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VIEWS AND OPINIONS

The Bible and Christianity

IN the hey-day of Victorian Protestantism an eminent pillar of the Established Church, Dr. W. Burgon, pronounced the following weighty dictum from the pulpit of St. Mary's, the University Church of Oxford, of which he was then Rector:—

"The Bible, whole and in its entirety, is the direct and unerring word of the most High. Every book, every chapter, every verse, every word, every syllable of it, represents the immediate and infallible utterance of Him who sitteth on the Throne."

A little later, during the course of the Evolution controversy, aroused by the discovery of man's animal ancestry by Darwin and its militant propagation by T. H. Huxley, the same champion of Biblical inerrancy went on record with the historic observation:—

"Leave me, my friends, leave me my ancestors in paradise and I will gladly leave you yours in the Zoological Gardens." A *bon mot* which deserves to rank in wit, at least, with Disraeli's almost contemporary affirmation:

"Is man an ape or an angel? My lord, I am on the side of the angels." Nor did Dean Burgon's practice fail to keep step with his theory. In the bitter ecclesiastical controversies aroused by the publication and official endorsement of the *Revised Version* of the Bible in 1881, which made many concessions to modern critical scholarship, he played a leading part and roundly declared that:

"Our Revisers stand convicted of having deliberately rejected the words of inspiration on every page." So vehement was his opposition to any, even the most trifling alteration in the infallible Word of God that a more liberal-minded colleague accused him of desiring "to canonize the misprints of a sixteenth-century printer."

Indeed, a modernist critic has stated that, had Dr. Burgon been able to make his obscurantist point of view prevail, he "would have been more effective than all the lectures of Mr. Bradlaugh and Colonel Ingersoll for the cause that those lecturers had at heart!"

However, Evolution is a fact which includes the religious sphere, even though Fundamentalists (of all creeds) deny it. Much water has flowed under the bridges of Isis and Thames since Dr. Burgon proclaimed the infallibility and inerrancy of the Divine Volume in the pulpit of Oxford University. Were the worthy Dean and his bibliolatrous generation to revisit the world of to-day, they would find matters have changed considerably, even in Oxford, the traditional "home of lost causes!"

To-day, it is only in the "backwoods" of religion, in bodies like the "Salvation Army," or "Jehovah's Witnesses," that one finds this unshaken confidence in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and the basic fact about all such atavistic groups is their complete divorce from modern culture. One can, in fact, say that any Church which, to-day, hopes to win or to retain any hold on the educated public, has compromised more or less heavily on the question of Biblical inspiration. No doubt, the old

view is still to be found in the more remote country areas. However, it is an assured axiom of progress that, what the educated minority thinks to-day, the ill-informed majority will think to-morrow. If theologians of the mental and oratorical calibre of Dean Burgon and of W. J. Bryan could not save the infallibility of the Bible, it is altogether improbable that its present apparently illiterate defenders will be able to do so. Religion, like every other mortal thing, conforms with, and to the evolutionary process. (Incidentally, the American Fundamentalist who prosecuted in the Tennessee "Monkeyville"—*cause célèbre*—in 1925, perpetrated there a *bon mot* which deserves to rank with those of Burgon and Disraeli cited above: when questioned on the bearing of geology on the Book of Genesis, Bryan made the notable affirmation that he "would rather trust the Rock of Ages than the age of the rocks!" However, even wit is a poor substitute for knowledge).

In the 19th century, in fact, ever since the Reformation established Protestantism in this island, the axiom of the (Anglican) Dr. Chillingworth "The Bible, and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants," held good in these centuries whilst the Established Church and the Dissenting sects hated each other as only true Christians can. Both believed firmly in the infallible Book, even though they sometimes extracted conflicting views from its pages on questions of dogma and, still more, on Church government. However, no one questioned the Divine authorship and consequent unerring nature of the Book, except obscure groups of "Epicureans," Deists and other social outcasts and heretics. Inside the Christian pale, there was practically no opposition. Higher education was the unchallenged monopoly of the Church, chiefly of the Established Church. Whilst if any theologians were led by their studies to doubt the prevailing dogma of verbal inspiration, they either kept their doubts to themselves or faced social and professional ruin. During these centuries, the Bible, interpreted not as a whole literature at very different levels of human progress and culture, but as a single undifferentiated volume, equally perfect and sublime in every page, was actually what the Deists and early Freethinkers described it, "the fetish-book of (Protestant) Christianity."

