

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: CHAPMAN COHEN

Vol. LXXI—No. 19

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Buddhism

IN his recently published Pelican book* the President of the London Buddhist Society surveys the whole field of Buddhism from the standpoints both of an historian of religion and of a convinced but non-sectarian Buddhist. The author has been for over a quarter of a century active in the English Buddhist movement and is the author of the well-known summary of Buddhist philosophy, "the twelve principles of Buddhism," intended as a kind of, so to speak, lowest common denominator of world-Buddhism, besides other books on specific aspects of Buddhism. To the general non-Buddhist public, Mr. Humphreys is better known as a leading member of the Bar and as Crown Prosecutor at the Old Bailey; a role which, at least, at first sight, might seem a trifle difficult to reconcile with the character of a practising Buddhist.

Mr. Humphreys surveys his creed from many angles. He presents, successively, a brief sketch of the life of the traditional Founder, Gotama the Buddha, and of the subsequent evolution of the religion—perhaps philosophy would be a more accurate term—which, whether consciously founded by Buddha or evolved subsequently by chance, at least finally developed into what is usually termed a "world religion." Subsequently, the learned author gives a generally lucid and always erudite critical survey of the successive and widely contrasting schools of thought, of which Buddhism has been as prolific as Christianity during the 2,500 years since the former Indian Ascetic, Gotama, found "Enlightenment" under the Bo-Tree, as the "Buddha" (the Enlightened One) traditionally founded the creed named after him.

It must be stated that our author has succeeded in cramming a great deal of valuable information into a comparatively short book and may be said to have largely succeeded in giving the reading public a lucid and comprehensive sketch of the complicated evolution of a vast cosmopolitan religion, which starts from premises that are not only not identical with those of Western religions' philosophy but are, in fact, flatly opposed to the presuppositions of Western theology. The general intelligent reader will derive from this book a clear bird's eye view of what is, upon any showing, a cosmopolitan movement of great historical significance. It is, perhaps, arguable that our author would have been better advised not to have paraded his own Buddhist beliefs so openly and to have written from a purely objective standpoint. As it is, it seems at times rather difficult to differentiate between Mr. Humphreys' statements of historical facts and his own frequently controversial opinions.

Naturally, these last will inevitably arouse criticism, both from Materialists and Freethinkers, on the one hand, and from adherents of Christianity and other Western creeds, upon the other. A further difficulty

lies in the inherent impossibility of finding exact English equivalents for some of the more abstruse philosophical terms used in the Oriental languages living and dead, in which Buddhist philosophy and its canonical scripture are written.

A further and, perhaps, more far reaching criticism of Mr. Humphreys' presentation of Buddhism lies in his altogether insufficient application of what may be termed the sociological method. The application of historical Materialism will, we think, be found to shed much light upon the rise and evolution of Buddhism, but our author makes singularly little use of this methodology, perhaps on account of his own marked tendency towards philosophical idealism.

Historically, Buddhism appears to have emerged in India in the sixth century B.C. as simultaneously, a social revolt against Brahminism and its hereditary caste-system and as a critical philosophical movement. As such, it was in no sense unique; Jainism, which still exists and, no doubt, other anti-Brahmin movements now extinct or absorbed into an elastic Hinduism being its contemporaries. Assuming, as I think we may safely do, the historical existence of Gotama, he appears to have been both a social critic of the Brahmin priests' growing despotism in Hindu society and a philosophical critic of the increasingly puerile theology which these priests since successfully imposed upon Hinduism. In the former role, Buddha himself belonged to the "warrior" caste, the chief rival of the Brahmins for supremacy over Hindu society, and it is significant that when Buddha died (traditionally at eighty-one years of age) we are expressly told that it was the "nobles," members of his own caste, who celebrated his passing "with all the honours due to a world teacher."

As an ethical and intellectual reformer Gotama reduced the complicated metaphysics of contemporary Brahminism to a few simple first principles. A modern French Buddhist has actually comprised these within two sheets of notepaper. (c.f. Mme Alexandra David-Neel, inadmissible to describe the historic Buddha, as some *Buddhism*). In the present writer's submission, it is English Rationalists have done either as an "Atheist" (J. E. Ellam—"Upasaka"), or as a "Materialist" (Archibald Robertson). If tradition has reported him with approximate accuracy, Buddha was surely an Agnostic and a Positivist in the most literal sense of these terms. Mankind, he asserted, should and could devote itself to the solution of certain problems, in particular, of suffering and the cure of suffering. These problems could be solved by an ethical discipline—"the Noble Eight-Fold Path"—which represented the original kernel, so to speak, whence grew in time the vast luxuriance of world Buddhism. Beyond these pragmatic teachings, verifiable in the here and now, the Master preserved "a noble silence" and apparently taught that all ultimate speculation is useless, as beyond the range of human mental equipment. Surely, here we have an early version

* *Buddhism*, by Christmas Humphreys. Pelican Books; 1s. 6d.

of Herbert Spencer's "unknowable" and Bergsonian Pragmatism, put forward by a critical intellect of, perhaps, the first rank.

