

THE FREETHINKER

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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Preserving One's Identity

THE above title occurs to us in connection with the recent abolition of identity cards. Identity cards, "internal passports" as they are sometimes accurately described, were one of the by-products of "Total War." Their retention in peace-time had a sinister flavour of Continental police States, and all genuine democrats must welcome their recent abolition; since their indefinite retention would have indicated clearly that what now passes for peace is actually a prolonged armistice in a society permanently organised upon a war-basis. For which reason, we repeat, all progressively-minded people must, we submit, rejoice at their recent abolition. In a world of growing regimentation and mounting armaments, it represents a not—unfortunately—very common sign of reason and elementary sanity.

However, the matter does not end there. Identity or, if one prefers the term, individuality, does not depend upon its documentary proofs, even if neatly folded and filed by painstaking bureaucrats in a government office. One's identity is not a signature nor a row of figures: it is, in some cases, a psychological fact; in many others, unhappily, merely a psychological potentiality. For in our modern massed communities the adjuration of the Greek philosophy—"Know Thyself"—is becoming increasingly rare. There are, one is forced to suspect, a great many people, to-day, who did not suspect that they had an identity unless and until they were asked for their identity cards. One fears that, upon the withdrawal of this document, they will again relapse into their traditional anonymity.

We think it opportune to raise this question in the columns of a Freethought journal since, from the Freethought point of view, it penetrates beyond all the "isms" to the very heart of the matter. For without a preliminary consciousness of identity, of personal individuality, there cannot be any Freethought at all, for, in such a primitive social state there could be no free thinkers. Accordingly, the consciousness of personal identity represents the beginning of wisdom—and of the Freethought movement. Indeed, it boils down to the simple equation: without free thinkers, Freethought cannot exist—"Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary"!

Historians of philosophy, a dreary and, for the most part, superficial crew, who cannot see the wood for the trees, usually equate the origins of modern secular thought freed from the dead hand of religious authority and mediæval dogma, with the historic declaration of the French thinker, Descartes: "I think, therefore, I am": (*Cogito ergo sum* in the original Latin). Materialist logicians have, indeed, picked holes in this statement from the point of view of formal logic and have suggested that "I am" ought to precede "I think." However, in the psychological, as distinct from the merely physical sense, Descartes may stand since, unless one is capable of thought, one is not conscious of one's existence as a

separate thinking entity, as "I" and not "you." It is in this fundamental sense that we referred above to the consciousness of personal identity as the beginning and as, indeed, the *sine qua non* of Freethought itself.

To-day, in the ultimate sense, perhaps the major danger to the contemporary Freethought movement lies in the growing submerging of the individual in and by various types of mass-organisation. Herbert Spencer's celebrated dictum, "The man versus the State", would appear to represent an over-simplification since States are neither the creation of Gods nor Devils, but are the work of men themselves. Still, to-day, the autonomy of the individual is in danger of being swamped by forces in our contemporary world far greater than any known in, and to the contemporaries of Herbert Spencer. Mass-propaganda, embodied in such devices as the wireless, the Daily Press, television, and the cinema, is virtually the technical creation of our century and creates a tendency to obliterate the individual on a scale undreamed of in any earlier epoch of the world's history. The situation which it creates is one of unprecedented gravity for the individual and for the expression of individual thought which finds it harder and harder to gain a hearing in an increasingly robotised world; from many points of view, indeed, the "robot" is the most typical and sinister discovery of the present age.

The social tendencies referred to above culminate in the twin monstrosities known as "Totalitarianism": under which comprehensive heading we include those contemporary "Siamese Twins": the "Total State" and "Total War." There have been, it is true, some partial foreshadowings and prototypes of present-day society in certain epochs in the world's history: the later Roman Empire, the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, the Tudor regime in England, the Incas of Peru; all these polities, besides others, have been dubbed as convincing examples of "Totalitarianism" in effective operation. However, all these belonged to ages which were technically primitive: even the Inquisition never had the radio to put over its tortures and executions to a terrified public. Genuine "Total States" are made possible by technical developments, by the perversion by socially ambitious men of a prostituted science, whilst, of course, "Total War" is purely the creation of technique in both the general social and in the specific military fields.

Properly speaking, Totalitarianism is a product of the 20th century and was unknown before its advent. It was foreshadowed by the historic definition of the Russian Anarchist, Alexander Herzen, who defined the State as, "Genghis Khan plus the electric telegraph," whilst its present practice and near potentialities are portrayed in terrifying and realistic fashion in such recent books as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and (the late) George Orwell's *1984*. Nor has the practice of contemporary Fascist and Communist states failed to keep pace with these terrifying possibilities: the Spanish Inquisition was a crude affair as and when compared with the Gestapo,

Whilst Stalin, along with many other of the old Russian revolutionaries, often escaped from the Tsar's prisons, we have never heard of anyone who has managed to escape from those of Stalin!