English—and, still more, Scottish and Welsh!—Christianity was, of course, almost entirely Protestant in character. Prior to the Irish immigration in the "Hungry Forties," the influence of Roman Catholicism in Britain was virtually extinct; it was the creed merely of an infinitesimal minority, socially ostracised and barely tolerated as the potential "fifth column" of a dangerous foreign power. The subsequent remarkable growth of Catholicism in Britain, a phenomenon due far more to the Irish immigration than to the much-boasted "Oxford Movement," has had, perhaps an even greater influence in demolishing the old Protestant fetish-worship of "The Bible and the Bible only," than has the modern diffusion of critical scholarship.

It is often forgotten that, whilst the Church of Rome recognises in theory the infallibility of the Bible, in practice, it has never accepted the fetish-worship of the Bible as practised in Protestant circles: the Catholic laity have never been encouraged to read the Holy Book, the interpretation of which has been kept rigidly under the control of the Church authorities. Moreover, the Catholic conception of the Bible is quite different from and, in certain respects, much more scientific than is the traditional approach of orthodox Protestantism: for example, the Catholic conception that the Church produced and guaranteed the Bible, is far closer to the facts disclosed by modern critical study than is the Protestant view that the Bible preceded and created the Church.

Practically all critical scholars, of all religions and none, now agree that it was the Church which produced the New Testament, just as, earlier on, it was the Jewish Synagogue which produced the "Old Testament," the "Bible" of Judaism. The selection of the canonical books which make up our "Bible"—a selection in the highest degree arbitrary and unscientific as and when judged by modern critical standards—was made entirely by the Church for its own ends. What the Church favoured, went in: what it did not approve of, stayed out! Ecclesiastical compromise, the motives of which are now largely lost, and not the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, explains actually "how we got our Bible!"

Thus, to-day, the old bull-dog belief in the verbal inerrancy of the "Word of God" which characterised the Protestant Divines of last century, has been simultaneously undermined by critical research on the one side, and by Catholic emphasis upon the Church as against the Bible upon the other. We fear that, were Dean Burgon to revisit this mortal scene in the present year of Grace, he would be profoundly horrified at present-day views on the Bible publicly expressed in his own Church and even in his own University and in his old pulpits. The views upon certain books in the Old Testament expressed by scholars and even on occasions by Bishops of the Anglican Church, repeat in substance—though, it is true, in much milder language!—what Thomas Paine said a century and a-half ago, when that great Deist set out to save God from His worshippers and to rescue the Deity from Biblical libels on His character. Perhaps, another century will see *The Age of Reason* officially adopted as a text-book on Biblical criticism and issued with a preface by the "Bishop Barnes" of the day!

F. A. RIDLEY.

SOME RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS EXAMINED

(2) The Logical Refutation

THE ARGUMENT

USED by many religious opponents of materialism, of whom Joad and Lunin may be mentioned, the logical refutation runs as follows:—

If materialism is true we can never know it is true. We can only say the belief has arisen in deterministic fashion in the heads of materialists, a procedure which offers no criterion as to the truth of the belief itself. All that has happened is that chemical changes have occurred in the brain which have yielded the belief. We therefore think our thoughts, not because they are true, but because our brain passes through certain cerebral states. Our thoughts may be chemically sound but not logically sound. They are simply imposed upon us by the particular constitution of the cells and grey matter at the moment of thinking. As for asking whether our thoughts are true,

you might just as well ask whether your blood pressure is true.