That Buddha himself intended to found anything more than a philosophical school—there were many such in the India of his day—seems improbable and it appears to be absolutely certain that he did not foresee that "Buddhism" would ever become an international creed; it was not until the conversion to Buddhism, two centuries later, of the Emperor Asoka, the Buddhist "Constantine" (3rd century B.C.), that the missionary phase of Buddhism began. In India, as Mr. Humphreys indicates, Buddhism died out in its land of origin towards the end of the first Christian millenium. The reason for which, a social reason not mentioned by our author, seems to have been in the inability of a monastic and pacifist Buddhism to defend India against the invaders, the militant Muslims from Central Asia. Modern Hinduism, however, as finally reformed by Shankara (ninth century), the Brahmin "Thomas Aquinas," himself an ex-Buddhist competitor. Buddhism was the oldest cosmopolitan creed to have survived until to-day.

To-day, a form of Buddhism at least approximately similar to that of early Buddhism is now confined to the Theraveda school in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam. This Southern Buddhism, Rationalistic and Agnostic, is probably the only existing form of "Buddhism" which the Founder might have recognised as such.

Our author, however, vigorously dissents from the above view. For he describes at great length and with obvious sympathy the later "Mahayana" schools of China, Korea, and Japan and, the luxuriant—and most un-Buddha-like!—speculations which are rampant in these Northern schools, which are often semi-theistic and even polytheistic in doctrine. Mr. Humphreys even accepts—though, it is true, with reservations—Tibetan Lamaism as genuine Buddhism. Rather surprisingly, he even passes over into Theosophy and accepts the actual existence of the Tibetan "Mahatmas," as described by their quondam pupil, Madame Blavatsky. I must comment that it seems a great pity that such holy men should habitually conceal their surpassing merits behind such inaccessible mountains at a critical period like this when their transcendent knowledge would be eminently useful to mankind. I do not think that Buddha would have approved at all of such conduct on the part of his self-styled disciples!

In an interesting concluding chapter Mr. Humphreys describes the development of Buddhism in England and other European lands. In England, where Buddhism is chiefly of the Theraveda, or Rationalist-Ethical school, the author pays tribute to the pioneer work of my esteemed friend, R. J. Jackson, a frequent and welcome visitor to N.S.S. meetings. Why, however, is it necessary to refer to Mr. Jackson's "traditional soapbox in Hyde Park?" Buddha himself is reported as having preached his first sermon in a park—the Deer Park at Benares. I am sure that Mr. Humphreys would not refer to *his* "traditional soapbox" on that historic occasion.

Whilst readers of *The Freethinker* may find a good deal to criticise in Mr. Humphreys' presentation of Buddhism, one must acknowledge and respect the author's vast erudition, as, also, the generally lucid character of his many-sided survey. Students of comparative religion in general and of Buddhism in particular, will find this excellent text book useful in the former, indispensable in the latter connection.

F. A. RIDLEY.

SCOTLAND'S BREAK WITH ROME

JOHN KNOX'S *History of the Reformation in Scotland* is now available in two massive volumes (Nelson, 1949, £4 4s.). Handsomely and strongly bound, well printed on excellent paper, it is reproduced from the original with no modifications of its violent diction, save that its spelling has been modernised. It is admittedly partisan, yet it throws an intense light on the trials, tribulations and struggles of a turbulent period during which the Calvinist party strove and ultimately triumphed.

This famous narrative is preceded by an instructive and scholarly introduction from the pen of Dr. W. C. Dickinson which is purely dispassionate. As he avers, the Scottish Reformation was by no means completely theological in character. "It is true," he states, "that the Roman Church, degenerate and corrupt, was despised and condemned, and that new questions were being answered by a new faith, but other factors were also at work—a 'murmuring' of the people, the 'avarice' of temporal lords, the ambitions of a noble house and, dominating all, the interplay of politics, whereby a reformation in religion became a rebellion against the State."

The decay of the Catholic Church was deplored by its own adherents. An ignorant and worldly clergy were constantly urged to set their house in order. Corruption and incompetence, however, were linked with clerical opulence and privileges, and these evoked the envy of powerful laymen. Ecclesiastical revenues were wasted in wanton extravagances, while the needs of the flocks were ignored. Appointments of priests and prelates were made regardless of their fitness, while Popes and Kings shared the revenues of vacant benefices. Rich livings endowed by dead benefactors were bestowed on the bastard children of princes, nobles and prelates. The abbey were used as sources of income by the powerful, while their obligations to the laity and especially the poor were completely forgotten. All these anomalies became glaring when, with the death of James V in 1543, the Scottish Parliament "calmly decided that once a reasonable sustentation had been provided for the late King's illegitimate sons the surplus revenues of the abbey and priories they enjoyed should be assigned to the finances of the Crown. In brief, in a poor country with poor soil and with a still primitive trade and commerce, the Church had become the easiest, if not the only avenue to wealth."

Nearly all the wealth of Scotland was monopolised by the Church dignitaries, while the parish clergy were sunk in poverty and many churches had no priests at all. Payments to the clergy were long voluntary, but were now exacted as a right. As Dickinson observes: "The sheep looked up and were not fed, for now the shepherds' only care was to find pasture for themselves."

The lay charges against the clergy were confirmed by the clericals themselves when, at a Provincial Council in 1549, the degradation of the Church was deplored. Ten years' later similar denunciations showed that the projected reforms had proved ineffective. If pledged to celibacy, the clergy, generally, including Cardinal Beaton, disregarded their vows. Lesley, a Catholic historian traced sacerdotal corruption to prelates nominated and appointed by the Crown with Papal approval. Beaton's successor, Hamilton, drew up a catechism of reform, but this prelate was not a model of virtue and Knox scorned his piety by saying that "the world knew how many wives and virgins he had enjoyed."