The above state of things we repeat, was unknown to earlier centuries, and it was, accordingly, unknown to the early Freethinkers. To-day, it represents the most menacing problem for their successors. For one cannot think freely if the very springs of thought themselves are submerged beneath the ever-increasing barrage of mass-compulsion and mass-propaganda. To-day, religion is no longer the sole nor, even, necessarily the most dangerous foe of Freethinking. That sinister pre-eminence now belongs to the "Total" State and to "Total" war, the former of which extinguishes the personal identity of its citizens, whilst the latter finally administers the *coup de grace* to the civilised society which ultimately represents the expression of their individual volition. The struggle, to-day, for both Freethought and for civilisation is, in the last resort, a struggle to retain the personal identity of the individual man and woman upon whom both depend for their existence.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPH

THE term "lie-detector" was in common use some years ago, but no such claim is made by the Electro E.G., and such a term can only do more harm than good by encouraging expectations that were never meant to be fulfilled. The suspicious wife will probably hold her own in this capacity against any machine yet made.

In 1925, a German, Hans Berger, was working alone trying to detect electrical changes on the scalp which originated in the brain. His apparatus was very insensitive on contemporary standards and as recently as 20 years ago no physiologist would have granted the possibility of recording such activity. Nevertheless, in 1934, the main lines of this research were fully confirmed, and culminated in the amazing advances over the last few years. To-day, the E.E.G. is being produced in England and the U.S.A., and Sweden has already become a buyer.

The chief clinical successes to date have been in the diagnosis of epilepsy and cerebral tumours. To distinguish between the two kinds of epilepsy (Essential and Acquired) is of first importance. Treatment of the former is purely palliative but in the latter the fits are due to some local brain disease, such as a tumour or a scar. The electrical counterparts are discovered by the machine. A recognisable seal is put on the record.

There are, however, other interesting possibilities besides clinical. The record made by a person dreaming, for instance, is distinctively different from that of one doing a sum, reciting a poem, looking at a picture, and so on. The findings do not yet suggest any theories, of course, for electroencephalography is still more or less in its empirical stage.

The most prominent feature is an almost rhythmic voltage-fluctuation at about ten cycles per second with peak-to-peak amplitude of about 40 millionths of a volt, coming from the back of the brain. This is the Alpha rhythm and it varies greatly from person to person both in duration and amplitude. Such factors as a sudden loud noise, a painful prod, or, especially, doing a difficult sum, will reduce or abolish alpha activity, though the efficacy of these and other "arousal stimuli" varies with the individual subject who is sitting. Even so, the sight

of something interesting provokes very similar responses in all.

Berger regarded this rhythm as a function of the whole brain, but Prof. Adrian later showed it to belong to areas near to those concerned with sight, whence it spreads forward and is usually to be recorded well in front of the plane of the ear with a steady decrease in amplitude. The nature of the spread is still in some doubt: there is an origin from both hemispheres and the two sides usually show a fair synchrony, though the respective amplitudes are far more independent.

Thus the "Berger rhythm," as I called it when making a passing mention of it in *The Freethinker* some years ago, is now an obsolete term, referring only to the Alpha, as distinct from the Beta and Theta, rhythms which have been found. These are a frontal rhythm at about 22 c/s and also waves at about 6 or 7 c/s, both having shown pathological medical significance. When there is no Beta or Theta rhythm and the Alpha is quiescent, there still remains an irregular background of activity.

The subject sits for about 20 minutes. The electrodes are fixed to his head, cabled to the E.E.G., multiway, and entering the machine at a complex selector switch, to connect any electrode with any of the input-grids. Many forms of electrode are tried. Metal discs less than six-pences, sealed to the scalp with collodion, or small gauze pads soaked in concentrated salt solution, have been much used. About 16 electrodes make a fair test under present limitations. The record passed to the E.E.G. is a graph of voltage changes against time, the time-axis being the movement of paper tape about 6 in. wide at 3 cm. a second, and on which will appear six or more ink traces. The number could advantageously be much larger but each recording channel in the machine costs about £200, the total cost of the E.E.G. being £1,200 or more. The difficulty, moreover, of keeping six or eight channels in daily use may be likened to that of keeping the same number of radio sets in the space of a small piano (the size of the E.E.G.) all tuned to different stations and the stations changed every few minutes, the interference between programmes to be negligible, the mains-hum inaudible and the amplification to be many times greater than that is asked of a domestic radio.

An additional difficulty is the presence of electrical changes not from the subject's brain, some of which irritatingly mimic the cerebral effects. Some of them are interference from A.C. mains, electric motors, and also the brief spikes on the graph which come from switch contacts, and from the recording system itself may come transients due to bad contacts in plugs, etc. The subject may similarly interfere by rocking the electrodes, and so on. Nevertheless, with an electrically screened recording room and co-operative subjects it is becoming possible to get records purely of cerebral activity.

It is most interesting that subjects show such individual differences. From an existing known record of any given person it is possible to find others of that person from a random batch. There are also family resemblances reaching the closest similarity in uni-ovular twins, and the E.E.G. can distinguish between uni-ovular and binovular twins.

The materialist will watch the future development with interest. The physical associations of thought are now being recorded and perhaps the brightest future of electroencephalography lies in the elucidation of the workings of the human brain.

G. H. TAYLOR.

THE SECOND CONVENTION OF INDIAN RATIONALISTS

AT Tenali, in the Guntur District of Andhra, will meet on the 9th and 10th of February, 1952, the Second Convention of Indian Rationalists. The first Convention was an epoch-making event in Indian history. It met over two years ago on December 8, 1949, at the Rajaji Hall in Madras under the Presidentship of that veteran Rationalist, Sir Ragnath P. Paranjpye.

