

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 15

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

A Rationalist Looks at World History

POPULAR scientific and historical literature is a product of modern culture and of its technical acquirements. In the ancient world and, as far as we know, in all earlier civilisations, culture represented the exclusive possession of a small ruling class which formed the reading-public for the literature of the era in question. The masses were totally illiterate and lived in what was virtually a different mental world from that of the dominant caste. In no previous civilisation was there anything corresponding to the popular Press and to the "best-sellers" of our day. Modern "popular" culture represents the creation, exclusively, of printing and of universal education.

One of the most recent forms taken by popular literature and, also, one of the most important, is represented by that literary sub-species described as "outlines," summaries of science, literature, history, as the case may be. Perhaps the most famous, as well as influential of such "outlines" is represented by *The Outline of History*, by (the late) Mr. H. G. Wells. In this celebrated work Mr. Wells brought the erudition of a sociologist and historian, illustrated by the narrative skill of a major novelist, to effect a lucid and coherent synthesis of the evolution of mankind and of his civilisation: to present a panorama of world-history. Mr. Wells's pioneer synthesis met with phenomenal success and went the round of the world. The distinguished author himself declared in the hearing of the present writer that his *Outline* was a bigger commercial success than even his most widely read novels. As is usually the case, the outstanding success of Wells's *Outline*, itself "outlined" in his subsequent *Short History of the World*, provoked a host of imitators, none of whom has, however, quite equalled their eminent predecessor. In an age when, as it has been aptly put, "a specialist is one who knows more and more about less and less," the man-in-the-street, who has little time or opportunity for original research, grasps eagerly at readable symposiums of knowledge and demonstrates a perhaps inevitable tendency to mistake lucidity of presentation for depth of knowledge. However, with whatever incidental defects, popular summaries of history have their own value: they create the public for the professional historian.

The latest example of such a popular presentation of Universal History comes from a pen which needs no introduction to readers of *The Freethinker*. For the past decade, Mr. Archibald Robertson, long previously known as a leading member of the R.P.A. and as a well-known lecturer and contributor to Rationalist periodicals, has been producing, successively, a series of scholarly volumes. His latest book, *How to Read History* (Watts—18s.), has just appeared. It represents what is, in effect, an "outline of history," written, as one would naturally expect from the author's own antecedents, from a rationalist angle modified, however, by strong traces of the Marxist, or Materialist Interpretation of History, which may cause a good many of his conclusions to be not altogether acceptable, not only, as might be expected, to the Christian

reading-public but, also, to the more traditional type of Anglo-Saxon Rationalists. Indeed, upon first taking up his pen to write this article, the present writer, who is tolerably familiar with both Rationalist and Marxist historiography, was at first undecided as to whether to describe Mr. Robertson as primarily a Rationalist (in the more usual sense of the word) or a Marxist.

Mr. Robertson's "Outline" is comparatively slight in volume and cannot on that account alone be compared with the Wells volume which was on a much more elaborate scale. A more valid comparison would be with another "Outline" reviewed in this column some time ago, *Glimpses of World-History* by M. René Sedillot. It must be said that, whilst the present writer is more sympathetic to Mr. Robertson's radical standpoint than to the more conservative standpoint of M. Sedillot, yet the French historian accomplishes his task of condensing world-history into a lucid summary more successfully than does our English (or Scottish?) author. One can, after all, give effective "glimpses of world-history" in a short book. On the other hand, it is inherently impossible in the nature of things to summarise both the actual history of the world and its scientific methodology, as our author attempts to do, in 239 pages. Some things are just impossible, and that is one of them! We cannot help feeling that Mr. Robertson has attempted too much, and that, besides outlining for us *How to read—and write—History* according to a scientific methodology, he should have taken his actual examples from a single period in world-history, preferably from the era of classical history which he obviously knows best.

By far the best part of Archibald Robertson's book—apart from his admirable concluding summary—is the first part dealing with classical history, which includes both the rise of the Roman Empire of the Caesars and, almost simultaneously, the origins of Christianity. This represents a masterly introduction to the subject written from a point of view radically different from that of the conventional approach which is still "religiously"—the operative word!—taught in those superannuated seats of pseudo-classical tradition, "our old universities." Readers of Mr. Robertson's vigorous pages will meet *real* persons who lived in a real world, instead of the conventional marionettes as portrayed by so much traditional history—or, rather, historical fiction! It is much to be hoped that Mr. Robertson will, one day, give us a more detailed picture of the final phase of classical civilisation which culminated in the empire of the Caesars in the political sphere and, spiritually, in the Christian Religion. Indeed, his masterly outline has so whetted our curiosity that, since we understand he has the necessary leisure for research, we regard it as a moral duty on his part to do so!

Had he the space, the present writer would join issue with our historian on a few points: notably on his description of Julius and Augustus Caesar as "revolutionaries." We think that "the Roman Counter-Revolution which inaugurated the 'Fascist' era of the ancient world," as we have elsewhere described it, would be a more accurate

simile: did not Julius Caesar use the actual phrase, "*The New Order*," in one of his speeches?

Our readers will probably find Mr. Robertson's chapters on Judaism and Christian origins to be of particular interest: here, his treatment is bold as well as erudite and he is at his best in drawing attention to the *social* origins of religion. It is here, precisely, that the Marxist interpretation of history, though often overstressed, scores heavily against more traditional idealistic explanations. The social basis, in particular, of the Hebrew Prophets is admirably portrayed and we concur entirely with Mr. Robertson in stressing the revolutionary character of the Old Testament's prophetic movement. Freethinkers are, we fear, often apt to overlook the revolutionary and, in particular, anti-clerical aspect which characterises most reforming religious movements at their start, before, in their turn, they become conservative vested interests.