Two people are asked what six fours are. One says 24, the other 26. Both replies have been determined by cerebral conditions, so how can the materialist presume to prefer one rather than the other?

Such is the argument. Now let us examine it.

THE ARGUMENT IN REVERSE

In the first place the argument can easily be turned on the person who uses it. Thus:—

Assume materialism is false and "free will" is true. Two people are asked what six fours are, one replying 24 and the other 26. In each case "free will" has chosen the reply. Both replies, the right and the wrong, have been spontaneously thrown up by free will, so how can the believer in free will presume to prefer one to the other? He is therefore similarly open to the charge of affording no criterion of truth.

So far, then, I have contended that the logical refutation is in any case neutral as between materialism and free will. Let us now pass to the solution, and it will be along materialist lines, for free will could never afford a satisfactory solution.

THE SOLUTION

The logical refutation is only valid against any materialism prior to the development of critical realism, which may be said to provide materialism with an adequate epistemology, thus to remedy a serious gap in the armour of the materialist prior to the 1930s. Prof. R. W. Sellars of Michigan (*Philosophy of Physical Realism*, etc.), represents the culminating point in this line of advance in twentieth-century analytical philosophy. I would, in fact, myself prefer the term Neo-Materialism, which term, however, has not as yet been used in any set exposition. Sellars comes nearest, speaking of his philosophy as the "new materialism."

The adjective "true" applies to ideas, propositions and beliefs. Trueness, as a property of an idea, depends on the content of the idea as agreeing with, and capable of disclosing, the object selected in the act of knowing. A proposition is true when it reveals its object, and the criterion is critical thinking. Thought cures its own difficulties and the success of critical thinking is attained in (1) the consilience of established facts, (2) the logical coherence of ideas, (3) the agreement of investigators, and (4) control over nature. The test of true ideas is whether they give knowledge, and all knowledge-claims are to be tested. The truth of ideas is bound up with the ability of judgments based on them to give knowledge. If they do, the ideas are true because they have disclosed the object of the judgment by corresponding to it.

There is thus a perfectly materialistic check on the two replies, 24 and 26. That is not to say, of course, that all problems can be settled forthwith in the light of our limited store of knowledge. It is to say that the solutions are to be sought materialistically.

G. H. TAYLOR.

CHAMELEON

Her blouse is red because her man is Red,
Black will she wear when her dear man is dead:
This may be soon because the Tory Blues
Can go to war whenever they so choose.
In Heaven, of course, she will be robed in White:
Red, White and Blue—the Patriot's delight!

B. S.

THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Continued from page 143)

With the rise of monotheistic religion, man begins to come out of the spiritual wilderness of mysticism; theology becomes a logical system in order to rationalise anthropomorphic monotheism. On the other hand, monotheism itself is a rational concept. Primitive rationalism of the savage, the instinctive belief that every event is caused by some unseen power, populated the landscape with the numerous Gods of natural religion. Monotheism followed as a corollary to that primitive rationalist view: The Gods of natural religion, in their turn, must be traced to some cause. The search for the causes of the phenomena of nature ended in the notion of an Almighty Creator of the world. It is inherent in the logic of religious thought that the idea of one God, the supreme architect of the world, should follow from polytheism.

The state of savagery is the intellectual infancy of man. In that state, primitive rationality takes the form of the belief in the volition of invisible supreme powers behind the diverse phenomena of nature. In course of time, experience reinforces reason, and man attains intellectual adolescence. The discovery that events in his immediate environments and of direct experience, such as the fall of stones, flow of water, rustling of leaves, movement of shadows, so on and so forth, are due to physical causes, enables man to outgrow the animistic belief of the savage. The religion of the primitive man progressively discards the infantile faith in the arbitrary volition of invisible powers, and moves towards the doctrine of law, conceived as the Providence. The intellectual development is towards monotheism—the notion of an Almighty Being ruling the world according to reason or law. In the last analysis, monotheistic religion is also a result of the rationality of man.

