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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

"Propaganda for Proper Geese"

A WITTY speaker during the last war is alleged to have described a particularly stupid hand-out of the then "Ministry of Information" as "propaganda for proper geese." Unfortunately, that kind of propaganda did not come to an end along with the "Ministry of Information" of unhappy memory; it still persists to-day. For the present generation is, par excellence, the age of propaganda; an art—from some points of view one could almost describe it as an exact science—the scope and influence of which has been enormously magnified and extended by the technical discoveries of modern times. For no such all-pervading institutions as the radio, the press, and the cinema, have ever been known before in human annals. They and their like have opened up new possibilities to governments and to powerful corporations and political parties which seek to sway the human mind and human passions in their own interests. For which reason, the age of propaganda, as we may accurately denominate the present century, has confronted Free-thought with problems of a nature and complexity which are different in degree and even in kind from those familiar to earlier, less technically developed ages.

It is not an accident, it is, indeed, an omen of sinister import that the first specifically designed organ of "propaganda" as, indeed, the name itself belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, the totalitarian form, par excellence, of Christianity. Indeed, even to-day in this age of science, of atoms—and of the Assumption!—the Roman Congregation "De Propaganda Fide," the Cardinal-President of which is still known in Rome as "The Red Pope," the "Ministry of Information," as it were, of the Catholic Church, is still probably the most influential, as it is certainly the most persistent and tenacious of the innumerable organisations for spreading propaganda in our contemporary world. Indeed, students of etymology may observe in the heavy Latin word "propaganda" something of the granite-like immovability of the Rock of Peter itself.

However, the name, and practice of propaganda have both long since quitted their originally exclusive ecclesiastical habitat and have acclimatised themselves to secular usage. The totalitarian regimes original to our age, whether of the political "Left" or "Right," Communism and Fascism, have thoroughly mastered, indeed, may be said to have revolutionised the art of propaganda; indeed, in the hands of such a specialist as the late Dr. Goebbels, the "Mephistopheles" of our era, propaganda may be said to have actually made the transition from an art to an exact science. What the left-wing Russian scientist, Dr. Serge Chakotin, has aptly described (in his book of that name) as "the rapid proportions unheard of and unknown to earlier less sophisticated generations.

The effective creation of what is virtually a new science, the "science" of corrupting, modifying, and

reducing to an exact common denominator the ideas of (what it is the fashion to term) "the general public," is one only made possible to-day by the technical innovations of our times; the mass-production of popular newspapers, the cinema, above all else, the radio; these are the indispensable technical adjuncts of the new totalitarian propaganda. No doubt, there are more to come in the near future; indeed, already, one shudders to contemplate the possibilities of mass-corruption inherent in the current rapid evolution of Television!

It must be pointed out in the foregoing connection; it is, indeed, strictly relevant to and for the future of Free-thought in particular, that the evolution in recent years of the technique of mass-propaganda has altered, and has altered gravely to their detriment, the position of what may be termed the "advanced movements" which, in one way or another, represent the thinking minority upon whom, in the last resort, both intellectual and social progress depend for their validity. For only consider this changed situation: in the last century, the advocates of radical change stood exactly in the same relation to the unthinking majority as did the ruling interests which they opposed. The great revolutionary figures of the 19th century, no matter from what precise angle, a Thomas Paine, a Karl Marx, a Charles Bradlaugh, had access to the same kind of platforms as their conservative opponents from which to put over their iconoclastic gospel; their audience was, no doubt, smaller than was the unthinking majority but, at least, it was only quantitatively different; the actual means of propaganda at the disposal of both radicals and reactionaries was precisely the same.

To-day, the above state of things belongs to a vanished past. To-day, the means of propaganda of which conservative orthodoxy disposes, differs in kind as well as in degree from that which is now alone at the disposal of the radical minority, the forward-looking minority which, as always, is the custodian of the future. For only money, the power of the purse, or power, the prerogative of the politician and the bureaucrat, have access to the vast unseen audiences which are available to the radio, the press and the cinema screen. The political and religious spokesman have, without any effort on their part, a many-millioned audience; whereas, the spokesman of an unpopular minority cause, be it Atheism, Republicanism, Eugenics, or Anarchism, has still to rely upon the traditional means of propaganda to the faithful few; the soap box at the street corner; the obscure hole-and-corner sheet supported by the pennies and sold by the self-sacrifice of a handful of devoted adherents.

It is altogether probable that, under such conditions as the above, the best thought of the current epoch actually makes its appeal to a narrow circle of intellectuals and is totally unknown to the vast general public that is "spoon-fed" by Fleet Street, Hollywood (et al), and the ubiquitous "Broadcasting House." To-day, more, we should say, than ever before, quantity and quality reside in different areas!

Our age, we repeat, is an age of propaganda. Its origins in this country may, perhaps, be traced to the now distant day when the late Lord Northcliffe, then Alfred Harmsworth, produced his first periodical for mass-consumption by the vast new public whom the then recent "Education Act" had taught to read and write, but not to think. It is on record that when that cultured and cynical old English aristocrat, the then Marquis of Salisbury, Prime Minister and High Tory, read the first issue of *The Daily Mail* which may be said to have introduced the present age of mass-propaganda, he made the prophetic observation:—

"This is a paper written by office boys in order to be read by office boys!"