The author's treatment of Christian origins is familiar to readers of his earlier works, in particular, *Jesus, History or Myth?* He holds the admittedly controversial view that primitive Christianity represents a confluence of several originally divergent sources, *one* of which was represented by an historical Jesus. His Jesus seems, however, to diminish steadily in importance with every book Mr. Robertson writes! However, upon this point we will leave him to the tender mercies of the "mythicists."

The later periods discussed appear somewhat sketchy, and may fairly be described as inadequate not, of course, for lack of knowledge but, rather, for lack of space. In an admirable summary Mr. Robertson discusses the concept of evolution in particular relation to ethics. He condemns equally anti-evolutionism and the superficial theory of uninterrupted evolution. His survey of world-history appears to him to justify a moderate degree of optimism since, despite temporary and often disastrous set-backs, "it still goes on" (in the historic phrase attributed to Galileo).

A notable, if in parts unequal contribution to the philosophy of History, written with all its author's habitual lucidity: a book to be read and discussed by all Rationalists who reject Tradition in the historical, no less than in the scientific sphere.

F. A. RIDLEY.

A CELEBRATED VICTORIAN PIONEER

II

MISS NIGHTINGALE'S nurses prepared bandages and prepared provisions for future use. Yet, while waiting for medical co-operation, the more emotional nurses began to regard their superintendent as callous and indifferent amid the tortures of the neglected wounded.

Water was scarce; there were no domestic utensils and the food supplied to the sick was shockingly inferior and insufficient. Then, so many casualties arrived from the battlefield at Scutari, that "a crisis of terrible urgency arose and prejudices and resentments were for the moment forgotten."

The enormous Barracks became densely crowded with unwashed, dysentery-stricken and verminous wounded. There was no screen to hide the amputations conducted without operating tables, until Miss Nightingale purchased one. She concluded that in the hospital "there were more than 1,000 men suffering from acute diarrhoea and only two chamber pots. The privies in the towers of the Barrack Hospital had been allowed to become useless." The filth on the floors in which the afflicted lay was an inch deep. No wonder, she stated, that "the dysentery cases have died at the rate of one in two . . . the mortality of the operation cases is frightful."

Even worse conditions followed, but she became the hospital purveyor and, in two months, at the doctors' request, she supplied some 6,000 shirts, 2,000 socks, and 500 pairs of drawers and refitted an entire regiment, who had only summer dress, with warm winter wear. In a letter to Sidney Herbert she averred: "I am a kind of General Dealer . . . in tin baths, tables and forms, cabbages and carrots, operating tables, towels and soap, small tooth combs, precipitate for destroying lice, scissors, bed pans and stump pillows."

It had been fully agreed that Miss Nightingale should exercise complete control over nurses sent to the Crimea when, much to her annoyance, she learnt that a number of nurses under a Miss Stanley had been consigned to a medical man. Many of her own nurses were Catholics who were more concerned with their patients' beliefs than in cleansing their bodies. Sidney Herbert, who was in ill-health and greatly worried, had consented to the Stanley expedition under a misunderstanding. The Romanist nurses were already causing trouble, and their number was now raised from 25 to 84. Popish plots were spoken of and, as our biographer states, there stood behind the Papist party "the formidable figure of Manning who wished to focus on the nuns of his church the fame and the glory which surrounded the Scutari nurses. He had no animus against Miss Nightingale . . . but the arrival of Mary Stanley's party dealt her mission a blow from which it never completely recovered. Before the arrival of the newcomers . . . she was well on the way to complete success. After it, although she achieved personal triumphs her authority was not established until her mission was almost ended." Sectarian animosities obscured the beneficent character of her tireless labours.

Letters appeared in the London Press deploring the high percentage of Romanist nurses in Miss Nightingale's original contingent, when it was stated that though formerly a Unitarian, Florence was a member of the Church of England. Still, she was declared to be an Anglican Papist, and Jesuit conspiracies were denounced, while the machinations of the "pervert Manning" were deplored. One clergyman cautioned his parishioners against sending money to a gang of "female ecclesiastics and Romish nuns." Indeed, Mary Stanley was accompanied by "Mother Frances Bridgeman of Kinsale, an ardent Irish and rebellious woman who openly avowed her intention to execute a spiritual as well as a medical mission." As Florence declared, she had to endure a "Protestant Howl" and a "Catholic Storm." The conflicting parties caused her, she wrote: "a devil of a life." As her biographer states: "Protestants and Catholics not only quarrelled with each other but among themselves. Mother Bridgeman refused to meet the Bermondsey nuns and her chaplain refused the sacrament to them. A Protestant chaplain wrote to the Secretary of State for War denouncing one of the Protestant nurses as a Socinian who denied the divinity of Christ—and demanded her instant dismissal. . . . One of the Irish nuns converted and re-baptised a soldier on his deathbed and was promptly sent away by Miss Nightingale: 'I do not intend to let our little society become a hotbed of Roman Catholic intrigues,' she wrote to Sidney Herbert." So serious became sectarian strife that it imperilled the hospital reforms. It was said that there were no Presbyterian nurses, and Florence reluctantly agreed to their arrival, but when they appeared, "two immediately went out with a pair of orderlies and were brought back hopelessly intoxicated. She had to send them home, but she knew there would be a storm not because she was

sending home two nurses but because she was returning two Presbyterians."