Monotheism, however, did not grow directly out of the background of the polytheistic natural religion. Metaphysical and moral thoughts, which followed the unsuccessful attempts of early science and philosophy, went into the making of the monotheistic religions, particularly, Christianity. Therefore, even during the dark Middle Ages, reason could not be altogether suffocated by blind faith; and eventually it reasserted itself in the scholastic learning of great Christian theologians who heralded the Renaissance of science and philosophy. They asserted that faith and reason were not mutually exclusive. Many centuries later, scholasticism developed that doctrine into the notion of a law-governed Universe.

The failure of ancient naturalist speculations gave rise to doubt about the possibility of positive knowledge. On the one hand, the belief in the gods of natural religion had been shaken by the bold speculations of the early philosophers. In that atmosphere of intellectual unsettlement and scepticism, the attention of the thinking man was turned towards the problems of human life, which were in the reach of direct observation.

The idea that the world was not a standing miracle, but a law-governed system, resulted from the rationalist Christian theology and scholastic learning. The concept of law at that time was largely teleological; it was conceived as the operation of the will of God. But reason having reasserted itself, the operation of the divine laws of nature was no longer a matter of blind faith. Growing curiosity to understand how the laws of nature operated, was indeed still frowned upon by religion; but it could no longer be altogether suppressed. That curiosity promoted the rise of modern science.

More than two hundred and fifty thousand years have passed since the origin of the human species. Only a small fraction of the time during which the human race has inhabited the earth comes under the purview of recorded history. Another period is covered by legends, myths, mythologies and epics. The historical value of those superstitious, poetical, imaginary and hear-say accounts of prehistory is of late being increasingly appreciated. Eventually, the scope of history proper may be extended backwards. Even then, by far the larger part of the time since the origin of the human species will remain in the realm of prehistory. Yet, whatever is constant in human nature was formed during those remote days. Anthropology will have to dig deep in that subsoil in order to discover the hidden springs of the mental evolution of the species.

The history of the infancy and adolescence of the human species coincides with the process of biological evolution. It is therefore that subsequent history, the history of civilisation, is to be regarded as an organic evolutionary process; and it could be rationally explained only when it was so conceived. The history of the infancy and adolescence of the human race has to be biologically reconstructed—as stages in the process of the evolution of the species. The biological approach to prehistory, the history of early savagery, throws a flood of light on the age-old problem of human nature.

The knowledge about the descent of man rules out the doctrine of creation. The appearance of man on earth having no other reason than the origin of a new biological species, the laws of the development of the human race cannot be essentially different from the general laws of organic evolution. Human nature, therefore, is determined by those laws. Subject to an evolutionary process, it cannot be an immutable category. It is a hackneyed saying that human nature never changes. The truth, however, is just the contrary. *To change is human nature.* (Our italics—EDITOR). Otherwise, there is no sense in regarding the history of civilisation as an evolutionary process. Yet, just as life is the red thread running through the whole process of biological evolution, similarly there is a residue of "humanness" underlying the flux of the process even before it has gone beyond the borderland where the primitive man is still not fully differentiated from his animal ancestry. The origin of humanness, therefore, antedates the origin of the species. That is a logical corollary to the doctrine of descent. The origin of a new species is a mutation in the process of evolution. The qualitative change, however, is superficially functional; the biological form involved in the process undergoes no essential change, anatomically or physiologically. In structure and size the brain of the primitive man differs very little from that of the anthropoid ape. The one inherits the mental and emotional equipment of the other as the basis of "humanness" which, therefore, is a direct outcome of the process of biological evolution ever since the origin of organic matter.