So far, however, have we travelled by 1950 that no contemporary political party, the Tory as much as any other, could hope to occupy the seats of power for long without catering for the support of such "office boys." Indeed, the more recent remark of another Tory leader may be said to mark the consummation of the current age of propaganda:—

"Give me the ordinary powers of the 'Minister of Information' and I will guarantee to transform a sack of potatoes into a national figure!"

Many people can testify to the truth of this statement; the sad experience of the Duke of Windsor, the most popular royalty since the great Elizabeth, snuffed out overnight, by propaganda, indicates that the same proposition is equally true in reverse order.

The present ubiquity and universal scope of propaganda represents a very serious matter for Freethinkers; since conditioned thought is, by definition, the precise opposite of any thought that is really free; obviously, people do not think freely when, in lieu of making any serious mental effort, they automatically switch on the radio for "information." Whilst the advantages of this arrangement for orthodoxy, in Church as well as in State, are manifest and do not need repetition here. We can almost state that the traditionally "Prussian" goose step has now become the universal symbol of the present phase of civilisation! It is, we repeat, a very serious matter for Freethinkers. For all the present signs are that human "geese" are multiplying as fast as the propaganda that appears to be specially designed for their multiplication and for their retention in the mentality of "geese" or, to use a perhaps more familiar comparison, "robots," the most significant word coined, perhaps, in our time.

F. A. RIDLEY.

AN OPEN-MINDED FREETHINKER

I AM an open-minded Freethinker. When people ask me if I believe in God, I say, "I believe in what I know, I know nothing of God." But the Christian says, "The Bible tells about God." It may tell the Christian about God, but it does not tell me anything about God. It tells me that someone wrote a series of books, stories and poems about a great many subjects, including what some men claimed to be a report about their God. There are so many Bibles in so many countries and from so many religions, and several Christian Bibles all differing, that it is hard for anyone to decide which one of them might be the true story of God. There is the King James Version, the Douay Version, the Greek Version, the Hebrew into English. I find that the ancient Hebrew writings were written without vowels and with many abbreviations.

The original Hebrew differs entirely from the other versions. They are so different that the translations seem to be of a different set of writings altogether. When I take a Hebrew dictionary and translate the original Hebrew into English I find that the ancient Hebrew conception of God is entirely different from the present Christian conception preached in practically all churches. The ordinary man would not believe this, but let him examine the Hebrew writings, and he will find as I did, that the original and later translators did not translate those writings according to the meanings of the words, but they translated them according to what they thought they ought to present to the people. But even then, there are thousands of obscure word meanings and many more words with several meanings. There is much conflict and confusion.

So, I cannot accept the Bible as a proof of God. Priests and preachers differ so much in their conceptions of God that I cannot believe that they know. If one priest knows, or one set of priests know, then the others are all wrong, and all the other religions are wrong, and the God would only represent a very few of the two billion people on earth.

Some preachers tell me that God is all powerful and all beneficent. But such a statement appears contrary to my common sense. Everywhere I see disease, suffering from cancer, infantile paralysis, tuberculosis, insanity, epilepsy, and a hundred dread diseases, many of them suffered by innocent little children, and above all by kindly old people who have been good to others all their lives.

I see injustice in government, in religion, I see tyranny, and unspeakable cruelty, practised by men against men, men against animal and animal against animal. Murder, torture, wrong, is a large part of the daily news. If there is an all-powerful God and an all-good God why do these things continue? Some preachers say that Jesus Christ was crucified so that there would be no more punishment of men for their sins. But why does sin continue, and increase, why do wars continue to increase and grow worse, and why is there a threat of destruction of all mankind with the atom bomb?

And then, anyone who says that man causes these things himself, does not explain to me why forces of nature are so cruel and destructive. Why are so many people killed by earthquakes, cyclones, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, great cold- and heat-waves, floods, hailstorms, electric storms? Why does a good God permit them? Why does a good God permit rattlesnakes, mosquitoes, fleas, lice, tuberculosis germs and worms eating the bowels out of little children?

So the priest says look around you, everywhere you will see evidence of God; look at that tree, look at the stars and the sun and moon, who made them, if it wasn't God? Perhaps it is evidence to the priest that God made these things, but it isn't to me. A tree is evidence of a tree, the stars are evidence of the stars and the planets are evidence of what they are. I can see the trees and the stars and the planets. But I can see no God. When I see a God then I can say that I believe in one. When a priest shows me a statue of God, or the Virgin Mary, or Jesus Christ, that is nothing but a statue to me. It is no more evidence of God than a picture of Lil Abner is evidence that such a being exists. It is evidence that the priest imagines the statue to be a replica of what he worships, just as the picture of Lil Abner is what the cartoonist has imagined his fictitious character to look like.

As I read science I find that astronomers looking billions of miles into space see no sign of any god, angels, Christ, Virgin Mary, Mohamet, or any other God, Devil or angel. In searching the bottoms of the sea, or in drilling miles into the earth, nowhere do I find any scientific discovery of any such things.

The only claim to there being a God is the claim by men in whom I have no confidence, in men whose intelligence does not appear to be superior, and in fact from the lack of scientific reasoning they show men who appear to be inferior to the scientists whose discoveries have been so great and progressive.