Queen Victoria asked Mrs. Herbert to furnish her with all the information her husband possessed concerning Miss Nightingale's services to the sick and wounded, upon which the Queen bestowed the highest praise. The letter was read in the hospitals and sufficed to silence captious criticism and remove opposition. Her priceless services were always acknowledged by the troops, and Godolphin Osborne asserted that had not Florence been present in 1854-5 the entire hospital system would have collapsed. Indeed, Lord Shaftesbury opined that she saved the British Army. Yet, when she returned home in 1856, jealousy and misrepresentation in official circles revived. Depressed by her Herculean labours, she was far from well. Much had been achieved, but she was never satisfied unless she gained perfection.

When the war was over she still desired to improve the lot of the common soldier. The horrors she had experienced did not lessen her faith in the potentialities of the men in the ranks. She optimistically declared that were they given "books and games and amusements they will leave off drinking. Give them suffering and they will bear it. . . . I would rather have to do with the Army than with any other class I have attempted to serve."

She became a public idol, but never emerged from seclusion and for many years it was generally assumed that she was dead. But she corresponded with J. Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, Clough, the poet, and other heretics. Another friend was the very heterodox, Dr. Jowett, the Master of Balliol. In 1872 he invited her to select stories for a Children's Bible. She complied and then commented: "The story of Achilles and his horses is far more fit for children than that of Balaam and his ass, which is only fit to be told to bulldogs; and the story of Bathsheba to be told to Bathshebas. Yet we give all these stories to children as 'Holy Writ'. . . . The stories about Andromache and Antigone are worth all the women in the Old Testament put together, nay, almost all the women in the Bible." The Books of Samuel and Kings she scorned as: "Witches. Harlots. Talking asses. Asses talking. Young gentlemen caught by the hair. Savage Tricks. Priests Tales."

In 1907 Miss Nightingale received the Order of Merit, and in 1908 the Freedom of the City of London. But it is doubtful whether she was fully conscious of the distinctions conferred, for she was a slowly dying woman. The world at large was astounded to learn that she was still alive and congratulations were sent to her from all parts of the earth. She was acclaimed at the International Conference of Red Cross Societies as the pioneer of their organisation.

In her will she directed that her remains should be dissected for the benefit of medical science and that she should have no memorial whatever. In accordance with her wishes, a public funeral in Westminster Abbey was declined. But she was buried in the family grave, her coffin being borne by six soldiers. On the grave stone are the simple initials: F. N. Born 1820. Died 1910.

T. F. PALMER.

INVITATION

WE invite all Freethinkers and Freethought organisations; all philosophic and scientific associations; all Masonic Lodges; all Leagues of the Rights of Man; all organisations for the defence of secular schools and of

laicity in government; all Ethical and Humanist Societies to assemble on August 22 at the Free University of Brussels, Avenue F. D. Roosevelt, Brussels.

CONGRESS PROGRAMME

FRIDAY, AUGUST 22

2 p.m.: Administrative session, reserved for mandated delegates of affiliated societies.

7-30 p.m.: (1) Reception of the Congress by the Belgian National Federation of Freethought Societies; (2) Presidential Address; (3) Messages; (4) Secretary's Report; (5) Memorial to Theodore Verhaegen, founder of the University.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23—MORNING SESSION AT 9 A.M.
AFTERNOON, 2-30 P.M.

(1) Reports; (2) Discussion of the Encyclical "Humani Generis," opened by Jean Cotereau (France); (3) Discussion of Freethought and the present Social Revolution, opened by A. Lorulot (France), followed by F. A. Ridley (Gt. Britain).

SUNDAY, AUGUST 24—MORNING SESSION AT 9 A.M.
AFTERNOON, 2-30 P.M.

(4) Relationship between Organised Religion (Church) and State, opened by J. G. Rausch (Holland), followed by P. Braun (Belgium); (5) Freethought and Youth, opened by C. Bradlaugh-Bonner, followed by C. Silvestri (Italy).

Evening: Dinner.

MONDAY, AUGUST 25—MORNING SESSION ONLY

(6) Resolutions, Elections, date of next Congress, etc. (only mandated delegates may vote); (7) End of Congress.

Afternoon: Floral homage to Modeste Terwagne, Francisco Ferrer and Paul Janson.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26

Coach excursion to the Ardennes.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27

Blankenberghe, Hôtel Astoria.

THE GENERAL COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD UNION OF
FREETHINKERS

The Treasurer: L. Courtois, Rue A. Bréart, 157, St.-Gilles-Brussels (Belgium). *The President*: C. Bradlaugh-Bonner, 4, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4 (Great Britain). *The Secretary*: P. H. Pardon, rue St. Martin, 32, Louvain (Belgique). *The Vice-President*: André Lorulot (France). *The Members*: A. Boulanger, E. Bartalini, H. J. Blackham, Dr. Th. Bartosek, J. Cotereau, J. De Ronde, J. G. Rausch, Ch. Smith (America), Glanville Cook (Australia), S. Gosh (India).

INFORMATION

(a) Apply for registration to Mlle P. H. Pardon, Hon. Secretary of the World Union of Freethinkers, 32, rue St. Martin, Louvain (Belgium).

(b) Mid-day and evening meals at Brussels will be taken at the City Estudiantine, including the Sunday Dinner; The City can also lodge registered members: charge per day, sharing a room, 176 Belgian francs inclusive; single room, 203 frs. 50 cms. Students, on showing their students card, room 65 frs. with 10% service, mid-day meal, 30 frs.; evening supper, 20 frs., self-service.

(c) For a hotel in Brussels, prices vary from 120-250 frs. for bed and breakfast.

(d) Hotel Astoria, Blankenberghe, will take registered members at 150 frs. a day, including three meals.