There were good Churchmen in Scotland who sincerely strove for reform, but they were a hopeless minority who

looked for improvement within the Catholic fold and refused co-operation with heretical innovations.

For centuries the people were bemused by the fear of hell and the hope for heaven, whose gates were opened with priestly keys. But blatant clerical corruption, coupled with heretical teachings, made men sceptical. Also, the spread of printed matter played an important part in this awakening. In 1543 we read references to "slandrous bills, writings, ballards and books" which defamed both spiritual and temporal estates and, in 1549 a Church Council "denounced the books of rhymes and popular songs containing infamous libels calumnies and slanders defamatory of the Church and churchmen." Parliament instituted a censorship to suppress the blasphemies and other affronts to the faith which proved abortive. Tyndale's New Testament and every Lutheran work were forbidden, but they circulated just the same.

Heresy was spreading in all directions and heretics perished in the flames. Three months after the burning alive of George Wishart in 1546, Cardinal Beaton, who was accused of the crime, was surprised and assassinated in his castle of St. Andrews. Then the Privy Council was constrained to "pass an Act against the 'invasion' and 'despoiling' of abbeys and other religious houses."

Apart from religious frenzy, the economic influences of the revolt are obvious. Those who stole jewels and other precious possessions from church or cloister in the name of the suppression of idolatry were mainly animated by mundane desires. Even so strict a Romanist as James V of Scotland, impropriated Church property to secular purposes, while the nobility, casting covetous glances on rich abbey estates declared that they must be restored to lay possessors. Moreover, as Dickinson notes: "Within the burghs, where the merchants suffered from the trading privileges and exemptions granted to the Church of old, new economic ideas were stirring. The burghs economists condemned the Church as a consumer but never a producer—and with that came the wonder whether some redistribution of spiritual wealth for productive purposes might not be an advantage to the commonwealth. To the poor, and they were many, the wealth of the friaries consisted of endowments for the poor; it was theirs by right; and in the 'Beggars Summonds' they demanded early entry to an inheritance of which they had been falsely deprived whereby many had been left to perish and to die."

Earlier, the century-long antagonism between England and Scotland enabled Cardinal Beaton to invoke the assistance of Catholic France to save the Church from destruction. Animosity between the two peoples had been renewed by the English invasion of Scotland in 1544 and 1545. In the former year, Mary of Guise became Regent and, when the English departed, the French garrison remained.

With the death of Mary Tudor, Elizabeth became Queen of England and the Protestant faith was restored. Catholic Europe, however, refused to regard Elizabeth as a legitimate sovereign and acknowledged Mary Stuart, the Scottish queen and Dauphiness of France, as the real heir to the English Crown and she and her spouse, the future King of France, assumed the title of King and Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland. For it was said that if Scotland could be retained, England's return to Catholicism would certainly follow.

The Scottish Reformers were in a quandary when Knox returned from a long absence abroad. For nineteen months he was captive in a French galley and the Scottish Calvinists were persecuted and exiled. In 1559, however,

they were again active and, after some delay, English help was afforded them. Civil war raged in Scotland, but by 1560 Parliament approved a Confession of Faith, Calvinist in character. Also, "the jurisdiction of the Pope was abolished; the celebration of the Mass was forbidden; and all doctrine contrary to the Confession utterly condemned."

But the lords and the ministers of the Kirk were at variance concerning the distribution of the abbey lands and revenues and when Mary Queen of Scots returned the conflict was renewed. As a fervent Catholic, she opposed all reform. Yet the Calvinists had become too powerful to be overthrown. The statesmen favoured a compromise which the godly rejected, for they asserted that: "The people were to reverence their ministers as the ambassadors of the Lord, and to obey the commandments which they proclaimed from God's mouth and book, 'even as they would obey God himself.'" These claims were accepted by a people mostly illiterate, and, as Dickinson avers, the ministers "gained a hold over their lives and thoughts which would have been otherwise denied. Because of that ministers became as infallible as former priests, and later 'new presbyter' was to be seen as 'but old priest writ large.'"

With Queen Mary's defeat and her escape to England, the Reformation became secure. Exception has been taken to Knox's lurid language. Still, as Dickinson urges, those who deplore his violent and salacious attacks "must not forget the spirit of the age in which he lived. War waged in the name of God, was staining with blood the hands of men throughout Western Europe. The massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day took place in the August preceding Knox's death."

A people, perhaps the brainiest in the world, succumbed to Knox's austere teaching and still largely remain the victims of a Sabbatarian Puritanism which not even the genius of Robert Burns, her greatest son, has sufficed to remove.