The predictions in the Bible, as to the end of the world, have never come true, but the scientist can predict to the minute and second when the tides will be high and low, when the seasons will change, when the eclipses will occur. They can tell me a hundred years in advance, to the minute, when a comet will appear. They can tell me what kind of chemicals to mix to produce useful compounds, they can show me by layers of soil washed down and rings in the trees how old formations are and how old the trees are. They can show me how evolution works and by following their methods I can even change one kind of plant into something very different. I have seen the scientist change corn from a 40 bushel per acre production to 100 bushels, where they have introduced hybridization.

All my life and every day I see the proof of science, and on the contrary, all my life and every day I have seen the failure of the priests and preachers to prove their theories and ideas about their God.

If the morality of the religions is so good, why is it that almost every ruler or tyrant, or group of them who start a war call on their God to aid them? Why have so many millions of innocent people been killed, even during my less than half-century of life? Certainly religion has done nothing to stop wars.

And when I examine populations of prisons I find that the overwhelming mass of prisoners are religious men, that Freethinkers are conspicuous by their scarcity? Why then must I believe that the churches make people live better?

Nearly every day I notice some article in the papers telling of a preacher who has been convicted of rape, or murder, or eloping with a young girl, or stealing money. Is the religion they preach so good that it keeps them straight? Just the opposite is the case. And I know that when a San Francisco, California, newspaper published a story that a priest had been arrested for drunken driving, that his bishop had threatened the newspaper with a boycott if the story was published again. So I am sure that newspapers do not publish all the stories of priests who violate the law for fear of such boycotts, so there must be many more than are in the news.

And what applies to the story of a God, applies to the story of a hereafter. Nowhere have I found any evidence of scientists of any such place, nor have I ever talked to anyone who has been to the alleged hereafter. There is simply no evidence of it. I hear about a God and a hereafter, constantly in the Press and on the radio. But I see fairy tales and comics published in the papers all the time, and I hear of fictitious characters on the radio all the time, but there is no reason for me to believe that either one or the other is true because I hear about such things constantly.

My mind is open; whenever I can find any concrete evidence of a god or a hereafter I will believe in them. But I will not consider hearsay evidence, nor will I accept as true the statements by men in whom I have

no confidence because what they have told me for years has been proven false or unfounded. I love science because it offers proof and evidence, while I am suspicious of religious dogmas and doctrines because they have always failed when put to the test of reason and knowledge.

JAMES HERVEY JOHNSON (U.S.A.).

THE ESPERANTO CRAZE AND ALL THAT

REPLYING to Mr. Percy Roy's article with above title, and in fairness to Esperanto, it must be stated that this auxiliary language has already had a run of sixty years, and is in greater esteem now than in any other year. The idea that Esperanto is a "craze" is ridiculous. No serious-minded person would deny that a widely accepted international language would be a benefit to humanity. Well, the adoption of very generally known tongues such as English and French is not the solution—though a possible new "inter-nation" language may yet be evolved based on either or both of these languages. But is not that just what Esperanto is already to a large extent?

Lately we have seen vast sums in money and man hours wasted on such elaborate "translation" systems which are at work at the Security Council, the General Assembly of U.N.O. and the trials at Nuremberg at the conclusion of the War. How much better that each person understand the other directly and on equal footing. None will have great advantages by the adoption officially of "his" native tongue. Elimination of the interpreter is essential. Until he goes there will never be "direct thought." Esperantists do without interpreters, and their deliberations are harmonious and scrupulously fair to all. Personally I have addressed thirty nations in Esperanto, and have been understood by all simultaneously—a satisfaction for all concerned. How useful it would be if everyone in every nation had a neutral, simple medium for use outside his own territory—one in which he could not be misunderstood.

Already a common language is coming into general use. Brochures are being prepared for use by "international bodies" where there are just too many national tongues to print individual booklets for. Air lines, travel agencies, businesses and travellers support the idea of one language. Esperanto may not be the ultimate solution, and though it may need revising I doubt if it can be bettered. It is the very essence of simplicity. It is easy to understand, and easy to speak. Capable of being spoken equally well by all nations, it is practically unique. It has complete neutrality, and is not attached to any one nation, religion or sect. In fact it lives up to the ideal of its inventor, and is a symbol of brotherhood.

As a student of many languages, I am convinced that none is so easy to learn and remember as Esperanto, and after one's own native tongue, none will yield such satisfaction. It is decidedly something finer than a "craze."

"IRISH FREETHINKER."

MISTAKES OF MOSES. By Col. R. G. Ingersoll. Price 3d.; postage 1d.

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

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY HANDBOOK. (General Information for Freethinkers.) Price 6d.; postage 1d.

ACID DROPS

The Dean of Exeter let himself go against the "secularist" teacher who, we are told as if it were true, "could not live happily in a close-knit community." The poor chap "had no higher aim than the transference of a body of information," or he took up teaching because it was an "easy way of earning a living." The Dean could have gone on and on like this to the middle of next year, no doubt believing every word he said; but it would have been a kindness to him if the *Western Morning News* had not printed such utter twaddle. The science master, if he knows his job, has to undo the religious nonsense taught in the Dean's Bible classes, and the fact that our bishops are wailing from every pulpit about the irreligion of our "teen-agers" proves the hopeless inefficiency of Bible and religious teaching.