(e) Mlle. Pardon will reserve rooms at the City Estudiantine, or in a hotel at a given rate.

The National Secular Society will be represented by Mr. F. A. Ridley.

AN AFRICAN "MUNICH"

THERE are two matters of recent occurrence which merit the active attention of all Freethinkers; I refer to the "witch" trial of the hypnotist, Mr. Slater and the decision of the British Government to exile Seretse Khama from his native land. The former is still *sub judice* and comment on it, therefore, must be postponed. But the latter is clamant for attention, and it is useless for any freethinker to try and shelter under the excuse that it is politics. So is disestablishment of the Church of England or cremation. And since the Conservatives have merely finalised the wrong started by Labour, it cannot be said to be a "party question."

For when all the smoke screens have blown away and—not to mince matters—some real downright lying is discounted, what is all the pother about? It is nothing more nor less than the revival of the age-old claim of privilege for the Chosen People of Jehovah and the condemnation of "subject" peoples to be the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for the superior white. It is the imposition, by the British Government, of the colour bar in its nakedest and ugliest form. It is because this coloured boy married a white girl, and because it is whites who are "turning on the heat" that the British Government has been acting in this shameful manner. It is alleged that the consent of the Imperial Government to the appointment of Seretse Khama as chief of the Bamangwato tribe would "be against the unity and well being of the tribe."

As that sober organ, *The Times* put it, when there started a little family dispute between Tshekedi and Seretse Khama, the Government thought they had "a good prospect of shifting the onus" for edging out Seretse and his white wife on to his own people. If they could have got the Bamangwato *kgotla* to vote Tshekedi in, we should not have heard any more about "unity and good order." Fortunately for truth, though unfortunately for British and South African colour bar-ites, the Bamangwatos saw the Imperialist red lamp in time, and even Tshekedi drew back when he realised how the whites were using him as a pawn in their dirty game. Curious that a couple of governments, Labour, then Conservative, both scraping into power on their bare bones, should consider a divided electorate in Bamangwato as indicative of disunity and disorder!

And this is where the downright lying comes in. Because what successive British Governments have feared is *not* that Seretse might get in power on some snap election representing only a minority of his people. No! Their fear is that he will romp home with an overwhelming majority, if they do not manipulate the elections. In fact, the voting at the last meeting of the *kgotla* was unanimous in Seretse's favour and the Tshekedi Party have withdrawn all opposition to him, with or without his white wife and their child. Every dirty trick and disreputable device to discredit Seretse has been used by Labour and Conservatives alike. Democracy, they shout; and when the tribe exercises their democratic rights and choose Seretse, they say: "No, you think again"! And we are told South Africa and Dr. Malan had nothing to do with the British Government's decision!

Yet the *only* "offence" with which Seretse Khama is charged is that he took to himself a white wife. If his own tribe do not object, what on earth has it got to do with the British Government—if *not because of Malan and the S.A.U.* And how is it that a coloured man with a white wife is unfit to govern blacks in Bamangwato, but fit to govern blacks in Jamaica?

In spite of all the lying it is clear that Malan and the whites in Africa are the decisive factor which has brought

the British Government to its despotic and unfair decision. And we all know what the Malanites are—God-fearing Christians with Dr. Malan, their leader, a professional minister of religion! They make no bones about it. They, the White Rulers, are the Chosen People of their god; like a new Joshua, Dr. Malan has condemned the indigenous Africans to be for ever the hewers of wood and drawers of water.

Are Freethinkers going to hold up the hero of Jericho to derision and yet remain silent before the outrages of his successor of Table Bay?

P. C. KING.

ACID DROPS

An awful discovery has just been made by a Commission set up by the Episcopal (C. of E.) Dioceses of Central New York. They have found that Mendelssohn's world famous Wedding March and the one by Wagner from Lohengrin must no longer be played at church weddings. They "are both open to question for their *secular* feeling and origin." They do not attempt "to dignify the new religion before God." This kind of hopeless drivel makes us wonder why the Commission does not insist that all weddings in which the offending marches were played—and enjoyed—are completely invalid. In any case, however, in this country and in France it is not the church wedding which is legal, but the secular ceremony, however much the happy couple wish the opposite; and we fancy both Mendelssohn and Wagner will still be in demand—in spite of their secular appeal.

That one time sceptic, Dr. C. E. M. Joad, recently boasted that he has *gradually* come to accept Christianity. Well, it is not easy for anybody to swallow at one gulp the ghosts and goblins, the myths and miracles, the devils and demons, the angels, the Virgin Birth, the wholesale Resurrection of Jewish Saints, and Heaven and Hell, all of which must be swallowed by true Christians. Still, Dr. Joad will do it in time at whatever cost to self-respect and intelligence. After all, it must be difficult to reach the level of a Bradlaugh or an Ingersoll, and we must not expect too much from a Dr. Joad.

A correspondent to the *Catholic Herald* insists that it is time for Catholics to stop calling Communism the enemy; the early Christians were all Communists and it exists "in perfection in our religious orders." He claims that the real enemy is Materialism, and we congratulate him on his perspicuity and heartily wish that more of his fellow believers would agree with him. Needless to say, however, this same correspondent tries to answer Materialism in three lines, and has no difficulty in proving his utter ignorance of what it is. The simple truth is that the reason why Materialism is the enemy is because no Catholic can answer a Materialist. If he could, it would cease to be the enemy.