The second Convention will be presided over by Dr. S. Chandrasekhar, Professor and Head of the Department of Economics in the Baroda University. Comrade M. N. Roy has kindly consented to open the Convention. The Indian Rationalist Association is organising this Convention as an integral section of the World Union of Freethinkers. There is a growing awareness on the part of the intelligentsia in this country at the present moment of the need for militant Rationalism. People are getting tired of the emphasis on religious superstitions which is the predominant feature of official propaganda. The sharpening economic crisis calls for a free expression of the genuine feelings of the common man and the common woman unhampered by the psychological complexes bred by the sway of tradition and authority. The real need is for a rational approach to all problems—economic, social and political—and the active discarding of prejudices and habits bred by vested interests.

The first convention of Indian Rationalists has shown the way out of the present morass but the Rationalists in our country have not yet answered the call. They are yet to organise themselves into a force which can effectively deal with the present crisis. We hope that fellow Rationalists will avail themselves of the opportunity presented to them at the second convention at Tenali. We earnestly call upon all Rationalists in India, whether they have already enrolled themselves as members of the Indian Rationalist Association or not, to gather together at Tenali on the 9th February and participate in the formation of a movement which will spread the light of reason and enlightenment over the length and breadth of this land.

Intending delegates are requested to notify their arrival to the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Sri A. Gopalakrishnamurthy, Advocate, Tenali.

INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION,
9, Broadway, Madras.

24th January, 1952.

THEATRE ON MERSEYSIDE

ON February 26, the Liverpool Repertory Company presented an interesting new play entitled *Journey to Earth*. This was not, as might be pardonably supposed, the latest fantasy of space travel by the Interplanetary Society, but the story of a woman who, after nearly 40 years in an enclosed Order, returns to the world. Having taken her vows in 1913, the theme of the story is the silent revolution that has occurred in the years from that pre-both-wars epoch and to-day and how it would affect one who had been "dead" all that time.

Action opens in the convent parlour where the prioress and the visiting secular priest discuss Sister Agatha. The playwright is presumably a Catholic herself, for her portrayal of the conventual atmosphere is most convincing and the Catholic approach to problems made with accuracy and understanding. In fact this opening scene is the best of Miss Boland's play, aided by Miss Savile, whose interpretation of the part as the prioress is the outstanding

performance of the cast. The priest is against a woman of 60 leaving the shelter of the convent to engage in the hurly-burly of everyday life. The Mother Superior, more practical, remarks that since Sister Agatha has no vocation for the enclosed life, she may as well return to the world.

"After 36 years," exclaims the Father, "you find she has no vocation for the life?" "She had—then," replies the Prioress. "She no longer has one." There can be no valid reason, therefore, in restraining her; having ascertained, with that prudence of economy so characteristic of Catholic institutions, that there is a sufficiency of private income for her to live on and a married nephew who is offering her a home, Sister Agatha gets dispensation from her vows, sheds the wedding ring symbolic of her marriage to the Christian God, and departs as Auntie Agatha with her atheistic nephew Peter, and his wife Angela.

We are then shown Agatha's metamorphosis in the world from which she has been so long absent. She visits the home of her childhood to find it turned into the offices of the Ministry of Co-ordination. We are treated to a rather unreal conversation in which Agatha learns for the first time apparently (though she has been "out" for over two years!) that there has been a social revolution in Russia and that Palestine has become the home of the Israelites again. (I fancy, even nuns in an enclosed Order would have heard about the Godless Bolshies and the fate of the Holy Land; after all, one of the chief functions of such Orders is to pray about things of that nature.)

Then we see Auntie cutting sandwiches at a Youth Centre, where the convent chaplain pays her a visit. For some reason Auntie isn't satisfied with serving at Youth Centres, nor did the somewhat mystical references of the Father to her lack of love for her brother humans help to clarify her motives. Finally, however, she finds salvation, working in a factory producing radio parts "for export only."

Miss Boland has picked an interesting theme, which she treats with sincerity and competence, creating for us a set of characters that really live. Yet I was left with the feeling that she had just failed to put it over to her audience. From her restrained but intensely dramatic opening scene, it began slipping more and more until it seemed to fade out with just a gentle sigh. Even to an atheist the portrayal of an old woman of 60 leaving a convent to wind up as a three-pounds-fifteen manual worker on "export only" is hardly the triumph of reason over medieval superstition.

There were the usual cracks about the Civil Service, etc., the best being when Auntie announces her decision to go into the factory in response to a government appeal for more exports. "Oh, but that's *propaganda*," exclaimed her shocked voice. "You can't believe that!" And I suppose propaganda to-day is misrepresentation, to say the least! The wisecrack I liked best was a remark of the Mother Superior on why women sought to be novitiates in her convent. ". . . And some," she said, "through yogi and Buddhism think our Order will give them the nearest approach to the oriental background they yearn for." The play is well worth a visit by all Freethinkers able to see it.

P. C. KING.

AN ARABIC PREDECESSOR OF DR. MALAN

"Races north of the Pyrenees are of cold temperament and never reach maturity; they are of great stature and of white colour. But they lack all sharpness of wit and penetration of intellect."

—Said of Toledo, 11th century.