In proof of what has been said, take the Conference held the other day at Bridge of Allan by all kinds of Scottish religious bodies, the speakers for whom complained at the "apathy" to religious education in Scottish Homes. One speaker wanted to know why Shakespeare and not the Bible "was the main consideration" in the teaching of English literature? Another speaker said that the teachers as well as the pupils "were in need of guidance," which really means that they are not altogether hypnotised by these pious exhortations. But nearly all the clerical gentlemen agreed that religious education should begin "in the home."

The point to note is, that in spite of the latest Education Act and that religion is part of the syllabus, things are not at all working out as the parsons hoped. For example, the Rev. Mr. Varney recently made a "vigorous" attack on the report of the diocesan Council for Religious Education. He insisted that "a school controlled is a school lost; a school lost means children lost, and if we lose the children, the Church is lost." We do not often agree with our religious mentors—but how right is Mr. Varney! Get the child by hook or crook or the Church is lost! It is a cry of despair.

It was bound to come, of course. Joan of Arc has at last materialised at a spiritualistic seance held by the Rev. James Dickson in his home at San Francisco. In the *Two Worlds* will be found an account of this wondrous event, the "tall robust young peasant woman vivaciously emerging through the wall," and engaging into a high spirited conversation with the lucky narrator, Mr. R. G. Svendsen. Needless to say, she spoke perfect modern English, no doubt, with the charming accent of Miss Claudette Colbert or, perhaps, Miss Rita Hayworth, and she made no secret of her proper name. They are not altogether sure what it was in France, but it was "Joan of Arc" all right here.

"So vivid, so perfect was her form," she might have walked off "a path at Domremy," and instead of the "male attire" about which the Holy Church made such a Devil of a row, she modestly "wore a blue, red and purple skirt." And her mission? In our ignorance, we all are taught that it was to kick the English out of France. Thank Heaven the truth really is—in her own words—"My mission was to promote Spiritualism." Joan is still interested in France and Europe, and she

often comes through to people who do not—alas!—recognise her. And the lucky Mr. Svendsen was promised that she would materialise again for him. How can ignorant and hopeless unbelievers dare to question such irrefutable truths!

Referring again to Spiritualism (in this country, however) we find Mr. Shaw Desmond had the temerity to declare that "Guides"—99 out of a 100, that is—were "no more enlightened than the Spiritualists who listened to them," a statement vigorously denied by a London medium, Miss Francis. Her own Guide is Red Star, who is the Leader of a large section of the White Brotherhood working under the beloved "Jesias" (Jesus?) and it appears that this Brotherhood "does not lightly permit abuse on the honoured and hardly-won title of Guide." She adds that "Controls" may be inferior, but Guides never! Did somebody mention the word "drivel" . . . ?

The Bishop of Exeter expressed himself very gingerly on the Assumption of Mary the other day. Instead of clearly denying it, he said: "It may be true or it may be false"—which any layman might have said with equal intelligence and authority. "It is not," he continued, "in scripture and cannot be proved by any historical evidence." What wonderful perspicuity! Supposing it were in "scripture," would that make it true? Does the Bishop really believe that Elijah went up to Heaven in "a fiery chariot?" And could he possibly expect "historical evidence" for such idiotic nonsense?

The Bishop calls it "a pious opinion," that is, a pious opinion which may or may not be true! Still, one must not be too hard even on a Bishop. It is his job to believe in miracles, and we simply cannot understand how anyone believing in the "miracle" of the "Incarnation" cannot go another step and swallow the miracle of the Assumption with its Heaven, Angels, and God Almighty all combined. In any case, the Assumption is now a Dogma, and not all the King's horses and all the King's men can smash it, and that is a fact.

So a "National Day of Prayer" has come and gone! It appears that even in church circles it caused no wild enthusiasm—as the *Church Times* said, "The general response to the Archbishops' call was lamentable." This proves that "the majority of the nation does not put God first or, indeed, anywhere, in its thought and practice." Well, if that is true, it is good news. Nearly all the National Days of Prayer during the war were followed by some awful calamity, and most people are beginning to think that the less God Almighty interferes with them the better for everybody all round.

But, we are told, there is a remedy. A National Day of Prayer should be held, not on a Sunday when everybody prays in any case, or is supposed to pray, but on a week-day, which would then "be marked out as something different and outstanding in the life of the Church." At least, that is what the *Church Times* says. In sober truth, the Day would be just as big a flop. The idea that a "universal chain of prayer could be maintained throughout the day" when men and women are working is just funny. But such hopeless nonsense would not be suggested if the Church was not desperate. The National Day of Prayer was a gambler's throw and it failed.

"THE FREETHINKER"

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ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

E. J. HUGHES.—We agree that a good deal of the fuss made about Bach is in the interests of religion—though, of course, he wrote a good deal of music which can be enjoyed for its own sake by Freethinkers and Christians alike. As for neglecting music, as such, in our pages, we cannot deal with everything. A first-class draughts player might well protest against our exclusion of difficult problems!

BESEVOLENT FUND, N.S.S.—The General Secretary gratefully acknowledges the following donations: E.C.R. 1s. 6d., and R. Cronin 10s.

FRANK HOLT.—The best answer to "Jehovah's Witnesses" is our *Bible Handbook*. If it is used intelligently it provides more arguments in ten minutes than a Witness, even if helped by Jehovah, can answer in a year—if at all.