We are always pleased to agree with a priest as it means that he has come to our way of thinking. Here, for example, is Fr. Dwyer who implores his brothers in the Faith not to try and convert England. He is shrewd enough to recognise that they have as much chance of doing this as they have of sweeping back the tide around England. Perhaps he would be surprised to learn that Catholics cannot even keep their own sheep from straying—straying even as far as Freethought. We are constantly making converts—does the Church ever get them back?

"THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

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

TO CORRESPONDENTS

JOHN McMANUS.—The "heresies" of Abelard are very fully dealt with by Joseph McCabe in his life of Abelard, which should be in your public library.

S. GRAY.—Mr. Chapman Cohen has now retired from active participation in the Freethought Movement, including *The Freethinker*, on account of his advanced years. As far as we know he is otherwise in good health. Mr. Cohen's retirement makes no difference to the "uncompromising" atheism of this journal.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s.; half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

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.

IN future donations to *The Freethinker* will be published monthly.

SUGAR PLUMS

Our former contributor and present critic, Mr. J. Rowland, has kindly sent us a copy of his new pamphlet, *A Rational Religion* (Lindsey Press; 6d.). This, no doubt, appears a contradictory title to most of our readers. However, we are now mostly acquainted with our former contributor's new line which has had, at least, the merit of adding many pages of lively discussion to the columns of this journal. We are eagerly looking forward to the forthcoming publication of his spiritual autobiography in which, with the skill of an experienced writer of detective fiction, he will tell us how he "found" God. Whatever one may think about Mr. Rowland's theology, he continues to write with the admirable lucidity which he has taught us to expect from him.

It is hoped as many readers as possible will attend the L. & B. Hotel on Sunday, when they will be assured of a topical and provocative lecture from Mr. Alexander. His unorthodox views and opinions should arouse considerable discussion. This is the only indoor lecture to a Freethought audience to be given this season by Mr. Alexander.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

IN his articles on Dialectical Materialism, Mr. Cutner has written a lot of words on the subject and quoted a few authorities with whom he disagrees, but, although he promised to give us his exposition, has failed to tell us what Dialectical Materialism really is.

Perhaps the following will help to clarify the position and, perhaps, Mr. Cutner will come to realise that his interpretation of natural phenomena has always been dialectical without his knowing it.

The difficulty seems to be the meaning of the word 'dialectical,' the 'materialism' being accepted as matter in motion existing independently of thought. In its limited application, Dialectics is that philosophy of the ancient Greeks which was the belief that Truth could be attained

by exposing the contradictions in an argument and correcting them. Modern Science follows a similar procedure in that a theory is discarded when it fails to account for observed phenomena. Thus the Theory of Phlogiston was abandoned when Priestley discovered oxygen and Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation is now modified by Einstein's Relativity. In effect, Dialectics is a progression towards ultimate knowledge by evolution.

In a wider application, Dialectics is seen to be the way of Nature which is a process of progressive development. The unit organism goes through its cycle of birth, life, decay and death. It resulted from change and for the line to continue it must adapt itself through successive generations in order to survive the ever-changing pattern of the world in which it exists. With the interaction and interdependence of all natural phenomena a situation obtains where it is either change or die. It is readily seen that this is but a paraphrase of Darwin's Natural Selection and the Survival of the Fittest.

Similarly, History is a record of social evolution. Primitive society was overtaken by the more organised feudal system and this in turn fell before the rise of capitalism. Now capitalism is on the wane, having sown the seeds of its own destruction by its inherent contradictions. Thomas Paine saw the dialectical nature of society and many of his arguments are based on it. In the Introduction to the Second Part of "The Rights of Man," he says: "If systems of government can be introduced, less expensive and more productive of general happiness than those which have existed, all attempts to oppose their progress will in the end be fruitless. Reason, like Time, will make its own way and prejudice will fall in a combat with interest. If universal peace, civilisation and commerce are ever to be the happy lot of man, it cannot be accomplished but by a revolution in the system of governments."

Hence Dialectical Materialism is seen to be a way of interpreting the phenomena of a material universe where the accent is on progressive change. Perhaps Mr. Cutner can make his "mechanistic" materialism account for progression in Nature and Society, for the development of consciousness from instinct, for the transition from ape to man, for the passing of the cave dwellings of the Neanderthaler into the modern metropolis, but it is likely to prove an awkward business. The dialectical explanation is far simpler and, contrary to Mr. Cutner's statement, needs no "Vitalism" to keep it going because, dialectically, Nature works out its own destiny.

It seems that Mr. Cutner has sought an explanation of Dialectical Materialism from authorities interested in one aspect of the subject, i.e., the rise of Communism which, dialectically, will supersede other ideologies if it can show itself to be more rational than those systems it replaces.

Finally, it is interesting to consider the Roman Catholic Church in the light of Dialectical Materialism. The Church came into being as a revolutionary movement and achieved temporal power by changing the old order of things. But once in power, it opposed change vigorously with anathema, excommunication and the fire. It thus became a contradiction to the natural way of things and thereby doomed itself to decay and eventual extinction. The proud boast of Rome that the Catholic Church is unchanged since its inception takes no reckoning of the concessions forced from it by the advance of Reason. Just as, after years of savage support, the Geocentric Theory was allowed to be replaced by Copernican astronomy, so the Catholic Church is now, after a hundred years of violent antipathy, gradually assimilating Evolution into its view of the Animal Creation. Thus it manages to linger on.

D. B. KENNEDY.

PROGRESS—FORWARD OR BACKWARD?

AS Freethinkers, we must have leanings to some political views. That the N.S.S. has remained aloof from political parties has to a large extent been justified, despite the statements made by party members that political action is the only effective means of procuring social justice.

