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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### A South American Theocracy

A FEW weeks back a B.B.C. book-reviewer gave an interesting talk on a new book by an American author, Hiram Bingham, entitled *The Lost City of the Incas* and dealing, as its name implies, with a new discovery relating to that perennially fascinating subject the Peruvian Empire and civilisation of the Incas, which was so suddenly and drastically obliterated by the Spanish "conquistadores" of Pizarro in 1533.

Most of our readers, we assume, are acquainted at least in some degree with the story of the Incas and with their tragic downfall, if only via the medium of the brilliant narrative of William H. Prescott whose well-known book, *The Conquest of Peru* (1847) still remains probably the most brilliant literary narrative in the English language relating to the civilisation of the Incas and to its summary and unhappy end. As is, no doubt, inevitable in the light of more recent archæological discoveries effected since the American historian's book first saw the light, a good many of Prescott's views have been questioned by modern Americanists.

One of the most recent writers on the subject of the lost civilisation of the Incas and, we would suppose, one of the most authoritative of modern sociologists who have specialised in this subject, is a French historian, Prof. Louis Baudin, whose book, *L'Empire socialiste des Inka*, we have recently had the pleasure of reading. M. Baudin is a historian and sociologist of the scientific school, entirely without the brilliant literary style which makes Prescott so eminently readable but immensely learned and severely critical of the work of his predecessors in the field of Peruvian studies. The scientific value of his book is greatly increased by his monumental bibliography which records, with terse and often severe critical and explanatory notes, practically everything ever written on this subject from, and including the era of the Spanish Conquest, down to the precise date (1928) at which his own book appeared. A survey, we may add, which includes even quite trivial works and obscure monographs otherwise long since swallowed up in the night of time.

M. Baudin's work has not, unfortunately, ever been translated into English, which is a pity since it is, we should say, a contribution to the subject of permanent authority and importance; though we must confess that we do not particularly envy the translator, since we found *The Socialist Empire of the Incas* heavy going, whilst the learned author's French is often technical and makes exceptionally difficult reading. However, despite these attendant shortcomings, M. Baudin gives us a masterly summary both of what is actually known about the Incas, as well as of the sources of that knowledge.

Our author is, actually, a social investigator and an historian of institutions rather than a political historian of the more obvious kind who deals primarily with personalities and peoples. This angle of approach is, indeed, indicated by his title, *The Socialist Empire of the*

*Incas*. However, before noting his critique of the Inca polity, it may be convenient to summarise in the briefest fashion what is actually known or reasonably surmised about the Rise and Fall of what was probably the most remarkable of native American empires and of American civilisations.

The actual empire of the Incas only lasted for some 300 years before its "untimely taking-off" by Pizarro. It was founded, probably in the Bolivian highlands, about 1250, and enjoyed its hey-day in the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, immediately prior to the Spanish Conquest, when the Incas expanded their empire until it included the present Republics of Peru and Ecuador and parts of Bolivia and Chile. At its height it was about six times the size of France and is estimated to have contained a population of about twelve millions. It is certain that the Incas themselves represented a modern version of South American civilisation, and many of the impressive remains now collectively designated as "Inca" ruins, were probably much older and represented relics of earlier races and cultures from whom, perhaps, the Incas themselves were actually descended.

The Incas may be described as the Romans of the New World, in that they seem to have been, like their European prototypes, soldiers, engineers and, in particular, administrators and law-givers. As our author demonstrates, the ease with which this vast empire was conquered by a handful of Spanish adventurers was not entirely due either to the superior military technique or to the barbarous cruelty and revolting treachery of their conquerors, but was largely, perhaps mainly, due to a violent dynastic civil war which was raging at the precise moment when Pizarro landed and which, perhaps, indicated that the Inca Empire had entered upon its decline. M. Baudin, indeed, is apparently of the opinion that another century would probably have witnessed its eventual dissolution even without the Spanish invasion.

However that may have been, the Incas are of greater interest to the sociologist than to the chronicler; for their social polity was, in many respects, unique, and it is this that our author treats in exhaustive detail under a succession of headings. Despite his title, M. Baudin is no socialist—he appears, in fact, to be a follower of Malthus—and modern socialists would join issue with him upon some of his more general criticisms. Briefly the Inca Empire, according to our author, combined three entirely distinct types of polity: The Inca régime was, at one and the same time, a theocracy in which the Inca caste, descendants of the Sun, ruled by Divine Right, like their opposite numbers in Japan; a socialist, or collectivist régime cemented by an enormous bureaucracy, with the Inca God-King at its apex, a kind of "Fabian" theocracy; and an indigenous system of agrarian communism carried on by local "clans" ("ayllus") under the supervision of the central government, and which was, probably, much older than the superimposed régime of the Incas.

Such, in brief, was the unique social structure of the Inca Empire. That it represented a very remarkable political

and economic régime seems indisputable: even the Spanish conquerors testified to the absence of destitution and to the high general level of material prosperity throughout the vast empire; the remains of its public works are most impressive; whilst, without machines, iron or any large pack animals, the Inca road-system was, perhaps, superior to that of the Romans and, otherwise, was unequalled prior to modern times.

A dramatic theme, this Sun-State by the far-off waters of the Pacific—and what a dramatic end! For not even the Sun itself has been eclipsed more suddenly or more completely than was its Peruvian offspring at the hands of the iron-clad invaders from the Rising Sun, who abruptly cut off and obliterated an entire civilisation at the zenith of its existence and transferred it, as it were, overnight, from the realm of History to that of the pre-historic.