T. F. PALMER.

MYSTAPHYSICS

With due, deep devotion to Science,
And to bring out Plain Truth from her well,
I venture to dip in the current,
In which wiser men often fell.
If Sam. Johnson butted the boulder
In order to prove it was there,
In these slick days of nine-minute wonders—
He'd have found himself Talking on Air.
Our merry, wise Mystaphysicians,
Hacking chips from the old Blarney Stone,
Are loading the Live Letter Columns
In a marvellous, mystical tone.
They're our glorious, glad gladiators,
Who move in a magical mist;
Who bejewel the Joy of Existence
By proving it doesn't exist.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

The Christian Church has left nothing untouched with its depravity; it has made a worthlessness out of every value, a lie out of every truth, a baseness of soul out of every straightforwardness. Let a person dare to speak to me of its "humanitarian" blessings. To do away with any state of distress whatsoever was counter to its profoundest expediency; it lived by states of distress, it created states of distress in order to perpetuate itself eternally.—NIETZSCHE.

How is it? Is man only a mistake of God? Or is God only a mistake of man?—NIETZSCHE.

ACID DROPS

No fewer than 1,814,081 pamphlets were sold by the Catholic Truth Society last year, and 303,875 leaflets were distributed. Quite a record, no doubt; but was it not carrying coals to Newcastle? Few of these pamphlets ever reach non-Catholics, and membership of the Society is dropping. If these pamphlets cannot bring "infidels" into the fold, of what use are they? If only Catholics read them, it means simply that they may help to prevent "leakages," but little else. For, whether Catholics read these pamphlets or not, they are forced to believe whatever they are told by priests, and they are not in the least influenced by pamphlets.

All this was sensed by Mr. Douglas Hyde, the one-time militant Communist—who obviously found little difficulty, when he went over, in accepting one dictatorship instead of another. At the Annual Meeting of the C.T.S., he asked if "they were using the pamphlets enough?" by which he obviously meant whether they were bringing the erring sheep into the fold. He admitted that, in his case, it took eleven years to get him, though they did get him through reading three of these inspired works—but obviously he imagines that it would take much less time to convert a hard-headed Secularist!

Quite a number of Christians feel rather uncomfortable at the Red Dean of Canterbury accepting £9,000 from such a "Bolshevist-Communist-Atheist" as Stalin, and we note that *The Christian* suggests that he should devote the whole of this sum to "relieving the dependants of the Korean Christians who have been martyred by" the Dean's Communist comrades. Now, if the sum had been £9 he might well have "donated" it for such a purpose—but £9,000? Isn't that asking too much even from a Christian?

Where do the Churches meet was the subject of a talk on the Third Programme by the Rev. O. Tomkins, and he took quite a long time to tell his listeners that about the only thing on which they all agreed was that God revealed himself through Jesus. Where is the common ground of such Christians as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, John Baillie, V. A. Demant, T. S. Eliot, George Florovsky—most of them not British, anyway—when they talk about Christianity? Only in Jesus, while they appear to disagree in almost everything else. Possibly, all these eminent religionists would violently disagree with Mr. Tomkins as well.

The Chief Education Officer of Blackpool, writing to *The Times*, is very disgruntled that the 1944 Education Act, though it appears to give religion every chance of being forced on to our hapless children, should actually make "co-operation between churches and schools more difficult instead of easier." He wants it possible for parents to withdraw children from school whenever they like and send them to church—which appears to be forbidden under the new Act. Some of these gentlemen in authority appear to be never satisfied unless they can do something, or say something, to show how thoroughly they believe in Christianity—as if that were a recommendation. And because they believe in this out-of-date twaddle, they feel that it ought to be forced on to everybody else. We are delighted that the Act does forbid parents—and Education Officers—from being tin-pot Dictators.

An interesting sidelight on the "liberty" we would get if the Church of Rome were in power is reported by Capt. R. M. Stephens in the Protestant *Reveille*. It appears that some Protestants in Italy rented a room for worship, but on the day of opening a mob of "Catholic Actionists," led by a priest, deliberately destroyed everything they could lay their hands on, and blocked the entrance to the room with large boulders. Well, what else could be expected when Catholics are in power? They have often boasted that as tolerance is, in some measure, part of the Protestant creed they (the Catholics) expect toleration; but as they (the Catholics) do not believe in tolerance, they would do their best, if in power, to smash all opposition. Totalitarianism is the same the world over.

On the question of adult education, the *Fortnightly* has an article from the pen of Prof. Niblett, whose work lies in teaching, and who claims that there is "an undoubted increase of people these days in discussions and classes on philosophy and on religion." This, no doubt, is quite true—but the only relevant point is whether this interest leads to acceptance of religion? There is nothing in the article which suggests that the adult schools have been pouring believers into the Churches, and it may well be that the discussions and classes simply lead either to active Freethought or mere indifferentism.

The people who want a religion should take heed of a correspondent in *Picture Post* who wants the best points of all and every religion amalgamated into "one fine religion." No doubt this would make a religion—but why a "fine" one? Wouldn't it be better to scrap all religions and concentrate on the best ethics combined with science and history? Of what earthly use are Gods, Devils, Angels, Hell, and Heaven? The people who want them can have them now free, gratis, and for nothing—and our business should be to concentrate on educating the others out of religion.

Still another very disgruntled Christian is the Rev. T. H. Jenkins who complained recently at a Sunday School Conference that "the modern Sunday School worker faced a situation with atheistic secularism more thoroughly and aggressively organised than ever before." Mr. Jenkins did not appear to have any remedy for such a lamentable state of affairs, so we suggest that he does a bit of grovelling—that is, he humbly gets down on his knees and asks God Almighty what should be done? If the Lord himself cannot deal with aggressive atheistic Secularism, how can he expect a mere man to do it? Or, perhaps, Mr. Jenkins knows in his heart that the good old days of Sunday schooling have gone for ever and that neither he nor God nor both together can ever bring them back.