NOTES FOR CATHOLIC NURSES

[In place of our normal two columns of Acid Drops, we are, this week, substituting some informative quotations from *Notes for Catholic Nurses* by Fr. John Fletcher—Catholic Truth Society—72, Victoria Street, London, S.W. 1.]

“**The priest** is the Minister of the Sacraments, though you or another may, in an emergency, be called upon to baptise, and it is essential that the parish priest be informed at once when a Catholic lies ill. It is never too early to send for the priest. You may take it as a rule that if a person is sufficiently ill to need a doctor and a nurse, he also needs the priest.”—(Page 15.)

“**If the patient be unconscious**, or you feel certain that he will die before the priest can arrive, or even if death has apparently just taken place, still send for the priest. The sacraments work by their own efficacy (“*ex opere operato*”), and if the sick person has made at least an act of attrition before becoming unconscious, and there be any life in the body, even though latent, the priest, when he arrives, will be able to complete conditionally the sacrament of penance and give Extreme Unction.”—(Page 16.)

“**A more difficult situation** is where the doctor in attendance is not a Catholic, has no knowledge of, or belief in the efficacy of the Sacraments, and will tell the friends that the patient must be kept quite quiet and see no one, not even the priest. In such a case, the friends should distinctly tell the doctor that the priest must be summoned and see the patient, if only for a few minutes. In the large majority of cases there will be no risk at all, and, if in the few there be some risk, it must be taken, for one cannot disregard the fact that eternal considerations are of more consequence than present ones.”—(Page 17.)

“**The water used** [in Baptism] must be *natural water* (italics in original), ordinary tap, spring or well water, sea water or holy water. Antiseptic solutions, even though water be the main constituent, are not lawful, and if used the baptism would be invalid.”—(Page 24.)

“**Further, the child's life** does not begin with its birth, nor even at the time of ‘quickening,’ but at the moment of conception. It is at the instant of conception that the human foetus is informed by the rational soul. From that moment, growth takes place, and growth presupposes life. Therefore, before birth the child possesses the rights of a human being, and the fundamental right of a human being is to live in this world a period of time fixed by God, and, if baptised, an eternity in the world to come.”—(Page 27.)

“**As every embryo** has a rational soul, it follows that every foetus prematurely expelled from the womb should be baptised if living, baptised conditionally (“If thou are alive,” etc.), if life be uncertain, and left alone if certainly dead.”—(Page 32.)

“**If the child's head is born** but not the rest of the body, and death is feared, you will baptise in the ordinary way, and conditional baptism will not be required afterwards. The umbilical cord is only a temporary part of the child, and baptism performed upon it is certainly invalid.”—(Page 31.)

“**With regard to** abnormal fruits of conception, these misfortunes are fortunately very rare and die soon after

birth. If they possess a head and breast they should be baptised. Unless there is immediate danger of death, leave the question of baptism to the priest.”—(Page 33.)

“**In cases of intra-uterine baptism**, by a decree of the Sacred Office, August 21, 1901, a solution of one part perchloride of mercury in 1,000 parts of water is allowed, if the use of plain water would be dangerous (italics in original) to the mother—not unless this danger be present.”—(Note to Page 24.)

EARTHBOUND

Earth born and earth beloved and earth blessed,
To-day I'll flaunt the gods and be carefree,
I'll keep no cloistered dream within my breast,
This good old earth is good enough for me.

I seek no choir of angels in the sky,
I'll watch the swallows as they wheel and climb,
Or laugh as drunken bees go buzzing by,
This sweet old earth for me makes life sublime.

I want no refuge in yon lonely star,
Nor airy castle built by fancy's flight,
I'll plant my feet in grass where daisies are,
This dear old earth to me is heart's delight.

Bright-shining golden stars give me no thrill,
Give me the homely touch of golden sand,
To-day I'll step along the winding hill,
This fond old earth shall be my promised land.

Not through elysian fields now shall I roam,
Nor stride o'er jasper pavements up above,
I'll find my happiness much nearer home;
The clinging earth about my shoe I love.

Ambrosial fabled food is not for me,
For me 'tis joy to eat my daily bread;
And ever golden grain shall glory be,
It grows from this good earth on which I tread.

Earth born and earth beloved and earth blessed,
The joy and pain of life I'll not regret,
E'en tho' the sun is sinking in the west;
Good earth! I've little sadness to forget.

J. CORSAIR.

THE ARBITER

There's God . . . and Satan . . . and me,
And I'm the most important of these Three.
God represents the Good, and Satan, Evil.
But choosing 'twixt them is the very devil!
Still I can choose, and, therefore, have the power
To raise up one, if only for an hour.
In raising one, the other I depress;
Both are displaced when one I curse, or bless.
I am the most important of these Three,
For God and Satan both depend on ME.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

CONVIVIAL SPIRIT

I'm a bold blackguard's Spook; I lived a life gay,
Seven cops would take me to the station;
Now it takes seven Parsons, to preach and to pray—
Exorcising my Manifestation.