F. A. RIDLEY.

## MATERIALISM AND MIND

### II

IT cannot be doubted that for most people, including a number of first-class thinkers, mind appears to be an "entity," that is, something existing by itself apart from what they are pleased to call matter. Is mind an entity?

On the second page of his devastating analysis of the problem, *The Myth of the Mind*, Frank Kenyon says:—

"There is no more an entity called the mind, from which what we describe as mental phenomena proceed, than there is an entity called digestion presiding over the digestive processes, or an entity called respiration governing the respiratory processes. The belief in the mind, as an entity, is due to that mistaken principle which has drawn philosophy into such disrepute: the principle of generalising phenomena into an abstract term, and then treating the abstraction as a metaphysical entity governing the phenomena it was invented to describe."

The truth is, of course, that "mind" was evolved—evolved when conditions on this earth of ours first produced "living" matter, that is, matter which visibly moved and gradually became more and more complex. Apart from this complex matter there is no mind whatever, no separate entity. Over a century ago when far less research had been done on the brain and mind, a famous "hypnotist," Dr. Elliotson, wrote "No fact in nature is more evident than that in certain conditions matter thinks. Every animal is matter: every indisputable animal has a portion of itself peculiarly compounded and organised, and termed nervous, which executes the functions of feeling and consciousness, desire and will. . . . The brain and its functions are subject to precisely the same laws as the other portions of the body and their functions. To ascribe the properties of the brain to a spirit or something distinct from matter is as childish as it would be to ascribe the property of gravitation, the phenomena of light, heat, electricity, or the properties of plants, to something distinct from matter." And in an address which he delivered in 1842, W. C. Engledue, M.D., declared, "We contend that mind has but an imaginary existence—that we have to consider matter only." (*Cerebral Physiology and Materialism*.)

The problem is not just a simple yea or nay. The Vitalists have been and still are strongly entrenched, and even many scientists who have accepted evolution either take an "agnostic" attitude or, like Alfred Russel Wallace, want us to believe that "mind" was engrafted on some early animal ancestor of man from some "spiritual" being.

The reader will find the problem brilliantly discussed in G. H. Taylor's *Can Materialism Explain Mind?*, following the latest authorities. He points out (in discussing the brain of apes and man), "Nowhere should we find an unbridgeable gap as though some extraneous power had here infused a soul, or at least something that could not have come from the conditions then existent. No 'Life Principle' has forced its way in on the journey; there has been no inoculation or interpolation of any structure or faculty. The difference (between the lowest ape and man) is due solely to complexity. As the brain increases in complexity it turns out a more complex product." And he quotes McDougall:—

"It is a matter of common knowledge that science has given its verdict against the soul; has declared that the conception of the soul as a thing, or being, or substance, or mode of existence, or activity, different from, distinguishable from, or in any sense or degree independent of, the body, is a mere survival from primitive culture, one of the many relics of savage superstition that obstinately persist among us in defiance of the clear teachings of modern science." (*Body and Mind*.)

Those Vitalists who maintain that "mind" or the "soul" came from some outside "spiritual" being should tell us exactly when it came and where it entered. "At what point," asks Mr. Taylor, "was the order of nature stopped and a non-natural soul implanted? At what stage in the developing embryo is it introduced and woven into the natural structure? Science can detect no such break. Further, it is now in a position to say there has not been such a break."

Then take the question of heredity, in particular the transmission of mental defects. In his *Study of Heredity*, Professor E. B. Ford says, "The constant recurrence of feeble-mindedness in the same families, even when their members may be brought up in widely differing environments, leave no room for doubt that the condition is inherited often on quite simple lines. The marriage of two feeble-minded persons produces with great frequency a family of feeble-minded children." But why should there be any feeble-mindedness if the "mind" is an entity coming from some "spiritual" being? Are we to understand that the feeble-minded have been thus *deliberately* endowed? As Buchner in *Force and Matter* said nearly a century ago:—

"If the mind, as spiritualists (i.e., Vitalists) contend, be a thing independent or self existing, and controlling or utilising matter, why is it so little able to defend itself against or repel these (physical) attacks? Why does it yield or succumb to a blow on the head, the commingling of a few drops of blood with the substance of the brain, a sunstroke, a few inhalations of chloroform, a few glasses of wine, or a few drops of opium, prussic acid, or other poison?"

The truth is "that bodily conditions determine mental output," and this "is amply corroborated wherever science investigates the sources of human conduct."

In his book, Mr. Taylor goes into many questions—into what we know of the working of our glands, for example, and into Rejuvenation, Conditioned Reflexes, Free Will and Determinism, the Kantian Mind, Conscience, Personality, Immortality, all with up-to-date authorities, and all part and parcel of "crass" or "blatant" Materialism. It is astonishing how many scientists hate the word and yet are Materialists in exactly the same sense in which we who declare ourselves Materialists use the term. They are obliged to admit that they can find no evidence for "Vitalism" for any outside spiritual force. The one

eternal substance is "matter" or, to put it another way, Nature or Existence or the totality of all phenomena or the Universe are ways of defining the word "matter"; and, if so defined, there is no room for a "spirit" or a God.