However, the Director of Education in Flintshire, Dr. H. Williams, thinks he has a plan. Speaking recently on "Sunday Schools in Wales," he said that the greatest enemy was "indifference," and he wanted to see legislation "to compel children to attend." Of course. Behind the facade of "love thy neighbour" and "tolerance," the true Christian may sometimes get away with it; but probe him deeper, and the old "compel 'em to come in" with the full force of the secular law is the Christ-like slogan. You might compel children to go to Sunday Schools, but you can never, in the ultimate, compel them to believe.

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,
London, W.C. 1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

H. RILEY, R. S. ASTBURY AND OTHERS.—Many thanks for cuttings which are always useful.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, 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 FRIEDENKER (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.

SUGAR PLUMS

The Time Table for the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society in London this week-end is as follows: Saturday, May 12, 7-30 p.m., reception of delegates and members in The Yorkshire Grey, across the road from Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road. Sunday, May 13, business session of the Conference at 10-30 and 2-30 in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1, for members of the N.S.S. only. Conference luncheon, 1 p.m., at The Bedford Restaurant, 39, Gray's Inn Road, for members and friends. At 7 p.m., Public Demonstration in the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C. 1. Admission Free, reserved seats one shilling each.

It cannot be too widely known that the Executive of the N.S.S. will send speakers to address outside organisations on our point of view. On May 3 Mr. P. V. Morris addressed the Norwood Labour Party League of Youth, and a very successful evening for all present followed. Questions and discussion were carried on till late evening and covered a wide range of topics. An outcome of the evening may be an arranged debate between Mr. Morris and a Christian speaker, if one can be found, but from our experience we are not very hopeful of that. At any rate there is an opportunity for an infidel slayer to do his stuff.

The South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. closed its indoor season with an excellent debate between Mr. L. Ebury and Mr. Tom Colyer on "Is Roman Catholicism more Tolerant than Protestantism?" The Branch had its largest audience, which included a good number of young people of both sexes, and both speakers were given generous applause. The Branch Executive have secured the hall for the next indoor season which will commence in September next. Open-air meetings will be held in Brockwell Park at 6-30 p.m. on Sundays, commencing on May 27. Details of membership, etc., may be had from the Branch Secretary, Mr. A. S. Gibbins, 58, Overdown Road, Bellingham, London, S.E. 6.

FREETHOUGHT TO-DAY

IF the development of human thought were the continuous and progressive phenomenon it is so commonly assumed to be; if, in matters intellectual, each generation commenced at the point arrived at by its predecessor, and made its own independent contribution to the common fund; we ought by now to be living in a state of mutual agreement respecting all that mattered most to us in our journey through this mundane life. We may seem to have travelled a long way when we compare primitive with modern man, the savage with the latest products of civilisation. But, unfortunately for our self-conceit, it is necessary for us to appreciate that the comparison is rarely, if ever, fairly made. The usual method is to compare the most ignorant savage with the very highest products of civilisation—with Shakespeare, Newton, Darwin, Einstein, and such. We are, however, far from being all Shakespeares or Newtons, and when we fairly compare the average man of the dawn with the average man of to-day we may be both surprised and humiliated to find that the distance traversed falls far short of that which we are so fondly apt to imagine.

Even in recorded times it may be doubted whether the average intelligence of modern civilised man is higher than that of the members of the ancient civilisations. In fact it has been contended that, instead of being higher, it is actually lower, and this contention does not appear to be without some justification. In his *Hereditary Genius*, Galton, writing in 1869, states that the average ability of the Athenian race in the time of Pericles (over 2,000 years ago) was, on the lowest possible estimate, as much above our own at the present day as ours is above that of the African Negro. "This estimate," says Galton, "which may seem prodigious to some, is confirmed by the quick intelligence and high culture of the Athenian commonalty, before whom literary works were recited and works of art exhibited, of a far more severe character than could possibly be appreciated by the average man of our race."

The chief distinguishing trait of the primitive savage is his superstition. Can it seriously be maintained that superstition is less rife to-day than it was in primitive times? We still have prayers for rain and fine weather, and for many other things that are supposed to depend on the favour of the gods. We still have apotheoses, canonizations, consecrations, and other forms of god-making, and at revival and other religious gatherings we witness orgies and exhibitions of which even the primitive savage would be ashamed. It may be true that superstition in its more orthodox religious forms has lost some of its force, but this is no indication that its sum-total is any the less. Apart from the superstitions specially associated with religion, the less orthodox superstitions continue to flourish with unabated vigour. The beliefs associated with broken looking-glasses, spilt salt, walking under ladders, omens, numerology, sitting at table thirteen at a time, crystal-gazing, reading fortunes by the cards or in the distribution of tea-leaves at the bottom of the cup, lucky charms and mascots, dream interpretation, ghosts, etc., etc., all these have their votaries in this year of grace, 1951.