A. E. C.

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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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS

Under the dynamic inspiration of its secretary, Mr. J. H. Bridle, the Coventry Branch of the R.P.A. has made an auspicious beginning. Their opening meeting in February was addressed by Mr. Archibald Robertson. On Sunday, March 16, Mr. Robertson's initial meeting was followed up by one on the subject of "The Menace of Rome." The speaker on the latter occasion was Mr. F. A. Ridley. Besides dealing adequately with the ubiquitous "menace," both in this country and on a world-wide scale, the totalitarian form taken by the Christian religion, Mr. Ridley emphasised the need for a united front by all secular and rationalist bodies in face of the common "Menace of Rome." The Coventry Branch, R.P.A., hold their meetings on Sunday evenings at "The Rose and Crown" Hotel, High Street, Coventry. Will all interested communicate with Mr. F. H. Bridle, 30 Brookside Avenue, Coventry.

Under the fostering care of the West London Branch, N.S.S., "The Laurie Arms," Edgware Road, W., continues to provide an intellectual forum amid the surrounding darkness. On Sunday last, March 23, a debate was staged there on the ever-intriguing subject, "Has Christianity Failed?". Mr. L. Ebury, Vice-President, N.S.S., and veteran of hundreds of verbal duels, took the affirmative, and Mr. J. Robins, a lay preacher of the Anglican Church, took the negative. The debate was marked by wit, lucidity, and courtesy. Numerous questions from the floor indicated the interest of a large audience. Mr. Robins remarked that he felt like Daniel in a den of lions, and the chairman, Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, paid a well-deserved tribute to his courage in tackling so formidable an opponent as Mr. Ebury on the latter's own ground. An excellent audience was registered, as is now usual at "The Laurie Arms."

The N.S.S. London headquarters are now adorned by a poster extending across the full width of the building, bearing the slogan, "SECULARISM delivers mankind from falsehood and fear!" This message cannot be ignored by the many thousands of workers who travel twice daily by 'bus along Gray's Inn Road between North London and the City, nor by the large number of passers-by on their way to and from King's Cross Station, one of London's busiest railway termini. The wording will be changed periodically, and should stimulate increasing interest on the part of the public, with ultimate benefit to the "best of causes."

"THE FREETHINKER FUND"

Donations for week ended Saturday, March 22, 1952:—

A. Hancock, 2s.; W. T. Hawks, £1; D. Fyfe, 5s.; A. O'Keefe, £2.

Total for week: £3 7s.

Total received to date: £481 2s. 5d.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND MATERIALISM

III

ONE of the mysteries which has always intrigued me is the number of professors who so readily accept Theism or Spiritualism or Occultism or something equally debatable. In Spiritualism, I marvel at the way in which Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Crookes were so thoroughly bamboozled, and I wonder still more at the way in which, because some people are "professors," therefore what they say on any subject should be considered as sacrosanct.

Here we have, for example, Prof. J. D. Bernal, a great defender of Dialectical Materialism, making this perfectly stupid statement in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism* (page 94): "But the world view of the mechanical materialist is distorted as a result of a different but equally dangerous ignorance: the simple materialist invokes God, but in a way so indirect that he is unconscious of the fact." This is not merely stupid, it is, of course, quite untrue—in other words, to bolster up the opposition all Dialectical Materialists have against what we call Scientific Materialism, this Professor descends to an untrue statement. Note that he gives no authority for his distortion of the truth. He cites no "simple" or "mechanical" Materialist to prove his case. It is sufficient, he no doubt thinks, to say so, and a statement from a professor should be enough. It is not enough for this Materialist.

Supposing I said that Prof. Bernal believed in a real Devil under the name of Capitalism? The way in which he and those who agree with him use the word is quite like the way in which Christians use "Devil." For a good Christian, the Devil exists, and all the evil in the world springs from the Devil. For in professors like Bernal, all the evils in the world spring from Capitalism, and the Great Saviour is Marx. The article in *Aspects* by Prof. Bernal could read like a Christian tract if one substituted Christ for Marx, Paul for Lenin, the Devil for Capitalism, and Faith in Christianity for Faith in Dialectical Materialism. Indeed, I have rarely read such a religious article.

And it is good sometimes to read what a critic of Dialectical Materialism who is himself a Marxist, like Mr. E. F. Carritt, has to say—"Dialectical Materialism looks like vitalism applied to society as well as life. . . . It applies a vitalist method outside biology." By its uncompromising attack on mechanistic Materialism, it is obvious that Mr. Carritt is right. As I pointed out in an earlier article, Materialism is either "mechanistic" or it is not. If it is opposed by Dialectical Materialism, then the latter must be Vitalistic. It is not, therefore, the "simple" Materialist specified by Prof. Bernal who has a God or a ghost of a God or who "invokes" God without knowing it, but people like himself on the authority of his own (more or less) follower.

And there is still another point. The Dialectical Materialist is always invoking "the Materialist Conception of History" as something which puts Marx, its alleged founder far and away above every thinker who so far has lived on this earth—and some would add, perhaps, even in the Universe. What did Engels say?

"The production and reproduction of real life constitute in *the last instance* the determining factor of history. Neither Marx nor I ever maintained more. When somebody distorts this to mean that the economic factor is the *sole* determining factor, he is converting our proposition into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase . . . Marx and I are partly responsible for the fact that at times our disciples have laid more weight upon the economic factor than belongs to it. We were compelled to emphasise its central character in opposition to adversaries who denied it, and there was not always time, place, or occasion to do justice to the other factors of the historical process. . . . Many recent Marxists have certainly turned out an extraordinary kind of nonsense." (Letter to Bloch, September 21, 1890.)