Modern Spiritualists are constantly attacking Materialism because they say that they have evidence that a person exists after he has died. He has not his body—but he has the same "mind" which he had in this world. The mind or the soul or the spirit exists. Mr. Taylor has many pages of close reasoning on this question to which I refer the reader. For my own part, after a fairly close study extending over many years of the claims of Spiritualism as far as "survival" goes, I can only say I have come across no evidence. I am of opinion that evolution has not ceased, and that our minds are subject to the same laws of nature as are our bodies. Even life itself, as we know it, cannot be "immortal" because we know that at some future date, as Joseph McCabe has pointed out, "Our sun must die, as other suns have done and are doing; and no human art can create a substitute for its streams of energy." (*The Evolution of Mind.*)

Whether "mind" as such will ever be "explained" is a question for the future. But one thing is sure—it will never be explained apart from "body."

H. CUTNER.

### RELIGION IN JOURNALISM

FROM time to time and for reasons which may be apparent or obscure, the several organs of our national capitalistic and "free" Press indulge in what the Press magnates choose to describe as journalistic "scoops," or "triumphs," but which would be more adequately and correctly described as "stunts" for the purpose of kidding the populace.

As a general rule these stunts are of political significance, with either international, national, or purely parochial implications and are designed to condition the mass mind into readiness to anticipate and to accept a state of affairs which is already in course of preparation for them, being carefully hatched, organised and planned. It is not at all easy to identify the organisers or planners behind the scenes, but there are factors which can always be taken as a reliable guide: 1, that everything, including publicity and propaganda, has to be paid for in terms of money, and 2, that the power of the Press lies chiefly in its power to suppress, to distort and to falsify. It may be cynical, but it is always at least useful, to consider as to whose or what interests are to be served, if a particular news story, or suggestion is widely accepted and believed.

Occasionally these journalistic "stunts" have a philosophical, or a religious significance, but the design and purpose behind these remain the same, whilst not being much more apparent.

During the "tween" war period it became apparent in this country that the "Age of Faith" was steadily disintegrating and that the general state of God's world was tending steadily to undermine the blind faith in gods and saviours which had been the result of the marriage of State and Church, with its unholy alliance of temporal and spiritual powers and authority. As a result of the failure of this structural underpinning of society and arising as a natural and necessary product of the spread of educational facilities and some degree of culture, the mass mind was becoming more conscious and alive, rejecting the old beliefs and superstitions in which and upon which it had been nurtured, and becoming rather querulously sceptical. The acquisition by the common

herd of some acquaintance with the elementary sciences and the results of Biblical criticism, was fast losing for this country its title of being a Christian country.

Such state of mind could hardly be allowed to develop without some effort being made to arrest or retard its progress, and we began to notice a constant and persistent "boosting up" by the Press of the "Christian" religion, of "Christian" ethics, of "Christian" morals, "Christian" principles, "Christian" values, etc., etc. Practically every news organ, no matter what its professed political outlook, began to carry its "Thought for the Day," or its "Daily Text," conspicuously displayed at the head of its Editorial column, with its scriptural reference. It would appear that many of our religious apologists and publicists anticipated the Goebbel's technique of constant repetition and reiteration of slogans as a means of carrying conviction, long before the Hitler regime, and that there are many people who have been induced to believe that there do exist some particular and peculiar morals, ethics, principles and values, which are entitled to the adjective "Christian," with, of course, a capital "C."

Critical and objective examination of these things demonstrates of course that there are no morals, ethics, principles, values, virtues, or vices, which are Christian or un-Christian. Such terms have, and can have, only a humanistic connotation and can only be interpreted in reference to society in some civilised state or condition. Unfortunately, however, the masses to whom the "blurbs" in question are directed, are not generally accustomed to the use and exercise of critical faculties in objective examination of propaganda. "Christian" ethics, "Christian" morals, "Christian" principles, "Christian" values and "eternal verities," are all nice-sounding and soothing phrases to the pious and simple minded, they slip readily off the tongue, but are merely phrases without precise meaning.

Our daily journals are, in these days of newsprint shortage, largely precluded from giving much free advertising, outside of their advertisement columns, to the pros and cons of, and for, the various contending religious factions, and indeed do the best they can to gloss over and to cover up the dissensions of the multitudinous sects and denominations. There is, however, plenty of scope in editorials, local news, city topics, and by the way columns, to advertise the words of "spiritual wisdom" and "muddled argumentation" which from time to time are spilled by ecclesiastical dignitaries, who claim to have the solution to all man's problems. It would indeed often appear that Popes, Archbishops, and Bishops, and even clerics of the lower strata, are more knowledgeable and capable in the realm of politics than are experienced statesmen, particularly if the latter happen to be non-Christian. It apparently pays dividends to give undue prominence to the "mistaken," "anti-social," or "anarchistic" tendencies of a "demented," "fanatical" or "unbalanced" Jehovah's Witness, Christadelphian, or Plymouth Brother, who pleads his love of God, for not wishing to be trained to go out and kill his opposite number of another country, or religion, or for being unwilling to forfeit his personal freedom, to relinquish his personality, or to sacrifice his individuality. This, of course, is designed to demonstrate how much superior are those faithful ones of the more orthodox and respectable communities who show exaggerated respect and reverence for Authority with a capital "A," and who never, by any chance, question or challenge it.

"LUKE STRAIGHT."