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. 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.

SUGAR PLUMS

The season's greeting card, from a design by Mr. P. V. Morris, and produced by the National Secular Society, is winning appreciation from many quarters. It is neat, attractive, with a wording that expresses a Freethought point of view regarding the season, and yet in no way offensive to a believer. Why not send for a sample copy, sixpence, plus one penny postage, before going on the annual route march around the shops for suitable cards for your friends. It will save you a lot of trouble and give complete satisfaction for a larger purchase.

Our enlightened, progressive and democratic House of Commons will introduce a Bill, not to abolish the Sunday Observance Acts of 1625 to 1780, but that those acts shall not apply to the Festival of Britain. According to Press reports, the Cabinet is divided on the question, and a free vote of the House has been granted. Large sums of public money are being spent on the Festival, but sabbatarians, armed with enactments passed in 1625, 1677 and 1780 respectively, may, by a few votes in parliament, get the Festival closed on the one day of the week most convenient to the general public to make a visit. Where freedom is concerned Britain, with its purges, screenings and bannings seems to be progressing steadily backwards.

The Sunday Observance Acts should be re-examined and any flaws corrected without delay. For instance, the Act under Charles II, 1677, prohibits the exposure of any goods for sale on Sundays except mackerel, which may be sold before or after divine service. Whatever reason Charles II had in 1677 for showing leniency to mackerel should have expired by 1950, and the Act should be amended forthwith, and so bring mackerel in line with bloaters and other fish involved in the prohibition.

While on the Sunday question, a new book by Mr. H. Cutner on *What is the Sabbath Day?* will be shortly on sale. It will be published by The Pioneer Press for the Secular Society Limited and will cost 1s. 3d., plus postage. Mr. Cutner examines the question very thoroughly, and every Freethinker should secure two copies, one for his bookshelf, and the other for lending purposes.

THE GENIUS OF BERNARD SHAW

AMONG the many special notices and appreciations of George Bernard Shaw which followed his death, and which I saw, there was not one which stressed his essentially anti-Christian outlook. The clergyman who attended him during the last days was confident that Shaw "understood" the mind of Christ better than anybody else, and he was also sure that Shaw was not an Atheist; but in general, any notice of his religious opinions was carefully excluded. Even the critics who, every Sunday give their uncensored opinions on books, plays, etc., for the B.B.C., and who the Sunday after the death of George Bernard Shaw discussed his work, said nothing about the very pronounced views on religion always held by the author of *Man and Superman*.

In his early and very flamboyant days, Shaw was never afraid of proclaiming himself an Atheist. Indeed, at one time he certainly thought of himself as the President of the National Secular Society in succession to Charles Bradlaugh, whatever else might have been thought by its members. When Annie Besant became a Socialist, and edited *Our Corner*, its pages were enriched by the early novels—and I believe the only ones—written by Shaw after they had been rejected by many publishers. Though they were youthful products, when many years later they were published in book form, I found them intensely interesting and certainly well up to the standard of contemporary fiction. But Shaw always had a message, and all his books and essays and prefaces were a vehicle for his teeming, irreverent mind, his scepticism, his wit and satire, his sometimes furious attempts to get everything somehow or other upside down—like the famous caricature drawn by the equally irreverent Max Beerbohm in which Shaw is depicted as standing on his head. That is how many people saw him perhaps, but then they didn't understand him.

From the outset, George Bernard Shaw made his mark in London even when he was almost starving while he did so. His critical articles on music and the drama which he contributed to that once famous periodical, the *Saturday Review*, were always recognised as outstanding by his contemporaries; and they can still be read as small masterpieces of the art of criticism. But all the time he was writing them he was attacking everything that he thought was reactionary with a flaming pen steeped in magnificent writing. His eloquence was always couched in splendid prose, a joy to all of us who love the English language. Much as I like the French language and revel in its crystal-clear lucidity, its wonderful aptness of phrase, I have always claimed that we can—at times—get the same effects in English, and I cite the masterly prose style of George Bernard Shaw as complete evidence.

It is just fifty years ago when I first heard of him, when his terrific assaults on our medical vaccinationists caught my eye, and in many ways I have been his slave ever since. He and Wells had many discussions on vaccination and vivisection, and much as I admire Wells, I still consider that Shaw easily had the best of their encounters.

It was also about this time that he stopped calling himself an Atheist and, following Samuel Butler, began to talk about the "Life Force" in the Universe and "Creative Evolution." It looked as if Shaw believed in some kind of Vitalism, but personally I do not think so. In this world of ours people grow from babyhood to old age, trees shoot up and bear fruit, there is constant change and constant movement. Perhaps our speech is

inadequate to form some comprehensive term which gives this change and growth and movement a name. Shaw was content with his "Life Force" and worked out some of his ideas about it in what I personally consider his best play—*Man and Superman*.