In the quarters where the commoner superstitions have to some extent declined, we find that other, more novel forms of superstition have arisen to take their place. A new method of getting a superstition accepted is to make it look scientific. Although the Copernican astronomy swept heaven from the skies, Mr. Hinton and his disciples have had no difficulty in inducing their dupes to believe that it can actually be reached along the fourth dimension. Not only the immortality of the soul, but its very existence, has been discredited by the course of

modern thought. Nevertheless, J. W. Dunne has, by means of the pseudo-scientific method, been able to impose on a gullible public a farrago of nonsense, based on nothing more substantial than his dreams, as "the first scientific proof of the immortality of the soul." We meet with pseudo-scientific arguments for a flat earth, for the miracles of the Old and New Testaments, and for all kinds of faith-healing—old and new.

Passing from the pseudo-scientists to the scientists themselves, we have Sir James Jeans telling us that we must alter our fundamental conceptions because, strange as it may seem, one and one does not always make two. The proof? When two raindrops meet and coalesce they lose their identity and become one! Sir Arthur Eddington writes a book, *The Nature of the Physical World*, for the express purpose of telling us how little we know. Satisfied ignorance pays bigger dividends than can be expected from the thoughtful few. Let but the popular scientist dramatically declare: "Here science pauses" and he is immediately greeted with rounds of applause. It is one thing to humbly acknowledge our limitations—it is quite another to glory in them. Then along comes Prof. Heisenberg who, because he cannot tell both the position and velocity of an electron at the same time, concludes its movements to be unpredictable now and for ever more, and we are expected to accept this conclusion as proof positive of the freedom of the will!

Until recent times the avowed object of science has been to give a natural explanation of what had hitherto been ascribed to the occult and, by the scientific method of proceeding from the known to the unknown, to make things appear less mysterious than they were before. Nowadays, among the popular scientists at least, the position appears to have been reversed. Instead of proceeding from the known to the unknown, the attempt is made to proceed from one unknown to another, and to make the subject under discussion appear still more mysterious than it was before. Professor Andrade, at the conclusion of one of his B.B.C. talks some time ago, told his listeners: "If I have shown you that to-day science leads us to mysteries, and not away from them, it is sufficient." Sufficient for what? All we can imply is that Professor Andrade is seeking to prove that belief is superior to knowledge, and that a belief in science is less reliable than a belief in God.

Superstition among the ignorant, and reaction among the not so ignorant, has probably never been more rife at any time within the past hundred years than it is to-day. There has never been a time when it was more essential for the small band of Freethinkers to close their ranks and to present a solid front to the common foe—superstition—not only in its religious, but in all its other hydra-headed manifestations. Yet it is precisely at this, its most crucial moment, that we are being advised to dissipate our strength on matters with which, as Freethinkers, we are not immediately concerned.

This attitude is especially noticeable in articles and correspondence that have been appearing of late in our contemporary, *The Literary Guide*. In the November, 1950 issue, Mr. G. I. Bennett says that the Rationalist Movement is failing to adapt itself to the age in which we are living and that it is "dissipating what might be constructive and creative energy upon issues that are now hardly worth fighting." His views are endorsed by another correspondent who says: "Religious and philosophical issues should not, of course, be neglected, but economic, social, and political problems of all kinds are at least equal in importance." That may well be, but if the writer prefers the study of economic, moral, and political

problems to those of religion and philosophy, there are not wanting movements to cater for his tastes. Rationalists may be interested in these questions, too, but I do not think many of those who will be attending the Magdalen College week-end will feel very keen about his proposal to sit on the grass between sessions discussing the profound subject of the present-day expenditure upon alcohol and tobacco!

FRANK KENYON.

OLD SABBATH

I

TOO old to endure the company of their parents, too far advanced in their teens for Sunday School, they sought Sunday pastime walking about in groups. There was nothing else to do. Each had risen in time to participate in family breakfast, for being late incurred the risk of going without it.

After breakfast the best suit, clean shirt and socks, starched collar and newest necktie were taken from their week's repose in drawers and carefully donned, to which were added glossily polished black boots. Thus arrayed the youths went to Church. If possible they sat in a pew below the doorway so as to see who came in, arriving early for that purpose.

Emerging from Church the boys took a walk up into the main street of the little town. They talked scurrily of the service just attended, with a few remarks upon the sermon, but more about whom they saw attending worship. To that were joined brief accounts of anything outstanding which had happened to themselves during the week, at work, home, or out of evenings. On this walk they saw other youths they knew, having a few words in passing, or stopping for a short conversation of enigmatic, often nearly meaningless questions and answers.

This constitutional was carefully timed so that the strollers arrived back home about one o'clock to enjoy the big cooked Sunday dinners characteristic of their homes.

After that meal their fathers slept, their mothers and sisters washed up, and the lads went forth again seeking diversion.

On this occasion, given fine weather, the young fellows resorted to Saint Anne's Well—in local idiom Stanswell—about a half-mile up the hillside. There at the top of zigzag walks was a flat space in front of the Well House. Around its border were seats under overhanging trees. Seated here the local lads amused themselves with gaiety restrained to conform to the sacred day.

They talked in scrappy disconnected phrases. Occasionally they called across to other groups on other seats. Anyone who passed by they watched with undisguised regard, stare indeed, what was known in the vulgar tongue as gawping.

Before the passers-by were out of sight, barely out of hearing, the seated youths were discussing them in detail and with particularity, their general appearance, features, clothes and gait, with as much humour as could be introduced into the analyses of the persons concerned. Humour that is of the type peculiar to homebred youths; very peculiar indeed, entertaining to themselves, but would not be found amusing by anyone outside their circle unaccustomed to their form of allusive wit.