(To be concluded)

### ACID DROPS

**Overheard** upon a bus: "So and so has gone to Alberta in Canada. It is near the equator and must be very cold." "Vox Populi, vox Dei" ("The voice of the People is the voice of God.") There was a time, not so long ago, either, when geography was not the Lord's strong point either.

**Wonders never cease!** The "third programme" of the B.B.C. has just staged a feature on the intriguing theme: "Can machines think?" Of course, as that former pillar of Broadcasting House, Dr. C. E. M. Joad, used to put it, "it all depends" on what one means by "machines." We are now anxiously awaiting an announcement by a religious "apologist" that man is not just a calculating machine. The trouble, however, is that materialism never said he was: there are machines and machines, and the human brain is a very highly developed one—sometimes!

**Here's news!** The recent boxing match in South Africa between a Scot and a (white) South African ended, as we all know now, in a victory for the local man. But, simultaneously, another battle was going on behind the scenes, in which South Africa was beaten. For the promoters announced their confidence, beforehand, that the weather would remain fine, whilst the Prime Minister of South Africa ordered prayers to be said for rain. The Lord is obviously a sportsman, since Malan's prayer went unanswered.

**The other day,** having time to "kill" in a large railway station, we carefully examined a large map of East Anglia which contained details of the famous men and events associated with that part of the world. When, however, we got as far as Thetford, the birthplace of "Tom" Paine, we did not notice any reference to that great man. Evidently, "The Age of Reason" has not yet dawned.

**Here is another fact** for our anti-evolutionists. A radio broadcast recently dealt with the origins of that plague of all our lives, the common cold. In this connection, we were informed that the only animal who catches cold in exactly the same way as man is the chimpanzee, who happens to be our nearest "cousin" amongst the arboreal apes. We submit that this can hardly be a coincidence. It would be interesting to know what our anti-evolutionists have to say about this, perhaps some reverend gentleman will oblige.

**It is not often** we thoroughly agree with a parson, but when the Rev. R. M. Thomson of the Wycliffe Congregational Church, Alfreton, insists that "you cannot be a Christian outside the fellowship of the Church of Christ," we must loudly cry out, "Hear, hear!" We have always resented the way in which Christians rope in thorough unbelievers like Charles Bradlaugh, Robert Blatchford, and many others as "real Christians without knowing it," or that one must be a Christian if he is honest, or if he does not kick his wife and children about. The fellowship of the Church of Christ means belief in Devils, Angels, Hell, Heaven, Miracles, Spiritual Healing, as well as in Spooks and Spirits, and Ghosts, Goblins and Gods. The idea of anyone having the insolence to call himself a Christian without such beliefs should be sternly suppressed. More power to the elbow of Mr. Thompson!

**Our heartfelt sympathy** also goes out to that backbone of genuine Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church. In flaming headlines, the *Catholic Times* launches a "world-

wide" protest against "an Atheist Editor" appointed by UNESCO to write a *History of Mankind*. Every history should be written by a thorough believer in Christianity (Catholic brand) and should bear a Vatican imprint of genuineness. And if people like Gibbon, Bury, Buckle, and others, who pour scorn and ridicule on the Papacy and all its works are allowed to influence mankind, then it is the duty of all Christians to see either that these liars and scoundrels are put to death—of course only by the "Secular" arm—or to root out their works by the public hangman or by the Holy Index.

**This dreadful "History of Mankind"** is to be written by Dr. R. E. Turner, described as "emphatically and vigorously Atheistic" who has, in addition, "little mercy either on God or on those who believe in him." He is to be helped by nine other writers and—horror of horrors!—not one "is from a Catholic institution of learning." The sum allocated for producing the work is £215,000—a sum which, it is idle to say, all true Catholics would have been only too pleased to spend themselves without having horrid Atheists interfering. Indeed, indeed, our wholehearted sympathy goes to the all-suffering Catholic Church for this dreadful blow to their hopes—and fears.

**Although that momentous happening,** the Second Coming of Christ has had to be postponed a number of times—one never knows how much this postponement is due to crass infidelity—echoes of a wholehearted belief in it regularly comes whenever there is a "crisis" in world affairs. The crisis is what is termed in the Bible a "tribulation" and there are quite a few prophecies in the Bible to tell us what is going to happen through the Second Coming of "our Lord." To make this certain, the International Legion of the Cross of New Zealand wants your—yes, you have guessed it—your "donation," the bigger the better. How the Beelzebub could you hope for a Second Coming if you did not grease the path liberally with donations?

**We just love to read** the modern "expositor" of some of the incidents in the life of "our Lord" especially when he is trying to give a rational explanation of one of the most stupid stories narrated in the Holy Bible—the cursing of the fig tree. In the *Methodist Recorder*, the Rev. H. Bett says there was no "injustice" in cursing it as "it was not a sentient creature," and it was therefore not wrong "in dooming it to wither away." In fact, the wicked old tree fully deserved the fate it got at the hands of "our Lord" for not having figs in winter. Hallelujah!

**The Divine Command:** "Thou canst not serve both God and Mammon," has usually been honoured in the breach rather than in the observance. Apparently it still is so. For the Pope has just appointed a committee of cardinals to investigate the commercial activities of a number of monastic religious Orders. Apparently, these holy men have been "preying"—with an "e" instead of an "a"!

**The anti-Communist "witch-hunt"** seems to claim some queer victims nowadays. The latest is Mr. Graham Greene, equally well known as novelist and ardent champion of Roman Catholicism. About the last person, we should imagine, to be accused of Communist sympathies. However, in his distant youth as an University student, Mr. Greene was a probationary member of the Communist Party for three weeks. Three weeks! Isn't this carrying the joke a bit too far?