Perhaps it is true that Shaw was really against religion because so many people were for it; that he was against vaccination and vivisection because nearly all doctors were in their favour; that he was a Socialist because it was then most unfashionable to be one; that he did not think much of Shakespeare because all or nearly all critics were Bardolaters. Or, perhaps, he really was sincere—as I believe he was—in his opposition to so many things about which most people merely blindly follow some leaders without thinking for themselves. But what a shake-up against conventional ideas he gave the world!—far more than the man he certainly admired, Samuel Butler. Has he not described himself better than any of his critics in that famous passage?—

"In vain do I redouble the violence of the language in which I proclaim my heterodoxies. I rail at the theistic credulity of Voltaire, the amoristic superstition of Shelley, the revival of tribal soothsaying and idolatrous rites which Huxley called Science and mistook for an advance on the Pentateuch, no less than the welter of ecclesiastical and professional humbug which saves the face of the stupid system of violence and robbery which we call Law and Industry. Even Atheists reproach me with infidelity and anarchists with nihilism because I cannot endure their moral tirades. And yet, instead of exclaiming 'Send this inconceivable Satanist to the stake,' the respectable newspapers pith me by announcing 'another book by this brilliant and thoughtful writer.'"

It was a lucky chance that I saw many of the early representations of the plays—an unforgettable experience. The Court theatre in Sloane Square was packed with Shaw devotees of whom I was one of the most enthusiastic, and actresses like Lillah McCarthy and Grace Lane, and actors like Granville Barker and Edmund Gwenn (among others) made those plays something to talk about. I was not surprised that later, at the Sorbonne in Paris, courses of lectures were given on Bernard Shaw, the dramatist, which again I was lucky to attend. That Shaw will remain acknowledged as one of our greatest dramatists I am quite certain. His plays, in spite of the critics, will be no more "dated" than Congreve or Gilbert.

The truth is that he had something vital to say. He was provocative, he slashed at current conventions, and he did it with a "mind" so packed with genius that whatever he said had an air of quality and distinction rarely given to man. Wells had it, so had Dickens and Shakespeare. In a way, so had Byron. When I read, as I do a thousand times, that men are born equal, that all ought to have equal opportunities, and that if only our education system were better (more Utopian is generally meant), we should all do far greater things, it makes me smile. Nature produces your genius very sparingly, and while "education" helps, it does not and cannot make a genius. The greatest learned man now living could not give the world what this flashing Irishman gave through his genius. Would Charles Dickens have written better if he had had a thorough grounding in Hegel or even in Darwin?

What did George Bernard Shaw think of Charles Dickens? He said:—

"My works are all over Dickens, and nothing but the stupendous illiteracy of modern criticism could have missed this glaring feature of my methods . . . I have actually transferred characters of Dickens to my plays—Jaggers in 'Great Expectations,' to 'You Never Can Tell,' for example—with complete success. Lomax in 'Major Barbara' is technically a piece of pure Dickens. It is not too much to say that Dickens could not only draw a character more accurately than any of the novelists in the nineteenth century, but could do it without ceasing for a single sentence to be not merely impossible but outrageous in his unrestrained fantasy and fertility of imagination. . . . Dickens was one of the greatest writers that ever lived. . . . His greatest contemporaries, Carlyle and Ruskin, William Morris and Tolstoy, knew this perfectly well. All his detractors were, and are, second rate." And Shaw claimed that there is no "greatest" book in Dickens—"All are magnificent."

One requires a big book, or rather several to deal with such a many-sided genius as Shaw—as also for Dickens, for that matter. What can one say in a short article? Only a small tribute perhaps to be forgotten as soon as read.

H. CUTNER.

OBSERVE THE OBSERVER

THE *Yorkshire Observer* is very angry with *The Freethinker*. An address given to some Methodist ladies by Mr. Thomas Goodall, the Methodist Church Press and Information officer was reported in a recent issue of the *Yorkshire Observer*. In one part of the address, as reported, it seemed clear to me that there was a suggestion that unfavourable news could be kept out of the Press by taking the Press into confidence. I quoted that part of the address, commented very strongly on it in a paragraph which I sent to our Editor, and it appeared as an "Acid Drop" in the October 14 issue. Mr. Goodall wrote to protest against my comments and added an accusation that I had suppressed relevant matter which he quoted.

As the supposed relevant part, supposed suppressed, was a plea for the freedom of the Press, I failed to see how the two quotations could be reconciled as endorsing that plea. Some correspondence followed and in my letter to Mr. Goodall I offered, if he wished, to ask the Editor to insert the two quotations; he replied that he had no wish to prolong the controversy. The *Yorkshire Observer* of October 21 stepped in with an article which declared, "Mr. Goodall, we are sure, did not mean that matters of public interest could readily be hushed up, etc." But I never said he did mean that. I took it he meant that unfavourable news concerning his Church might be kept out of the Press by taking the Press into confidence. The quotation I used is as follows: "If they had any unfavourable news which they did not wish to see in the Press, take them into your confidence and you will be amazed at how that confidence will be respected." The quotation Mr. Goodall accused me of suppressing reads, "Once we have the precedent set of people interfering with the free reporting of facts we are providing a control which can be used by those whose motives are not so pure." Readers can examine those two quotations and judge for themselves which one agrees with the other, and what they collectively endorse. Now remember the circumstances under which the quotation I used prevailed. Mr. Goodall is the Press

and Information Officer of the Methodist Church, he was addressing an assembly of Methodist lady members, and urging a closer co-operation between the Press and the Church in religious work. With that in view I contend my interpretation of his remarks was a reasonable one, and was liable to that interpretation by anyone. That is all I am concerned with, that considering the circumstances under which the statement was made by Mr. Goodall, my interpretation was a reasonable one, and my comments were justified. What the *Yorkshire Observer* thought Mr. Goodall meant does not concern me, but when that journal goes on to add, "But that indefatigable advocate of atheism, *The Freethinker*, whose compilers would appear to spend most of their time peering in the gutters to find a little mud to fling at Christian institutions sees something sinister in our report," one feels very much less impressed with its interpretation of what they thought Mr. Goodall meant. We do not know the religious belief of the writer of that abuse, but in this case at any rate he has acted like a Christian.