M. N. ROY.

(To be continued)

THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

By W. A. Campbell. With a Preface by the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

DETERMINISM OR FREEWILL? By Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s.; postage 2d.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE PAPACY. By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

ACID DROPS

The Lord's Day Observance Society is at last grimly on the warpath again. The new secretary is Mr. Harold Legerton, who sports, we are laughingly told, "a smile as broad as a Max Miller joke," and he is out to scotch once and for all motor-cycle racing on Sundays. He is also going to stop friendly football matches and, if at all possible, all Sunday shows. No fewer than 357 Members of Parliament, he declares, are with him in forcing legislation against "Sunday entertainment." What a magnificent tribute to the sanctity of the Lord's Day it would be if Mr. Legerton were to publish the names of these gallant defenders of our Holy Day! They surely ought to be proud of their stand for the Lord.

The "Sunday Graphic," from which we got these particulars of the beaming Mr. Legerton, thinks, alas and alack, that he is "fighting a losing battle." Oh, come, come! How can anybody lose a fight with God Almighty behind him? This looks almost as bad as a horrid specimen of blatant blasphemy. What have the aforesaid 357 M.P.'s to say about such a pessimistic outlook? Aren't they wildly rushing in to help Mr. Legerton to bring about the sacred task the Lord has commanded him see through? If not, why not?

We always understood that Catholic theology taught that nobody could be "saved" (whatever that means) except all-believing Roman Catholics, but here comes the Australian Catholic weekly, *The Tribune*, definitely telling us that of course Protestants "who follow their conscience" will be saved. It would be quite "un-Catholic to suggest otherwise." The hundreds of Protestant martyrs who were put to death, mostly at the stake, by the Queen who is known as "Bloody" Mary will all, therefore, be enjoying Heavenly Bliss instead of frizzling in Hell—and we cannot help wondering what is happening to Mary? Is the Lord punishing her for her terrible mistakes?

And, by the way, it would be interesting to learn what all the gentlemen and ladies who are filling columns of praise about the age of our first Elizabeth would have said if our new Queen had been named Mary? Would they also have gone into raptures about Mary's reign with the hope that we should have another new Age of Mary?

"Why not be a Saint?" is the heartrending cry of the R.C. Dr. J. O'Brien in one of the hundreds of pamphlets sent out by his Church in the United States. It is a perfect example of publicity methods. He scorns the popular and "too prevalent misconception" of a saint. We always, it is true, thought that a genuine saint was a hungry, haggard, foul-smelling, unwashed, bearded specimen of *homo sapiens* if a man and, if a woman, with similar qualities though perhaps not as big a beard; but it appears we are all wrong. "A saint," we are told, "is the most attractive and likeable of all people." In fact, he is "filled with a constant love of God and of all his children." As we never shall have "a constant love of God," Dr. O'Brien's pamphlet is unfortunately wasted on us.

Most Christian saints appear to have spent nearly all of their time on their knees wailing to God and eating roots, washed down with water. On the other hand, Buddhist saints appear to have gone into forests spending most of their time contemplating and admiring their navels

while sitting on prickly leaves in a cross-legged fashion. We have never had the remotest inclination to do either—though God knows what might have happened had we been born in Palestine or India 2000 years ago.

DETERMINISM

MY friend, C. E. Ratcliffe, under whose chairmanship I used to speak for the North London Branch, N.S.S., 30 years ago, wants me briefly to state the difference between Determinism and Dialectical Materialism. This is a very big subject for I should have to make clear what is Dialectical Materialism in the first place, and as far as I have been able to understand it, many Dialectical Materialists accuse each other of not knowing what it is; and, secondly, I should have to explain what Determinism is and that cannot be adequately done in an article or two.

One thing is, however, very clear, and that is, if Marx, Engels, and Lenin oppose Determinism, or declare that nobody understands it except Dialectical Materialists, then all their followers will violently insist that this is so. If Marx, Engels, and Lenin were to insist on the truth of the Freewill position, then all their followers would attack Determinism quite as violently as they attack Capitalism.