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

## SUGAR PLUMS

The 46th Annual Dinner at the Charing Cross Hotel on Saturday, January 26, appears to have given general satisfaction. Over a hundred guests were present and, despite the heavy losses sustained by the N.S.S. during the last year, the general tone of the speeches was one of sober optimism. The Executive Committee of the N.S.S. were fortunate enough to secure the services of one of the guests of honour, Mrs. Janet Chance, at the forthcoming meeting at Conway Hall, "The B.B.C. versus Democracy," on Thursday, February 14. Mrs. Chance will represent a most valuable addition to the N.S.S. platform on that occasion.

The *Freethinker* continues to attract attention in the Press from several widely divergent angles. Recently, our spiritualistic contemporary, *The Two Worlds*, requested our permission to reproduce an article that appeared not long ago in our columns on the "R101" disaster, entitled *Dr. Tabori Sums Up*. We hope that the answering letter by our contributor, Mr. H. Cutner, will also appear in our contemporary. A few weeks back, *Peace News*, organ of the well-known Pacifist body, *The Peace Pledge Union*, referred in an editorial to an article recently contributed to our columns by Mr. Oswell Blakeston. Whilst the Bombay weekly, *The National Guardian*, in its issue of December 30, reproduced in full the article, "Religious Terrorism in the Middle East," by F. A. Ridley, which originally appeared as an editorial in *The Freethinker*. We are in the news!

The West London Branch N.S.S. continued its excellent winter lecture course at "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, W., on Sunday, February 3. A notable contribution to the course was made by Mr. R. W. S. Pollard, who took as his subject "The Reform of the Law." Mr. Pollard, who is himself a solicitor and well known in progressive circles as an outspoken advocate of Divorce Law Reform, had many constructive proposals to make on this important subject. He stressed, in particular, the necessity for the written codification of the Law, as in Continental countries, for the creation here of a Minister of Justice as in the British Dominions, and for the fusion of the two branches of the legal profession, barristers and solicitors. A lively discussion followed these radical proposals. Mr. F. A. Ridley, who presided in the absence of the Branch President, Mr. Hornbrook, in proposing a vote of thanks to the speaker, suggested that Mr. Pollard himself would make an excellent Minister of Justice. The lecturer broke much new ground and threw out ideas of which, we are sure, more will be heard in the future.

## "THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for week ended Saturday, February 2, 1952:—

J. Henshaw, £1 1s.; C. Wagner, 16s.; H. Brown, 5s.; W. Collins, £1 1s.; Blackburn Branch, £2; Hilda M. W. Rogals, 10s.; Mrs. F. M. Pearce, 10s.; Edwin L. Thomae, £2 10s. 10d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; H. W. Armstrong, 1s.

Total for week: £8 15s 10d.

Total received to date: £449 19s. 8d.

## NUNNERIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

IN her elaborate study, *Medieval English Nunneries: 1273 to 1525* (the late) Miss Eileen Power stresses the small percentage of the female population who took the veil. The nuns were almost invariably drawn from titled and upper middle class families and very seldom entered a priory or convent without a dowry. Every effort was made in this volume of 703 closely printed pages, to consult ecclesiastical authorities who are constantly cited, and Eileen Power expresses her gratitude to those eminent medieval experts: G. G. Coulton and Hamilton Thompson. To the last named scholar, she records her indebtedness "for the loan of his transcripts and translations of Alnwick's Register," and other favours. For Bishop Alnwick made many visitations to religious houses during the 15th century, and his injunctions to insurgent and incontinent nuns foreshadow the charges made by Henry VIII's commissioners a century later.

A prominent reason why women of prosperous families entered cloistral life "lies in the very narrowness of the sphere to which women of gentle birth were confined." What to us are laudable occupations were then deemed degrading to well-born women or girls. On the other hand, observes our authoress, "the poor labourer on the land had no need to get rid of his daughter, if he could not find her a husband, nor would it have been his interest to do so, for working in the fields among his sons, or spinning or brewing with his wife at home, she could have earned a supplementary if not a living wage."

Many bishops opposed the dowry system, but the registers prove that it was general, and in some instances the Prioress refused to admit a novice without payment. Certainly there were those who entered a nunnery voluntarily and vowed, and, perhaps, observed the rules of virginity, poverty and obedience. But these vows were more and more broken as time went on. The convent life, when chosen as a career, was constantly a scene of discord and rebellion, and was liable to be chosen "as a 'dumping ground' for unwanted and unwilling girls, whom it was desirable to put out of the world, by means as sure as death itself and without the risks attaching to murder. Kings themselves were wont to immure the wives and daughters of defeated rebels. . . The nunnery must often have served the purposes of lesser men, desirous of shaking off an encumbrance." Adulterous wives of powerful men were sometimes packed off to convents, as well as illegitimates, often the offspring of priests, while a papal dispensation was occasionally procured to enable a dissolute nun to assume the position of Prioress. Deformed and half-witted children were also immured in nunneries, even when the sisters protested against their presence. These complaints are quite frequent. But, as Miss Power comments: "In an age when faith and superstition went hand in hand a mad nun might even bring glory to her house." Another malpractice was the thrusting of little children and even grown girls into nunneries by avaricious parents in order to gain their inheritance as their victims themselves were vowed to poverty. When denied justice, a nun who had

been forced into a convent at an early age, escaped from confinement, married and bore children. Cases are recorded where wives deserted their husbands and took the veil, but these occurrences are very exceptional and suggest theomania.