These contentions of the N.S.S. can be fully justified if the statement made by Mr. C. H. Norman are correct. In a sixteen-page pamphlet, obtainable from 84-86, Chancery Lane, London, at the modest price of sixpence, is brought to light the particular rôle of political parties, in and out of office. In passing, this pamphlet was quietly mentioned in a "particular" paper without indicating its title or its publishers. Our writer claims that none of the national Presses would undertake a review. It is understandable and should have been obvious to the compiler.

The British Worker in Retreat, 1938-1952 is its charming title. It would have been more appropriate to have called it *The Crucifixion of John Citizen*, for we have outlined, in compete detail, reports from the *Report of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue*, March 31, 1949.

That there has been very little change in the economic conditions of the people as a whole, is proved when reviewing the figures of the transference of wealth production. In other words, our writer contends there is no fundamental difference between the Conservative, Liberal or Labour parties, and of course he could have added "and one or two aspiring political parties."

It is the writer's contention that the unhappy position we find ourselves in to-day started in the 1914 war, with a continuous expense in armaments. Surely this is an understatement: the conditions of the masses go further back than the Enclosure Acts.

One amazing statement, however, which has now been confirmed in the House of Commons is that Mr. Attlee and Mr. Churchill have been partly responsible for the present tragic position, with both attempting to cloud the position, yet secretly spending millions on arms.

P.A.Y.E. and the Health Scheme are analysed in such a way, together with various income grades, that one is forced to admit that, never have so many been exploited by so few, for so much, and for no useful purpose.

It is an amazing fact that the Press has ignored the Inland Revenue report; even the left wing section of the Labour Press.

One important fact overlooked by the writer is that all industrial undertakings in the country are relieved of rates to the tune of millions of pounds per annum, they paying only 25 per cent. of their rateable value, whilst the Church and farmers are completely exempt under the De-rating Act, 1929, which the Labour Party opposed when out of office and did nothing to rectify this rank injustice.

However interesting, the comparative figures given of the prices of commodities since 1896, which are startling and should be studied by everybody, whatever their political complexion, they have little bearing on price movements since 1947. The facts are, however, that the steep rise in the cost of living, together with increase of taxation, has in no way been compensated with wage increase.

In other words, the community is no better off now than in 1940, is the contention of the writer.

The figures given have been checked and found correct, with one exception. That is, the price of bread, the staple diet of the masses. He quotes best white bread in 1897 costing 3½d. per 4-lb. loaf, whereas to-day it costs 1s. 2d. (subsidised). For our writer's information there has not been a 4-lb. loaf since 1948. The loaf was reduced to a standard weight of 3¾ lb., so that in comparison the 4-lb. loaf in 1951 would be approximately 1s. 6d. (subsidised).

Mr. Norman by implication contends that the Labour Party is another "class party" with methods for hoodwinking the masses by bribery, promises and cajoling. The Labour Party, however, never claimed to be a Socialist party. Its programme was based entirely upon the prevailing system and its retention. This has been stated many times in the House of Commons. For included in the "higher income" groups in the Revenue report are Members of Parliament who before their access to power performed some useful service to society but, like the Church, has produced a host of useless nonentities. They toil not neither do they spin, yet the the producer in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these.

On war preparations, the Labour Party completely identified itself with the policy of previous governments, even conscientious objectors of the 1914 defended Empires, and become efficient "strike breakers." That the Labour Party has fulfilled its historic rôle is not quite clear, unless it means that the voting masses have produced a political stalemate which in the end will produce a coalition.

This seems a fair assumption on the basis that the Labour Party and trade union officials have more to lose by an improvement in the standard of existence, and one cannot expect politicians to commit *hari kari*.

Mr. Norman has rendered a great service to producers of wealth and to those who believed the promises of politicians and parsons of "pie in the sky."

The pamphlet should be studied by every person who claims to Freethought, who knows it might rest with the Rationalists to provide the answer to our social problems. Left to politicians it ends in poverty, hunger and war. No wonder the "Left Press" are afraid to publicise it.

Whether Mr. Norman's conclusions are conclusive remains to be seen. We are reminded of the *Labour Bulletin*, March, 1941—January 24 under the signature of C. R. Attlee, which reads: "When we, the Labour Party, entered the Government we made no sacrifice of principle. We asked no sacrifice of principle from the Conservatives. We entered the Government as *equal partners in a common enterprise*." So there is in this instance no "sell out" and there should be no surprises or disappointments.

J. B.

THEATRE

"**The Constant Couple.**" By George Farquhar. Winter Garden Theatre.

THIS Restoration Comedy should be interesting if only to follow the mind of the author at the fairly early age of twenty-one. Of course, it turns to love, and very free love at that, and the conversation of the beaux and would-be-beaux always seems to turn to whores. So when Alec Clunes, as Sir Harry Wildair, makes a serious mistake in believing Ruth Trouncer—as a Woman of Honour—to be a woman of easy virtue, he does not realise that his approaches are resented.

The real butterfly of the play is Maxine Audley as Lurewell, who impishly plays the men one against the other, with results that keep us continually laughing. There is a strong male cast, the most outstanding being Laurence Hardy as a disbanded colonel, Tony Britton as a great debaucher, Richard Wordsworth as an old merchant, and Ivan Staff as Clincher Senior. Apart from these, Alec Clunes' performance is brilliant, and he deals with his part much more effectively than he has handled the production of this play.

This is a rollicking good play in which the spirit of the period is suitably captured.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

PRAYERS, BUT NOT BY REQUEST!

THE week ended April 5 was designated "The Children's Request Week," and, according to the *Radio Times*, the Children's Hour programmes broadcast that week were "chosen from the lists of favourites" submitted by young listeners in the Request Week Ballot conducted in February.