R. H. ROSETTI.

CORRESPONDENCE

ESPERANTO AND THE EAST

Sir.—It isn't easy to argue with Mr. P. G. Roy, to whom Esperantists are "addicts" to a "lingo," a "hotch-potch," a "mongrel."

He complains that it doesn't cater for Orientals, who would (he thinks) much prefer disguised English. Yet how is it that in Japan Esperanto is making great strides, while in war-ridden China there are papers printed in Esperanto? There are Esperantists even in Korea!

I once asked a Chinese who spoke passable English how long it took to learn. He said 12 years, and Esperanto in 2. An article before me written by a Chinese many years ago advocates Esperanto not only for international use but for use among the Chinese themselves, whose written language is the most difficult to learn in the whole world.—Yours, etc.,

A.H.M.,

Newcastle-on-Tyne.

THE LOST TRIBES

Sir.—Mr. Ridley, November 5, refers to alleged descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel and mentions as another "chosen race" the Scots! (Why his mark of exclamation at the Scots?) Does Mr. Ridley not know that The British-Israel World Federation, London, asserts that "the Anglo-Saxon race are the inheritors, under Divine Providence, of the promises made to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob"; that in their "Abraham's Family Tree" the Angles, Picts and Scots are Israelites, and the Normans partly Israelite and partly Jewish; in short, all British Isles peoples are Israelites. The B.I.W.F. Special Number of their "National Message," February, 1938, 60 pp., expounds their claims on various subjects and on back cover list some 560 supporters, beginning with H.M. Queen Victoria. The Federation preaches the Hebrew descent of the people and the Davidic descent of our Royal Family.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE ROSS.

A PROTEST

Sir.—My copies of *The Freethinker* have not kept up with me in my travels and consequently I have only now read Mr. Cutner's letter in the number of October 22.

I have been much impressed by Mr. Cutner's articles concerning matters in the field of religion; they made me picture Mr. Cutner as a man who carefully investigated his sources of knowledge, who consulted and compared the opinions of acknowledged authorities and who then drew his conclusions. Alas! His letter has shattered that illusion.

The whole world, with the exception of Marxist Russia and her satellites has applauded the dropping of bombs on the Korean warmongers, says Mr. Cutner. Surely, Mr. Cutner's "whole world," less Russia and her satellites, and China and India, other millions in Asia, some millions in Africa and Europe, reduce Mr. Cutner's "whole world" to perhaps less than half the world? And even that, at most, half of the world, does not unanimously agree with or unitedly applaud the action of the United Nations in Korea. Non-Communists like myself who, examining all the opinions available to them, conclude that "Korean warmongers" can properly be applied

only to persons like Syngman Rhee are, I believe, not so few as Mr. Attlee would like to think. For my part, I regard with contempt and loathing the American conduct of the war; I do not applaud the dropping of bombs on militarily worthless and insignificant villages as anything but cowardly terrorism directed against harmless villagers. There is plenty of evidence to support this view; and there is plenty of evidence to make one ponder the question whether the war in Korea is not an American war for which the UNO flag has been stolen; such evidence dates from long before the war began. It may well be a further step in the encirclement of Russia in preparation for the American attack said by widely read organs of the American press to be scheduled for the year 1953. The satellite Chiang Kai Shek, still receiving large supplies of arms, expects to reconquer China in four years; does not this suggest that peace in Asia is not an American aim? May I also mention that Lord Boyd Orr found as a result of his experience that America will not participate in any organisation she does not dominate; he said so. Did not Vernon Bartlett at Lake Success find the deliberations of UNO a farce where at a nod the Latin American satellites of Washington voted as required and openly laughed and joked about it? An American dominated UNO is a sham.

I trust that Mr. Cutner will go farther afield in the search for truth about world affairs. He would regard with amused contempt the swallowing by millions of the nonsense broadcast by the pulbits; but is he any better in swallowing what he reads in our millionaire-owned "newspapers" and what is broadcast by the B.B.C. by kind permission of the Foreign Office?—Yours, etc.,

W. KEANE.

[Mr. Cutner writes: "I am not questioning Mr. Keane's ability to judge the political situation in his way, but I strongly object to his questioning my ability to do so in my way. I put in the same care in judging political questions as I do religious ones."]

OBITUARY

The Manchester Branch has lost one of its loyal and staunch members by the death on October 30 of Mr. George Wilde at the age of 74.

Until recently he regularly attended our indoor meetings, and at his express wish a Secular Service was read at Rochdale Crematorium on Friday, November 3, 1950. We wish to extend to his relatives the sympathy of the branch in their loss.

M. McCALL.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Mrs. IVY SHARPE, "Psychology and Human Relations."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall Library, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, November 21, 7 p.m.: MAURICE BURTON, D.Sc., "Darwinism Re-Examined."