As a rule the head of a nunnery was a woman of social standing but very frequently she was at variance with the sisters who, as the episcopal registers show, were apt to complain of her despotism, improvidence and even sexual misconduct. Much as it was not the hood that made the monk, nuns themselves sometimes obeyed their natural instincts. Injunctions from the bishops repeatedly occur against the nuns' travels abroad, and remaining with friends or relatives to the neglect of their religious devotions. As our historian states: "A survey of monastic visitations [all prior to the Dissolution] of a careful visitor such as Alnwick shows that a consorting with women was a common charge against the monks and there is some evidence that points to grosser forms of vice. It would be strange, indeed, if the nuns were an exception to the rule. Even if they kept their vow they kept it sometimes at a cost which psychologists have only recently been able to understand. The visions which were at once the torture and the joy of so many mystic women were sexual as well as religious in their origin, as in their imagery. The terrible lassitude and despair of *accidua* grew in part at least from the repression of the most powerful of natural instincts, accentuated by the absence of sufficient counter-interests and employments."

The vow of poverty was persistently broken. The rule that all things should be held in common—Christian Communism—was for centuries ignored. Nuns had their personal possessions and accepted gifts from their friends. From a commonsense standpoint, this is natural enough, although it was condemned by bishops who enjoyed all the comforts of life the world afforded.

Unlike the monasteries the nunneries were comparatively poor. Some, indeed, were wealthy, but all were at the mercy of privileged guests who trespassed on their hospitality. Again, few heads of convents possessed business capacity and their houses were all too frequently in debt. Some had custodians to superintend fiscal affairs. Miss Power notes that: "It must have been of great assistance to the worried and incompetent nuns to have had a reliable guardian thus to look after their temporal affairs."

For several centuries Continental convents were haunted by gallants, but this love-making remains unrecorded in the English episcopal registers, although these records refer to the men who frequented medieval nunneries on pleasure bent. "We hear," avers Miss Power "of a married man boarding in the house, now of the steward of the convent, now of the bailiff of the manor, now of a wandering harp player, now of a smith's son, now of this or that layman, married or unmarried. But far more often nuns' lovers were drawn from that great host of vicars, chaplains and chantry priests, themselves the children of the Church and under the vow of chastity, whose needs were greatest and whose very familiarity with the bonds of religion possibly bred contempt." All this is very natural, but it renders ridiculous the vows of celibacy decreed by the Church.

Henry VIII has been greatly vilified as the pestilent dissolver of the religious houses, but however base his and his adherents' motives may have been, the reports of his commissioners coincide with the conclusions of the visiting bishops of the previous three centuries who

unsuccessfully strove to reform the abbeys, priories and convents. As Eileen Power judiciously states: "Apologists of the monastic houses have blamed the king for undue and unreasonable harshness. But if Henry VIII was too strict so also was Ottobon, so Peckham, so Boniface VIII, so almost every bishop and Council of the past three hundred years. On this at least, low as his motives may have been, the man who was to claim the headship of the English Church was the lineal descendant of the most masterful of medieval popes." And Miss Power proceeds, Henry's conduct was "amply justified by the condition of the monastic houses."

T. F. PALMER.

### THE EXISTENTIALIST'S PRAYER

THE Existentialist entered the church and, kneeling before a statue of the Madonna and Child, commenced to pray. His sad eyes cast down at the cold stone floor, he did not see the figure of the Christ Child slowly turn his face towards him. Never having seen so miserable a face before the Christ Child turned to His mother and asked her to question him.

The Existentialist betrayed no surprise at being addressed by the statue, but simply shook his head and replied, "Nothing."

Thinking she had been misunderstood, the Madonna repeated, "What is it that you pray for?"

But she received the same reply, "Nothing."

Suppliants usually wanted something tangible and though they were often shy of coming direct to the point, it was rarely that the Madonna received one that began with a blank negative.

"Are you quite sure there is nothing you want?" she asked.

"You misunderstand me," said the Existentialist. "It is nothing that I want. Once I would have asked you for everything, now I know better for the whole of existence is nothing. The only thing of value is nothing. The only thing that is, is nothing. And nothing is what I wish to obtain."

"I don't think I can help you," replied the Madonna doubtfully.

"I don't suppose you can. Like all men, I am cursed with freedom to choose, and I must summon up courage to choose fearlessly."

"If you are of the opinion that nothing is, what have you to choose?" she asked.

"That is the point; what have I? Is my problem to be solved by accepting death, or not? Life is a journey from nothing to the land of nowhere. Life is such a fleeting emptiness that suicide seems pointless. Yet there are times when I feel that the gas oven contains the solution I seek."

Before the Madonna could think of a suitable rejoinder to this, the Christ Child looked up at his mother and said, "Come, let us leave this fool to his folly."

And with that the statue relapsed into inanimate stone.

L. HANGER.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### COPERNICUS

SIR,—Mr. Ebury's pretence to knowledge of the above is humorous. He seems more concerned to avoid being proved wrong than to assess the facts. If he is right, then he makes the impertinent claim to know more of the mind of Copernicus than that great man knew himself.

