, cricket, hockey, tennis, netball, stoolball, baseball and all outdoor games which youngsters play, as well as space for athletics, plain romping and cycle tracks.

Gramophones, radio and television sets and film projectors should be available, likewise telephones and typewriters. Visits to local cinemas, theatres, music halls, concerts, dances, public events and swimming baths would be arranged, as well as journeys, hikes, camps, Scout and Guide troops and other combined and social activities organised.

The laboratories must be abundantly stocked with experimental material as the workshops with tools, wood and metal. School gardens could be cultivated and animals reared. Plentiful mechanical and constructive toys and fitments there should be, beside a hall which may be used for dramatic performances and all manner

of entertainments. The library will be stocked with comics, juveniles and all literature which is popular with young readers.

All this being accomplished the style of teachers would be transformed, their title changed to Youth Leaders, though in practice they will do more following than leading, for no restraints or restrictions can be placed on young people's enterprise.

III.

For years the realisation has been growing that teaching is not an intellectual job. It never was an intellectual job. Cultured and learned men or women are out of place in schools, rarely successful, more often failures, disliked by children, unwanted by colleagues, a nuisance to the authorities and a misery to themselves.

The ideal teacher was strong, tough, beefy, noisy, cheerful bully, the dominating if not dictatorial type. He needed to have nerves of steel, a front of brass and a leather throat, to be more than a little an actor. A posturer in fact, for children are easily humbugged by a pretentious swaggering character. His affinities were with police, prison warders and asylum attendants, with whom teachers might have incorporated as one Trade Union.

So the teacher vanishing his place in Juvenile Clubs will be taken by sporting types of men and women. Fellows and girls able to play any and every kind of game, sing, dance, act, cycle, swim, walk, climb; proficient in physical activity and bodily exercise; will be required, devoting their lives to co-operating with younger generations in all the manifold ventures they like and choose to do.

Most of the Education Acts can be eliminated from the Statute Book when Juvenile Clubs have taken the place of schools. The majority will be unnecessary. Many of them are misnomers, having nothing to do with Education. Compulsory Education will disappear as superfluous and indeed meaningless. Compulsory Education is a contradiction in terms, the adjective nullifying the substantive.

Compulsory schooling we have had, a dismal business and largely a failure, enough so to make its abolition desirable. Education is an expansion which goes on continually from the moment the baby is born. It cannot be made compulsory. If any process in a child's life is compulsory it ceases to be educative.

IV.

The question may be asked: What about those children whose parents wish them to learn reading, writing and arithmetic, with the necessary technicalities of spelling, grammar and clear speech, followed as they grow older by mathematics, science, art or humanities, with cultural background, training in refinements of social life and learning duties involved in civilised communal life?

The answer is they will do as many of them do now. Pay for their children's education at schools where they know what is being done and taught, so can choose schools of whose methods and subjects they approve.

For the mass of children attending institutions supported out of public funds there should be entertainment, activity, sport, pleasure and amusement; in short Juvenile Clubs instead of schools.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

Romanism is the greatest foe of the individual. The Church is all; the man is nothing. Every Roman Catholic is part of the vast machinery of Romanism. The man does not count; he is counted.