It would be, I think, needless to add that this and similar pronouncements by Engels are rarely referred to when the Materialist Conception of History is used by champions of Dialectical Materialism. As Mr. Carritt says: "It is refreshing to find that the *one* undoubted Marxist, Engels (for Marx said he himself was not a Marxist), admits that he and Marx had made a mistake." To read Prof. Bernal and his fellow Dialectical Materialists, one would never think so.

How little Mr. Rudas (to whom I referred in a former article) knows of modern Materialism is shown in a note he gives to a statement of Bertrand Russell in his *Outline of Philosophy*. Russell said: "Some—the materialists—have said that matter alone is real and *mind is an illusion*." And how does Mr. Rudas answer that? "This is a *complete* misrepresentation even of the standpoint of older materialism, but does not in any case take into account the standpoint of modern, Dialectical Materialism." (My italics.) He knows so little of genuine Materialism that he has the nerve to write in this way. Of course, some Materialists claim that "mind is an illusion" if we mean by mind, an entity. The slightest acquaintance with d'Holbach's *System of Nature* or Buchner's *Force and Matter* would have shown him that, let alone later works by more modern Materialists.

The reader if he has digested what I have written about the two Materialisms, even if he disagrees with me, will, I hope, have at least some points to think about. I plump for the only Materialism that matters—that which refuses to admit Vitalism in any shape or form. We also oppose Idealism for, if Evolution is true—and it is true—then "matter" was in existence long before one of its complex forms which, through Evolution, manifested a form of activity we call "mind." There is no evidence of a God or a ghost of a God or any "Animism" in Nature. This clear and unequivocal Materialism brings with it a better understanding of what we call Nature in all its multifarious forms, and if any "system" or philosophy brings with it a better understanding, we as Freethinkers can take it up fearlessly and proudly. There is nothing sacrosanct with us. Our own reason, backed by all the knowledge modern science and discovery can give, is our guide; and we resent all forms of Totalitarianism.

In short, we stand by Freethought.

H. CUTNER.

[We have received several replies to Mr. Cutner's articles, some of which we hope to begin publishing next week. EDITOR.]

FALLACY OF HINDU THOUGHT

(Continued)

SCIENTIFIC thinking stands in sharp conflict with spiritualistic metaphysics from the very beginning. Spiritualist systems of thought thus generally lack in the rigour of scientific thinking and logical discipline, while they make extravagant use of imageries, analogies, poetic metaphors and even highflown imaginings. Nevertheless, claims of reason are unassailable; hence even spiritualists contend on rational grounds they have their reasons and systems of logic too. We should note, however, that Indian logic stands entirely on a different ground from Western logic.

Religion cannot be based on reason simply because it is irrationality par excellence. It is not based on a spirit of inquiry and reasoning but on faith. Coming out of the background of a law-governed universe man is also rational, and rationality in nature is reason in human beings. And the purpose of reasoning is not to avoid any conclusion but to reach one.

Soul, according to Hindu philosophy, is perfect, free, pure and absolute. One may raise a very pertinent question as to the physical basis of such a soul. Matter is not perfect, hence soul cannot be enclosed in any material body. How can a Hindu explain this paradox? Many thinking men among them therefore, tried to complete the gap by bringing into the conception of soul such ideas as one or many quasi-perfect beings and many other such names. But you do not explain a thing by simply giving it a name. The question remains there: how can a perfect being become quasi-perfect? How can a pure and absolute being effect change in the minutest particle of nature? But you cannot expect answers to such questions anywhere in Hindu philosophy. Devout Hindus scrupulously avoid such philosophical intricacies and content themselves with the simple answer: "We don't know." They care not to know how soul comes to be connected with matter, enters into it, and then thinks about itself.

Everybody's thinking centres round his physical existence; if souls exist within bodies as separate entities, why do they do so? They are satisfied to know that it is because "God ordained it to be so." Further question seems unnecessary. Indian spiritualism thus stands upon an irrational premise, a grand bogus, which is by no means a proud achievement of Indian thought but its failure.

Spiritualism aims at the liberation of mind from the disturbing influences of pleasure and pain. If the idea is to achieve mental equilibrium, not disturbed in happiness or sorrow, it can best be achieved by proper development and harmonious functioning of all the faculties and not in the desiccation of all desires. Man wants pleasure, and this want is, among many other human desires, delicate and sensitive. Religious people cannot altogether get rid of this desire; while, on the other hand, they fail to give it due recognition and practical direction. Their only joy is in God. Their pleasure is in the thought of God.

GOBINDA DAS GHOSH.

(To be concluded)

FRANCO TERROR IN SPAIN

Whilst *The Freethinker* normally eschews party politics as such, it has always implacably opposed Fascism in all its forms, accordingly, we desire to associate ourselves with current protests against the reign of terror at present operative in Spain. Whether as a form of Fascist dictatorship negating Democracy or as an intolerant instrument of clericalism, the present regime of Franco is inimical to all for which Freethought stands.

CORRESPONDENCE

WORLD FOOD SUPPLY

SIR,—Considering total world population and total available land I think this works out to about 15 acres per head. Would someone please verify this for general information? If this is nearly correct, each square mile must support about 40 people.