Glasgow Branch (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. MCKAY HART, M.B., C.H.B., "Marriage Guidance."

Kingston Branch N.S.S. ("The Fighting Cock," London Road, Kingston-on-Thames).—7-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: JOHN McNAIR, "The Future of European Civilisation."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: SIR WALDRON SMITHERS, M.P., "Conservatism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Need of Historical Background."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W. 1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: R. S. W. POLLARD, L.A.M.T.P.I., J.P., "Cost of English Morals."

SCIENCE, RELIGION AND MORALS

VI.—HISTORICAL JESUS

(1) It is unnecessary to consider the "Life of Jesus" in detail here since this has often been done in many books.

(2) All that is needed is to refer to certain alleged incidents in, and aspects of, that life as stated in the Gospel Story.

(3) David Frederick Strauss wrote his life of Jesus in 1835 and practically began the modern school of critical studies.

(4) Since then a number of "lives" have been written, some literary such as Renan's, some verging on mere fiction.

(5) During the present century the subject has been divided into categories and dealt with more systematically.

(6) This latter method avoids much of the confusion which often exists in these lives between history, teaching and exegesis.

(7) The first category may be considered as the historical aspect since the existence of Jesus seems fundamental.

(8) As history only this has been dealt with in such erudite works as Charles Guignebert's detailed "Jesus."

(9) Some results of this historical analysis are interesting and also convenient for present purposes.

(10) One is to indicate the small proportion of the Gospel Story which is occupied by actual history.

(11) This Gospel Story of the "Life of Jesus" stands isolated and alone, uncorroborated by any external sources.

(12) Consequently ordinary historical criticisms from collateral history do not apply in this fundamental matter.

(13) This point has been emphasised in many controversies, but the uniqueness of the position is not always recognised.

(14) This Gospel Story can conveniently be divided into three parts, first, early life; second, ministry; third, posthumous.

(15) Between the first and second parts is an unrecorded break which is alleged or presumed to be about twenty years.

(16) This is sometimes termed "the hidden life" and some accounts have been written about it, presumably subjectively.

(17) It has been plausibly suggested that this Gospel "Life of Jesus" was probably compiled backwards.

(18) It seems fairly certain that the initial impulse was the supposed and alleged Resurrection of Jesus.

(19) It was because of this that certain followers began to write down records of Jesus, as Luke implies (Luke I, 1).

(20) This Gospel Story is an alleged biography compiled from many recollections written down long after the events.

(21) In these circumstances literal accuracy of facts or statements would be expected only by theopneustic inspiration.

(22) To maintain that this is the guarantee, however, begs the question and places it outside ordinary history.

(23) It seems hardly reasonable to suggest that this historical narrative alone possesses proof of its own verity.

(24) Most student of this subject will therefore agree that some allowance must be made for its unreliability.

(25) Differences of opinion occur when discussions arise as to how great these allowances should be.

(26) Here an endeavour will be made to arrive at what may be termed the lowest common denominator of orthodoxy.

(27) Even in this difficulties are considerable when high church officials deny the validity of much of the Story.

(28) Generally, however, what is termed the "ministerial life" of Jesus will be granted for purposes of consideration.

(29) Scepticism about the "early life" is rapidly increasing in orthodox circles, but it is the least important part.

(30) One may adopt the position of some early heretics and start the "life of Jesus" at his baptism by John.

(31) Of his "ministerial life" the historical parts are not of essential importance for present purposes.

(32) Whether "the Sermon" was delivered on a mount or in a plain is immaterial and unimportant.

(33) Of this part of His life what matters most is His teaching, His ethics and His own viewpoint.

(34) These non-historical parts will be referred to later when they are considered in their turn.

(35) These considerations cannot apply, however, to the end of the Story, to the Resurrection and Ascension.

(36) These are absolutely essential factors in any system of Christianity which can be recognised as orthodox.

(37) Broadly speaking the Story can be granted up to the trial, crucifixion and death of Jesus.

(38) As Guignebert says, beyond that point the Story cannot be regarded as history in any ordinary sense.

(39) It is continued, however, in varying narratives, to describe the alleged Resurrection, Appearances and Ascension.

(40) Here this general outline story will be granted hypothetically only for purposes of following the argument.

(41) An account is given in the Gospel Story of how Jesus "rose from the dead" and subsequently appeared to many.

(42) Is such an account more reliable than that of the "Saints" who rose from their graves? (Matth. XXVII. 52-53).

(43) A narrative is given of the final event when Jesus blessed his disciples and was carried up into heaven.

(44) This seems to indicate a physical ascension, as objective in its meaning as the Resurrection and Appearances.

(45) What can one think of this when one realises that the known periphery of the universe is millions of light years away?

(46) The promise of Jesus to the dying thief that both should be in Paradise that day contradicts many suggestions.

(47) It is quite impossible to make any coherent story from the varying and contradictory accounts recorded.

(48) Modern Spiritualists maintain that the posthumous "appearances" were spiritualistic manifestations.

(49) Here the primitive and decidedly objective story of the Synoptic Gospels will be taken as a tentative hypothesis.

(50) It is this view, not rcondite theology or spiritualistic speculations, which forms the faith of the majority of Christians.

W. EDWARD MEADS.