Followed a slow walk home to five o'clock Sunday tea, a heavy meal in accordance with the prevailing aphorism: A good dinner deserves a good tea.

II

Soon after six o'clock these youths were again moving towards Church. The evening service resembled the morning performance with a social difference. The upper classes were absent, being at dinner, while the lower middle and working classes were more numerous, mainly their womenfolk.

Coming out of Church the groups of boys took their way to the main street of the town. There they had two or three saunters to and fro among the crowd, mainly young people similarly engaged, the Monkey Parade.

Tiring of that they resorted to the Grove. This lay immediately beyond the end of the town on the highroad leading out of it along the foot of the Hills. Where the latter eased their slope to the roadway ran a broad path lined by trees. Under these were seats. Upon them the young men and boys seated themselves. So placed they could watch all that went along the highway.

There was yet much horse traffic, many cyclists and a few motor cars. All were looked at and commented upon, especially the automobiles, still sufficiently a novelty to arouse interest, with no standardised types but most queer experimental vehicles.

Chiefly the passing scene was of people. Family parties strolling after Church, groups, pairs, individuals, mostly local people following the only Sunday evening amusement available, that of walking about.

Occupants of all the seats full of youths gazed and made remarks in low tones, witty where possible or according to their ideas of wit, comic, questioning or revelatory when passers-by were people they knew.

Outstandingly interesting to them were couples, married, courting, or merely temporary acquaintances or having some link of friendship.

About all these there was much speculation among the youths with subtle or slurred skirting round sexual implications, accompanied by sidelong glances and covert smiles and laughter.

They were considerably aroused whenever a girl alone passed by. Then there would be sly coughs, little hems!, low whistles, and as the girl passed on discussion of her form and face, attire and walk, with suggestions as to her possibilities for a man's company.

Twice a tall dark girl with a slender swan neck went by, and the seated lads began to be stirred. She was analysed, and individual opinions expressed as to her likeability.

A pale youth with somewhat red-rimmed eyes was of opinion that a girl walking to and fro alone and remaining so had something wrong about her; was not so good or innocent as she looked. He finished his besmirching description of her with the cryptic phrase, muttered out of the corner of his mouth, "They smother 'em," repeated with a grin.

A third time the girl passed, regarded intently but in silence.

The oldest of the young fellows rose and followed her. His companions saw him overtake her, raise his straw boater and speak to the girl. After the slightest hesitation they walked on together, linking arms before they were out of sight.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

A little while ago the belief was general that there were certain healing virtues in inanimate things, in the bones of holy men and women, in the rags that had been torn from the foul clothing of still fouler saints, in hairs from martyrs, in bits of wood and rusty nails from the true Cross, in the teeth and finger nails of pious men, and in a thousand other sacred things.—INGERSOLL.

CORRESPONDENCE

WHO WERE THE ARYANS?

SIR,—The "Aryan Race," which seems to cause some headache to Mr. Laws, springs from the German usage to call the Indo-European races "Indo-Aryans." Prof. L. von Schroeder (whose pupil I had been for a time) did not apply this term in the Nazi sense—if "sense" may be connected with the Nazis who persecuted, *inter alia*, the Romnis (gypsies), far better Aryan themselves than the Prussians!

The Indo-European tribes, descending from the highlands of Eran (Iran-Bactria) into the Indus Valley, called themselves "Araya" (New Persian a'yān=nobles)—Greek aristos, Anglo-Saxon ethel; they put up the caste system as a social safeguard and a deterrent against intermarriage with the *varna* (cp. varnish), the surrounding dark-skinned peoples of the country. The Teutonic tribe who conquered France styled themselves the Franks=Freemen, freeborn. The term "Slavs" is derived from "Slava" = glory (O. Germ. *hliu*, in Chlod-o-wek, Ludwig), related to "slovo"=word, hence Slovan, Slovak, Slavon, etc., people endowed with sensible speech. Czech (*cesky*), connected with *clovék* (human being), is a contraction of *cel-ed'*+*vek* (from *clen*, *celedi*=native, clansman). As we still speak of the Slavonic races, or the Czech language, it appears that prior to Hitler's misuse of the word, "Aryan" could be connected with both language and race. At present, however, I would advise against either application.—Yours, etc.,

PERCY G. ROY.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: Mr. J. W. BARKER.

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

National Secular Society
CONWAY HALL
Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1

**A FREETHOUGHT
DEMONSTRATION**
(following the Annual Conference NSS)

WHIT SUNDAY, MAY 13th

Chairman;
R. H. ROSETTI
(President NSS)

Speakers;

J. T. BRIGHTON (Newcastle)	H. DAY (Bradford)
L. EBURY (London)	T. M. MOSLEY (Nottingham)
F. A. RIDLEY (London)	

Doors open at 6-30 p.m. Commencing at 7-0 p.m.
ADMISSION FREE Reserved Seats
1/- each.

"I BELIEVED"

Autobiography of Douglas Hyde, late News Editor of the "Daily Worker"

DOUGLAS HYDE is a religious man. Brought up in the Methodist Church and, passing, by easy stages into the Church of Moscow, he has now arrived in the Church of Rome. It would seem likely that he will rest there; indeed, for one so subjectively doctrinaire, there really isn't anywhere to go from here!