It follows that the amount of land can never at any time be increased. Therefore, if population increases the same amount of land must support that increase. And if the population increase is faster than the produce increase of that land, then the ration of each person is reduced in proportion to the increase of numbers or population. Therefore, the Malthusian theory is and always will remain correct.

Now some people are claiming that the produce per acre can be increased by scientific means. But population can double itself in a few years and go on doing so every few years and for all time. Is it claimed that science can double produce in a few years and go on doing so for all time? If so, Malthus was wrong, but if not then he was correct. If he was correct then world starvation of the human race is only a matter of time, unless world population is limited and stabilised to the possible increased food supply per acre.

I submit that world population can go on doubling itself every few years in perpetuity, but that science cannot do likewise with the produce of the permanently limited amount of land. Therefore world population must be limited and stabilised to the total land produce and that the increase of land produce can never be doubled every few years like world population can double itself every few years and can go on doing so in perpetuity.

Does anyone venture to say that this necessary limitation and stabilisation of population can, or ever will be, done without contraception? It never has been done so in all the history of mankind.—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.

SIR,—Does our science never deviate? One type of scientist gets knighted and much Press space; another execrated or ignored—what can we expect? So let "bourgeois science" stand with "Bankers' economics," "Christian civilisation" and "Western democracy"—we hold our noses, of course.—Yours, etc.,

H. FIDDIAN.

PEACE, POLITICS—AND PARIKH

SIR,—There are so many periodicals devoted to politics that it grieves me somewhat to see the valuable space of *The Freethinker* used for any purpose other than exposing the foolishness of belief in the supernatural nonsense of the various religions. I know that many readers would like to see treated in *The Freethinker* columns subjects of great controversial interest, such as politics; but, if politics must be touched upon, the exposure of the British brand of Shintoism might, perhaps, be considered the limit beyond which discussion is irrelevant to the real aims of *The Freethinker*.

If, however, concessions must be made, I trust that only contributions of the well informed kind will be accepted. It seems to me, with all due respect to you, Sir, that an error has been made in accepting from Mr. N. K. Parikh his article for publication.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KEANE.

If Mr. Keane really regards the issue of peace, with which Mr. Parikh's article was primarily concerned, as irrelevant to Freethinkers, we can only conclude that he does not live in the real world at all. How much Freethought would exist after an atomic war?—EDITOR.]

MR. YATES AND MR. ROWLAND

SIR,—I do not think that there is much point in continuing this argument between Mr. Yates and myself, since there is little, if any, likelihood of either of us convincing the other—or even of converting believers in either side of the argument.

But I do think it is worth my while to thank Mr. Yates for at last saying in as many words that the first basic belief of Freethought is that "Christianity is a myth." This is what I have always found so utterly and absolutely unconvincing about the "party line" of Freethought, and it is good to know that its irrationality is regarded as being of basic importance. One can look around at the ideological world, seeing the world-wide influence of Christianity, even in its divided state; one can appreciate the work which even now is being done by such people as Dr. Schweitzer; one can read the countless books inspired by a belief in some version of religious truth. Then, when one comes back to Mr. Yates' assertion that all this is based on a myth, one feels like echoing one of Mr. Churchill's war-time remarks, and saying: "Some myth!"—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

"THE FREETHINKER" IN "THE ISLE OF SAINTS"

"SHOCKED by seeing *The Freethinker* openly displayed for sale, on the showstand of a Dublin newsagent, the Irish *Standard* recently took action in a manner which is characteristic of the technique of Catholics in assaulting truth by oblique insinuations. After describing the leading article of *The Freethinker* as an attack on the accounts of the investigation of the Tomb of St. Peter, the *Standard* went on: "the centre pages are given over to a scurrilous attack against nuns in the worst 'Maria Monk' tradition. The Bible is scoffed at, and 'fun' is poked at the Methodists. Some of the advertisements for lectures and meetings show that Soviet Russia and its fellow travellers consider it a suitable medium for support."

—"The Literary Guide," April, p.65.

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, J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER.

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

INDOOR

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—March 30, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY, "The Awakening of Asia."

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street).—March 30, 7 p.m.: E. W. SHAW, A.I.Q.S., M.I.C.W.A. (Kent). "Political Institutions of the U.S.A."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: A Lecture.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, March 30, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "Some Modern Superstitions."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: MISS BETTY ENGLAND: "I Saw New China."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY, "Slave Revolts of the Ancient World."

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen Road, Peckham).—March 30, 7-30 p.m.: LEN EBURY (Vice-President, N.S.S.): A Lecture.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE: "Thomas and Jane Carlyle."

Streatham Debating Society (White Lion Hotel, Streatham High Street, S.W.).—Friday, March 28, 7-45 p.m.: Debate: Dr. F. CROWLEY (R.C.) versus Mr. F. A. RIDLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: A Lecture.

MR. HERBERT CUTNER

Our readers will be pleased to learn that Mr. Herbert Cutner, so well known for many years past for his outspoken articles in *The Freethinker*, not to mention his numerous publications, has successfully undergone a rather serious operation at the Middlesex Hospital. Mr. Cutner hopes to be back at work again shortly and in renewed health, to resume, with enhanced vigour, his fearless attacks on Spiritualism and other arsenals of superstition.

THE DIVORCE OF ANAHITA

IN the days when Gods were plentiful and walked and talked with men, Jahveh gazed out of his temple at the Judean hills and sighed. He felt there was little to be gained by being a God. Turning to Kadmiel, his high priest, he expressed his discontent.