Ebury confuses Copernicus's own preface to Pope Paul III with the anonymous one substituted by Oslander, for he says, "Copernicus did not write the preface, though Ruby Ta'Bois

categorically states he did." I still categorically state he wrote his own preface. When Ebury says, "It is strange Mrs. Ta'Bois thinks this preface supports her argument," he is referring to Osiander's and seems blissfully unaware I am referring to Copernicus's which does support my argument.

Why should the hackneyed information quoted from Draper and from White be preferable to the authorities I use? Draper's unattested statement that Copernicus feared persecution is worthless. How did Draper know?

When Copernicus was satirised on the stage in 1531 he felt the ridicule so acutely that in his dedicatory letter to the Pope, and prefaced to "De Revolutionibus," he makes it clear that these considerations caused him to delay publication. This dread of ridicule and the fearless defiance of his would-be persecutors are conclusive proof (to use the words of one authority), that Copernicus did not fear persecution.—Yours, etc.,

RUBY TA'BOIS.

#### ATHEISM IN ASTRONOMY

SIR,—I remember Bayard Simmons writing in *The Freethinker* that *scientists are good guessers*; and his estimation applies to what appears under the above title in last week's *Freethinker*.

Astronomers write and lecture about astronomy, telling the public of star distances, as though their calculations are easy as "2 and 2 make 4."

So it is in everyday talk of millions, thousands of them; but ask the speaker how long it would take him to count a million pennies, at the rate of one a second, his guess, invariably, is ludicrous; and, when told, counting eight hours a day would take over a month, he is astonished!

Now scientists use the term "Light Years" for reckoning astronomical distances of millions of miles, using 500 millions of their Light Years, when one Light Year is equal to 7,054,912,000,000 miles; multiply this enormous total by 500 millions and the product will be "utter tripe," as remarked by a R.A.F. pilot when the Astronomer Royal, Sir Harold Spence Jones, lectured the Royal Aircraft Technical Society at Farnborough recently, telling them that a day of 24 hours will equal a month of 30 days in two million years time!

"And there was evening and there was morning, one day."—BIBLE.—Yours, etc.,

W. A. V.

#### THE MYTH THEORY

SIR,—In his review of the *Rationalist Annual*, Mr. Cutner attributes to me the view that the prophecies in the Gospels about the Second Coming "came from Jesus himself exactly as described."

I will pay ten pounds to any fund or society named by Mr. Cutner if he points to any article or book in which I assert that these prophecies were really uttered by Jesus. Verbatim passage preferred.

I do not suppose that Mr. Cutner is consciously misrepresenting me. He seems to suffer from a complete inability to state anybody's case accurately.—Yours, etc.,

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.

#### OBITUARY

We regret to report the sudden death of William Robertson Frame, at age of 60, on January 13, 1952. He was always proud to proclaim himself as a Freethinker following Thomas Paine's "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, to do good is my religion." He leaves a widow and two sons to whom we send our sympathy. The cremation and Secular Service was held by the undersigned.

ALEX FRAME.

We regret to report the death of Miss Mabel Ray, a member of the N.S.S., which took place at the age of 59 on the 28th January, in the Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway. Quiet, retiring, studious and kindly, Miss Ray was a staunch Secularist and a loyal member of the Society, who a few days before undergoing a serious operation, remembered to renew her support of the Movement for 1952. She was cremated at Golders Green on Monday, February 4, the undersigned conducting a secular ceremony before a gathering of relatives and friends.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

#### "GATHER YOUR ROSEBUDS," ETC.

Ever draining sand from glass,  
Time cannot quench his thirst, alas!

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

#### LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

##### OUTDOOR

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

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

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon, L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER.

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

##### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: FRED RATCLIFFE, "Where Does Marx Come In?"

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Tuesday, February 12: J. B. COATES, "Does God Exist?"

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Miss MARJORIE NICHOLSON, "Colonial Affairs To-day."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. R. O. GORDON, M.A., "Reincarnation—Prelude to World Peace."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Pattern of Society."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "Some Free Thoughts on Defence."

### *Intolerance and Unfairness in British Broadcasting*

## PUBLIC MEETING

Organised by *The National Secular Society*

### "THE B.B.C. versus DEMOCRACY"

SPEAKERS:

Mrs. JANET CHANCE P. VICTOR MORRIS  
L. EBURY E. W. SHAW

Chairman: F. A. RIDLEY

7 p.m. CONWAY HALL Admission Free  
Thursday RED LION SQUARE, W.C.1.  
14th Feb. Doors open at 6.30 p.m. Discussion

To ensure at death, Secular funeral arrangements in any part of the country, write in confidence: L. H. Sparks, New House, Wimpole Road, Colchester.

YUGOSLAV HOLIDAYS (Apr. to Oct.).—Dormitory accom. in hostels, camps of Yugoslav Trade Unions, Youth Movements, etc. Reductions for youth; family exchange. Write: Sec., 16, Doneraile House, Ebury Bridge, London, S.W.1. Send stamp; state holiday month.

### THE VISIONARY VOICE

THERE have been many new ideas of the old, old story. But there are serious flaws in the modern idea of a political historical interpretation of the Apocalypse. The Scarlet Woman does not refer to Rome as the City of Seven Hills as Rome is not, in fact, built upon seven hills; and the author of Revelations distinctly says it is the CITY OF BABYLON. There is no doubt that later ages have understood the meaning, and our own city of London has been called the City of Seven Hills just as the idea of the New Jerusalem has been applied to England's green and pleasant land, in contrast to the dark satanic mills of the industrial revolution.