The issue of the *Radio Times* dated March 29 gave the programme for "The Children's Request Week." It also gave the result of the popularity ballot, showing the order of choice of the twenty favourite programmes in Children's Hour. Owing to lack of time, it was explained, all of the twenty could not be broadcast during the week.

I studied the programmes for that week, and found that every item except one was qualified for inclusion as a result of the ballot. The exception was "Children's Hour Prayers," on Wednesday, April 2. According to the conditions of the ballot and the announcement in the *Radio Times* neither the prayers nor the parson who said them had any right to be in Children's Hour at all. They were not in the first twenty favourites chosen by the children, yet they were given broadcasting time in preference to other items that were.

A little thing, no doubt; but it exposes Christian Ethics in a peculiar light. This fraud on the children was, of course, carried out with B.B.C. connivance. It is not to be wondered at, for the parson and the religious bigot have exercised such a disproportionate influence over broadcasting policy since the B.B.C. was born, that listeners as a whole appear to be quite unaware of how unfairly they are being treated. It is the task of every Freethinker, therefore, to enlighten them and to shame the B.B.C. into reforming its policy and personnel.

P. V. M.

CORRESPONDENCE

SIT OR STAND

SIR,—Enclosed please find my weekly donation of 1s. towards *The Freethinker* Fund.

Difference between church and cinema as follows: Sit down in church. "Stand up for Jesus." Stand up in the cinema. "For Christ's sake sit down."—Yours, etc.,

A. HANCOCK.

FREETHOUGHT AND DOGMATISM

SIR,—Re controversy between Mr. R. J. Jackson and P. Turner, the latter, in your March 16 issue, suggests that to be a Freethinker one must be capable of "Thinking freely without beliefs. . . ." Is this true? Surely Freethinkers must have beliefs; assuming belief is what we *think* is or is not, when we are not quite certain; when we do not know. For instance, P. Turner thinks "All life is idiotic." This assertion is assumption, belief; not knowledge, in my opinion; my belief. Am I right?

Mr. Jackson says: Man gives Meaning to all things. . . ." Does this apply to earthquakes? Is friend Jackson implying design in the Universe?—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

MALTHUS UP TO DATE

SIR,—May I supply what your correspondent, Mr. Rupert L. Humphris requests, confirmation of his statement that there are 15 acres of planetary space available for each inhabitant—at present?

This can be found in "The Estate of Man," by Michael Roberts. Unhappily, the position is even worse than this appears; of these fifteen acres, five are forest or jungle; four, dry desert; two, semi-desert; two, polar snow; leaving two acres per individual—and four are needed, in order to maintain even our present living standards.

Unhappily, again, although nature is becoming tractable to science, man is much less so; and it is to be feared that, short of widespread artificial infertility, resisted by almost all religious and political systems, only famine, disease or catastrophic war can match populations to food supply.—Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

POLITICS AND THE FREETHINKER

SIR,—Finding a spare moment I must write to tell you that I have decided to discontinue taking *The Freethinker*. My news-agent, no doubt by the triumphant look he now wears, considers it, although of financial loss to himself, a victory for Christian principles, and he really has the hall-mark of the good Christian.

However, I consider N. K. Parikh has won a victory over the discretions and good taste of the powers that be behind *The Freethinker* with his "Primarily Political Article." The propagation of a new world war and subsequent untold misery for us all is done much better from day to day in our national newspapers; not only have we access to it daily but it is cheaper and usually better written. So I beg of you, until *The Freethinker* returns to its former praiseworthy position of political neutrality, please print one less.—Yours, etc.,

A. MACRAE.

[Our correspondent misunderstands the policy of *The Freethinker*. We have published many political articles in the past, though not party political ones. We consider that the at present paramount question of peace falls entirely within the scope of this journal, and Mr. Parikh's is not the first article that we have published on this topic. We presume that our correspondent dislikes Mr. Parikh's political standpoint, but *The Freethinker* has never censored opinions, and we have no intention of doing so now.—EDITOR.]

OBITUARY

WILLIAM EDWIN CHATWIN

After a short illness, the death of the above-named member of the N.S.S. Birmingham Branch occurred on March 26. The remains were subsequently cremated. Mr. Chatwin held rational and progressive ideas for many years, but only latterly joined the N.S.S. sympathy is extended to Mrs. M. D. Chatwin and her son, John, both of them valued members of the Birmingham Branch.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETING

At the monthly meeting held on April 8, the following were present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Cleaver, Ebury, Gibbins, Griffiths, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shaw, Woodley and the Secretary.

New members were admitted to the Parent and West London Branches. It was reported that applications for renewed membership of the Society through the Parent Branch were being received from late members of the Glasgow Branch (dissolved), together with messages of support for the present Executive and the N.S.S., and in these cases the necessary transfers were authorised.

Correspondence with the Leicester Secular Society and the Bell Hotel, Leicester, was dealt with. The suggested revisions to the Principles and Objects and Immediate Practical Objects recommended by the Sub-Committee appointed to consider this question were discussed and additional suggestions incorporated; and it was agreed that the amended document be submitted to the Conference with the Executive's approval.

Letters from a member of the N.S.S., from The Freethought Society and from Mr. Sydney Silverman, M.P., regarding a proposed clause amending the Defamation (Amendment) Bill were read. The dangers of such a clause were noted, also the fact that it had been rejected.

Messrs. Johnson and Shaw, together with the Acting President and Secretary, were appointed to act as the Conference Agenda Sub-Committee.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place, Blackburn).—Sunday, April 13, 3 and 7 p.m.: JACK CLAYTON.