"Who am I and what is it I command? My people are nothing but an insignificant hill tribe. They do not build great cities like the Babylonians, or sail the sea like the Phoenicians, nor are they learned like the Egyptians. Yet they give themselves airs and when they sacrifice to me they expect miracles. It is nothing to be the god of such a people."

Kadmiel frowned, to be the priest of a discontented god was almost as uncomfortable a position as being the priest of discontented worshippers.

"There is much in what you say," he replied. "But have you considered how this may be rectified?"

For some time Kadmiel had been turning over in his mind a scheme to enhance the reputation of his god, knowing that his own importance would grow with it. He felt that now was the time to set his scheme in motion.

"You are too tolerant and easy going," he told Jahveh, "Not only towards your people but towards other gods. You allow your temple to harbour half a dozen minor divinities who are constantly taking sacrifices and honours that are yours by right."

Kadmiel paused to judge what effect his words were having. He knew his god was a slow thinker and did not take kindly to new ideas. He received no answer, though judging by a low gleam in Jahveh's eyes his words were favourably received.

"Your people too," he continued, "are inconstant in their affections for you. They frequent the temples of neighbouring gods giving and receiving favours. Many take to themselves foreign wives and each brings with her the worship of her own deities, thus you are robbed by strangers in your own land."

"The women of the Zidonians make excellent wives," observed Jahveh, "and are often very beautiful. One must not be surprised if they are much sought after in marriage."

"That is not the point," returned Kadmiel sharply. "Are you not jealous? Do you not resent the intrusion of these strangers?"

This was a new idea to Jahveh and an exciting one. He now began to conceive the cause of his discontent. Lowering his head he listened to Kadmiel as he continued:

"Show your people that your wrath is something to be dreaded. Go out and show the nations that you are first among the gods, that none are your equals. Then your people will flock to you, and unite in fear and worship you and you and they will be strong in that unity."

These words went to Jahveh's heart. He raised himself up and began to walk to and fro exclaiming excitedly, "Yes, I will show them what I am made of. I will have my dues. My people will own that their god is great, and I and they will be great together."

While Jahveh continued in this strain, Kadmiel smiled and nodded; it would be worth while being high priest of an exclusive god, one that would not brook a rival. His own position would be enhanced as Jahveh widened his power. And Jahveh had possibilities for if he was a trifle thick in the head, he was certainly strong in the arm. With proper guidance. . . .

Jahveh stopped abruptly and turned to face Kadmiel. "Do you really think I can do it?" he asked.

"You hurl a very good thunderbolt," Kadmiel replied, "Let us try."

The next day a party of worshippers of Jahveh were returning from Gaza. While in that city they had paid their respects to Baal in his temple, for they agreed it would be wise to stand well with the god of the Philistines while they were within his reach. When they came within sight of their homes they were struck by lightning and all killed. About the same time disaster overtook a prominent citizen of Jerusalem who had a Zidonian wife and had shown favour towards her people. His house took fire and he and his household were destroyed.

"Not bad for a beginning," said Kadmiel. "But in the way that lies before you are wars and pestilence and worse. And be warned you will not have it all your own way. You will receive knocks as well as give them. But your reward will be glory and honour and the loyal devotion of a large following."

Kadmiel and his god were walking in a grove of pomegranates that grew on the banks of a stream. In a pool shaded from the sun by trees, they came upon Jahveh's consort, the goddess Anahita, disporting herself with a couple of minor deities. She made a pretty picture with the water rippling about her feet and the dappled sunshine playing on her body. Perhaps she was aware of the fact, for she gave no sign that she was aware of being observed, but continued her sport with her companions.

As gods count time, Jahveh and Anahita had not been married long and Kadmiel knew that his god took great pleasure in the company of the goddess. In his plans there was no room for a possible rival, so the beauty of Anahita was a most unpleasant sight to him.

"Did I not tell you how they encroach on your rights and privileges," said Kadmiel drawing Jahveh's attention to Anahita's companions. "They would even steal your wife from you."

A sudden storm obscured the sun, thunder was heard and rain splattered in the stream. The minor divinities fled leaving Anahita alone to face the angry Jahveh. She was surprised for she knew that a moment before Jahveh had been admiring her with loving eyes.

"What is this?" she cried indignantly. "You have become very ill-tempered of late. To what do we owe this outburst?"

"I have been tolerant long enough," replied Jahveh. "I will share with no one and none shall be a rival to me."

"And you dare to turn the anger of an unwarranted jealousy on me?"

"I am a jealous god, and upon none other may you look."

So they wrangled, Anahita expostulating against the extravagant and unheard of claims of Jahveh, whilst he, the idea expanding with the exercise of it, grew more lordly and overbearing at every word.

Standing aside, Kadmiel listened to this quarrel with satisfaction. He had sown seed on rich soil. His god had a streak of pride and covetousness and the idea of being the one and only god of his people appealed vastly to him. It also pleased Kadmiel that Anahita should object so strongly to Jahveh's ambitions. The goddess was popular with the people and Kadmiel feared to see her share in Jahveh's triumphs to his detriment. In his scheme there was room for only one deity and Kadmiel was his priest.

L. HANGER.

(To be concluded)