Just as such names as Erin and Iran strictly mean holy land, so every homeland is sacred to its own people, and every people the chosen of its own god. To think of the Jews as *the* Chosen People makes a problem of how the Apocalypse came to be accepted by the Gentiles. If no one can be sure who wrote it, when or where it was written, or whether the author was Jew or Christian, or how it became a Christian canon, what does this explanation explain? It leaves as a mystery how a theological mystery of the most authoritarian character imaginable comes to be adopted by revolutionaries, and how political revolutionaries, in revolt against authority, come to use the authoritarian ideology and idiom of this fantasy of Divine Revelation.

The essential theme is to be found in its symbolic predecessor, the Prophet Ezekiel, the visions he saw in the sky, which, he says, spoke through his mouth. The winged wheels within wheels are a crude pre-Ptolemy epicycle theory, and the fantastic animals are Zodiacal in allegory. There is much obscenity and an elaborate description of the heavenly New Jerusalem, but this Utopian vision has no connection with the Eternal City, Rome, being contrasted, in the name of righteousness, with the painted Jezebels of the old Jerusalem. He speaks of prophesying for and of being prophesied against, so a curse is crude prophecy just as vengeance is rough justice, and this is a curse proclaiming the Voice of Heaven in the same idiom as that of the Son of Thunder in the Revelation of the Wrath of God.

Later ages have associated the mystic number seven, as with the seven heavens and the breaking of the seven seals in the Apocalypse, with the astrological power of the seven planets; and the twelve gates of the celestial city, with the twelve signs of the Zodiac; as symbols of the "powers that be." The Apocalypse is certainly typical Biblical prophecy, with storm, famine, disease, pestilence, war, death, and desolation, as the Divine Curse, the Wrath of Heaven. It is as certainly theological; with its declamation against the seven deadly sins, the Mammon of unrighteousness; and its anathema calling down the Wrath of God as punishment for sin. The idiom is too passionately expressive not to be understood.

To seek a new hidden meaning is to forget the old discredited astrological meaning. The Apocalypse can be related to its predecessor in cultural development and historic evolution, and this new idea of it can also be given its time and place. The idea of the Apocalypse as political is modern; power politics; just as the idea of it is pre-Freudian wishfulfilment could only come after Freud; and does not consider the ideology of the time at which it is presumed to have been written. But the grim realism of the theological idiom, and the historic development, involves what Freud meant when he said superstition

is physically false but psychologically true; for the apocalyptic curse truly expresses personal feeling in the ideology and idiom of its day and generation.

Historically, the Apocalypse is a Christian canon; the traditional date of authorship is problematical. The Christianising of Hebrew thought and theme, a gradual process, in a very different historical setting, gave an entirely different kind of wishfulfilment. It is not a matter of mistaking the symbol for the thing symbolized, for Rome as the Eternal City was not mistaken for the Eternity it symbolized; and if the Jews, suppressed by the immense power of the Roman Empire, found satisfaction in a heavenly Messiah, the political collapse of the Empire in intellectual and moral decline, was the establishment of the Church here on earth as the mystical Body of Christ, with temporal concern for Eternity.

The baffling idiom and peculiar symbolic style certainly belongs to a different literary tradition, but the same idiom is there in the eloquence of St. Augustine; more subtle but just as allegorical; and it is to be found in later ages in the analogy of the logic of St. Thomas Aquinas, and in the subtleties of the casuistry of St. Ignatius Loyola; and still later in Ruskin and Proust and the Romanticism of modern times. But although Augustine lived when Rome was being sacked and burned by Alaric the Goth, the Scourge of God, in an atmosphere of frustration in the decline of the Empire, he found his wishfulfilment, not in a phantom in the sky, a heavenly Messiah, but here on earth in the Church as the City of God.

This consideration of literary tradition shows it to be much wider; and its persistence throughout the ages, much deeper than a political matter. The underlying content is not in any particular historical setting. The author of the Apocalypse was not an historian nor a politician, nor even an historical person. But Augustine was different, said to have been a Roman magistrate, and so, concerned with justice and the administration of law. Intimately and vitally concerned in the political collapse of the Empire, and the moral bankruptcy of the ancient philosophy, and directly concerned in the affairs of men, he found his self-justification in the apocalyptic curse of theological invective in the Will of God, incarnate in the Church.

History shows an increasing subtlety in the grim realism of this accepted idiom of self-justification. The crude curse in word magic, as the voice crying in the wilderness, becomes the Voice of Heaven in the mouth of the Prophet. Then in the Apocalypse, in various churches as candlesticks with light, revealed in the times of tribulation as the Wrath of God. Then, coming down to earth in Augustine's doctrine of pre-destination as the Will of God as expressed in the Church. In the analogy of the logic of Aquinas it becomes Necessary Being. And in Loyola's casuistry, the study of conscience, it is the still small voice. Now to-day, it is said to reveal itself, still in crude allegory, in the hearts of men. But if we feel it in our very bones, it is but a skeleton of its old self.

H. H. PREECE.

### "HOLY HEADLINES"

"Church choc-a-block with the famed and the great ones!"  
 "Huge crowds outside, just to watch—and to pray!"  
 "No room inside for the laggards and late ones!"  
 Just 'cos a film star's to wed there to-day.

A. E. C.