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: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

INDOOR

South London Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road Station, S.E.15).—Sunday, April 13, 7-15 p.m.: Mr. J. M. ALEXANDER, "Humanity at the Crossroads."

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

1 or 2 Rooms required; temporary, part furnished or otherwise. J. Hill, Institution, 82, Ladywell Road, Lewisham, S.E.13.

TRAVELLING PARSON

I

THE train was on the point of starting, the guard having blown his whistle and now waving his green flag. As I hurried along the platform all the carriages seemed full till I came to a compartment with only one passenger in it. Into that I jumped. As the door was slammed shut by a porter I placed my bag and coat and hat on the rack and sank into a corner seat.

Facing me was a clergyman, as evidenced by his dog-collar and buttonless waistcoat and dark clothes. He smiled almost wistfully, saying in a soft voice, "I'm glad you're staying."

Surprised, I stared at him, replying, "I prefer a carriage to myself, but it's too late to change now."

"Don't tell me you're like everybody else."

"How?" I asked, not getting his meaning.

"If you wish to travel alone you should be in Holy Orders; in common language, a parson."

Light began to dawn upon me, but not yet fully comprehending I uttered the non-committal "Really!"

"Yes. I've no difficulty in travelling alone. When people see my outfit, garb, attire, uniform, whatever you like to call it, they sheer off as from the plague and find another coach."

"I don't. Why should I? You're only another human being like myself."

"Thank you. I take that as a compliment. You've put me more at ease than I usually am travelling."

"I do so much under all conditions and with such different people that I'm not choosy."

As the cleric nodded I went on, "I was in a trainful of workers one Monday morning in the Black Country. Some of the women had been to church the day before and fell to talking about the preacher. They soon left his sermon and got on to his appearance and character. After a while one turned to a silent fellow slumped in the corner and asked him, 'What about it, Alf?'

'What about what?'

'Parsons.'

Alf shifted his stub of cigarette in his lips and mumbled: 'Parsons. Churches ought to fall on 'em and bury 'em.' I've omitted his colourful and decorative adjectives. Of course the hearers laughed."

This parson was not shocked or disturbed, not enough to show it. He sighed, saying, "That attitude's too common to worry me. I've heard worse things said than that."

"And passing comments can be disregarded. One hears, ignores and forgets after a while."

"It isn't what people say that affects me. It's their withdrawal from me that's so awful; their lack of confidence or any sign of fellowship. I've no real friends."

"You aren't one of the hearty, backslapping, muscular Christian sort, hail-fellow-well-met with everybody, a sport."

The clergyman cast me a disdainful glance and the tones of his voice were scornful, well-nigh contemptuous, as he said: "They deceive no one but themselves by it."

"Too true. Yet's it's an attempt to break down the barriers of which you complain."

"The barriers are there right enough. I've never been able to climb over them or break through."

"Nevertheless there's no definitely anti-clerical movement or strong feeling against you in England."

"No. What exists is more subtle and more derogatory to us than open or violent anti-clericalism."

"What d'you find?"

"Chiefly indifference, considerable contempt, some insolence, criticism but no intention of taking us seriously. We're nobodies in the affairs of life, hangers-on, parasites."

"That, of course, is result of the spirit of the age, the growing materialism and secularisation of life."

II

Here the reverend gentleman sat up, more moved and interested than he had hitherto shown himself.

He said earnestly, "Now you've come to the point. We're superfluous. Teachers have taken our place with the young. Lawyers and doctors and officials and the local authorities have displaced our influence with adults and old folk. The Welfare State has made administration of charity useless, indeed repugnant to people. Science and machinery occupy their serious thoughts; sport and pleasure-making fill their leisure. On the religious side this country's neither Godfearing nor Christian."

As he finished his tone was bitter.

"Yet there's still prevalence of a generalised idea of a God among the majority of people."

"Very generalised. A vague deism. A tenuous hope that everything's for the best. What may be called Radio Theism."

I laughed. "Ha! Very apt."

"And true. But of real religion few signs. No deep belief; no holding on to tenets to the extent of facing martyrdom; no faith thinking it can move mountains; no consciousness of sin; no desire to be at one with God in the brotherhood of Jesus Christ."

Stopping abruptly the priest drew a long breath, smiled sadly and asked, "Am I boring you?"

"No. Indeed not. Carry on."

"The full creed and message does bore most people. They neither understand it nor want it. To most of them it's meaningless. As you say, the material secular scientific world's triumphing."

"Beyond doubt."

"Of course, the churches will go lingering on, perhaps for centuries, preaching idly to dwindling congregations getting less receptive of their formularies. Nonconformist chapels are little closed corporations; my church is the church of a class, an expiring class, while Roman Catholicism is master of the art of self-advertisement, never mentioning its losses or defeats, failures or weaknesses. So we may drift indefinitely."

A. R. WILLIAMS.

(To be concluded)

PANACEA

When I have a hangover, some dark, dismal morn,

After junketings, binges and beanos;

When I'm wishing I'd never been thought of, or born,

It's cured, thanks to Prayer—and to E - - s.

When snuffling, sneezing and gasping for air,

In the toils of a thundering chill;

There's only one remedy—Christian prayer—

And a lovely, large dose of B - v - - l.

If you can't swallow tripe without aching and pain—

If your eating lacks gusto and beans;

If you look as if left out all night in the rain—

Try a good healing prayer—and "Mac - - - s."

For the PRAYER is what does all the good,

In faith all the healing is latent;

Labels don't matter, if anguish they shatter—

That cure, like the others, is Patent!

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.