An able journalist, Mr. Hyde has written an interesting and informative book, even if one is left with the impression that, for some reason, he is pulling his punches. And whatever his former comrades may now say to belittle him, Douglas Hyde was in a position to know; though not one of the Big Six of the Politburo of the Communist Party in Great Britain, he was, as one of the London Secretariat, next door to it; certainly he was in a better position to know what was going on than that ornamental but purely honorary body, the "Editorial Board," on which sat Professor Haldane, Canterbury's Dean, and actress Beatrix Lehmann, *inter alios*.

Looking back from his new stand on the Ultramontane heights, Mr. Hyde sees the activities of his former companions as those of ruthless opportunism, reflecting the Leninist teaching that "morality is subordinate to the class struggle." He tells us that the Communist defeat by the Nazis in 1930 was totally unexpected by the former and led to a *volte-face* in Stalinist policy. Up to that event they had proudly pursued the policy outlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, namely, that "Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare their ends can only be obtained by the forcible overthrow of existing social conditions." After the Nazi triumph, the Stalinist Marxists reversed their former "open" policy and entered into the various Popular Fronts which were then springing up in European countries, until, in the author's words, now "Communists' propaganda never at any time bears any relation whatsoever to their real aims."

His remarks on spying and sabotage by Communists are interesting and highly instructive. "The significant thing to recognise," he writes, "is that those who went in for it did not see themselves as spies, still less as traitors." They did it at considerable risk to themselves nor did they receive any payment for their services; but as Party members their conscience would have given them no rest if they had failed to disclose any information they had, *however obtained*, which might be useful to Moscow. "One spy of this sort," remarks the author, "is worth scores of mercenaries." (This should help Mr. Hyde to grasp the necessity, imposed by his new authority, of withholding no vital information, *however obtained*, from one's father confessor.) Incidentally, Mr. Hyde exposes the shameful ignorance and stupidity of M.I. 5, defects so glaring as to be attributable only to an overweening vanity on the part of Shillitoe and Co., who are apparently above studying Marxism and getting to understand their enemy; *there lies the real betrayal!*

Our Catholic convert constantly emphasises this Communist attitude that the end not only justifies the means but that means can only be judged by their effectiveness; therefore, the terms "good" and "evil" are not only irrelevant to the issue but utterly meaningless in such a connection. "As a Marxist," writes the late *Daily Worker* executive, "I believed that truth and falsity are subordinate to the over-riding interests of the class

struggle," and as, later, he began to move away from the Leninist concept, he remarks: "I was judging behaviour on the basis of ethics and not expediency—a thoroughly un-Marxist thing to do." He suggests that the reasons for a large number of those entering the Communist Party derive from a sense of social injustice; but they remain to learn that it is not social justice but Communism itself that is to become their be-all and end-all. Bad social conditions, he says, have been the breeding ground for Communism, which has thereby been able to take on "what is essentially a religious instinct."

Mr. Hyde likes to attribute his conversion to the chance reading of a small reactionary Catholic weekly, superimposed on his abiding attraction for medieval arts and forms. It would, however, be a fairer analysis to say his Marxism became a spent force, a lifeless framework, just as Catholicism has become a spent force for many a priest who, however, stays on in it because he has not the energy or opportunity to get out of it. "Marxist analysis," as our author, under the influence of his new ideology, puts it, "was becoming a science to me without being an apostolic faith. I could use my Marxist methodology coldly." Once he had arrived at this critical, "protestant" view of his former activities, the whole structure of his Marxism rapidly crumbled.

Few people, in my experience, have been converted *from a faith or to a faith* by logic or argument alone; the change is always basically motivated by some transcendental emotional urge. Mr. Hyde, who is an intelligent and well read fellow, looking one day for "dirt" in some Catholic journal suddenly discovered that it was not dirt but sound, common sense. Yet the content of the journal had not changed; only Mr. Hyde's emotional reactions had changed. We rationalists are aware of this phenomenon, for it more often happens the other way about—away from Christianity, not towards it.

Douglas Hyde has discovered that *Rerum novarum* and *Quadragesimo anno* are great social documents in contrast with the "phoney" Communist Party variety. He has unearthed a new "ism," Distributism. I thought I knew all the varieties of political and religious "isms," but this is a new one on me. It is apparently a Catholic variant of the Protestant invocation that one should be content in that state to which it has pleased God to call one; in short, Distributism is a shabby and dishonest racket to bamboozle the common people into accepting clerical dictatorship. Asked to review Avro Manhattan's remarkable book, *The Catholic Church against the Twentieth Century* (ably reviewed in this journal recently by F. A. Ridley), he could only find in it more proof of the value of "the Church's social teaching"; it only served to help him more quickly on his path to Rome. I feel it is a pity he did not get hold of something by McCabe or Chapman Cohen; I feel that such reading matter would have God-speeded him at the double on his journey!

Not that I wish to imply that there is anything insincere or phoney about Mr. Hyde's conversion to the Catholic faith. He is always an earnest and serious minded young man who embraces wholly and enthusiastically anything he takes up. If I doubted everything else in his book I would accept the sincerity of his delusion in the Catholic Church.

However, I am only a book reviewer and as such inadequate to the task; it requires a psychopathist to do Mr. Hyde and his views justice.

P. C. KING.