I should advise Mr. Ratcliffe and those who want to know what is Determinism to read, if they can get it, *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* by Anthony Collins—it was reprinted by G. W. Foote over 60 years ago—or *Determinism and Freewill* by Chapman Cohen, and utterly disregard Dialectical Materialism. After all, if Determinism is true, anything that Marx, Engels, and Lenin say about it will not make a scrap of difference. In any case, the problem was argued, and very ably argued, by many great thinkers long before Dialectical Materialism was put forward as the world's greatest philosophy. In actual fact, it was dealt with by Anthony Collins far better than Marx, Engels, and Lenin put together.

H. C.

REVELATION

He wrote it in letters of light,
 Jewels and gems, set in space;
 The Message that's Righter than Right,
 The Word, much more graceful than Grace.
 He carved it in granite and rock,
 To stand, thro' the aeons and ages;
 Firm against earthquake and shock—
 To be polished by Saints and by Sages.
 On the lips of His prophets he placed it,
 Proof against sceptic and scoffer;
 (Though one sound has often effaced it—
 The chinking of coin into coffer.)
 'Twas set up in buildings of stone
 Pointed out with His finger, the steeple:
 This thunderous Word from the Throne,
 This message He made for His people.
 In symbol and sign did He set it,
 'Twas rooted in rainbow and ark;
 In the height and the depth have we met it,
 Imprinted on light and on dark.
 In these ways was it set out for man,
 Ways which are His—only His;
 But what has gone wrong with the Plan?
 For none seem to know what it is.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

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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

We can now announce the general arrangements for the National Secular Society Conference, which this year is being held in Leicester by invitation of the Leicester Secular Society.

Prior to the Conference there will be a Reception of Members given by the Leicester Secular Society in The Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, at 7-30 p.m., on Saturday, May 31.

The Conference will be held in The Secular Hall on Sunday, June 1, in two sessions: Morning, 10-30 to 12-30; Afternoon, 2-30 to 4-30.

Only Members of the Society are entitled to be present. Delegates are required to show their credentials at the door; other members their current Membership Cards.

A Conference Luncheon will be ready at 1 p.m. at the Bell Hotel, Humberstone Gate.

In the evening, at 7 p.m., a Public Demonstration will be held in The Secular Hall.

Speakers will be announced shortly. The Secretary asks all attending to let him know if they will be requiring hotel accommodation, which he will be pleased to reserve for them at the Bell Hotel, where most of the delegates and other visitors will be staying.

In view of the many important problems to be discussed at Leicester, this Conference may well rank as one of the most important which has ever been held by the National Secular Society.

Last Sunday, the South London and Lewisham Branch, N.S.S., concluded a rather difficult winter session of indoor lectures at the London and Brighton Hotel, Queen's Road, Peckham, S.E., the headquarters of the branch in question. Under the efficient chairmanship of the Branch President, Mr. E. W. Shaw, two active members of the N.S.S., Mr. Len Ebury and Mr. F. A. Ridley, discussed, with some support from the audience, the problem whether all religions are *equally* false, a topic upon which the respective protagonists have already crossed swords. The discussion was marked by great erudition and much good humour on the part of both speakers. The religious policy of the Emperor Constantine figured largely in the discussion and the audience sat spellbound whilst citation and counter-citation hurtled across the platform. Summing up, Mr. Shaw drew attention to the fact that only in Freethought circles could such an educative discussion have been held.

"THE FREETHINKER" FUND

It has been decided to bring the Fund temporarily to a close on June 30, 1952. The response to our appeal has been very satisfactory and encouraging and we take this opportunity of thanking all who have so kindly helped us with their donations. The total amount collected to date is £490 15s. 2d. and it is anticipated that the extension of the closing date to the end of June will enable us to attain the £600 mark.

REVIEW

"SIX EXISTENTIALIST THINKERS," by H. J. Blackham. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 15s.

WHEN Grecian feudal society and its values were cracking before the onslaught of a monetary economy, Plato placed in an eternal and immaterial realm of Ideas (or Forms) what he could not save on earth. St. Augustine taught that God in creating the universe used as models such "Ideas," which he called Archetypes (a word later to be adapted by Jung). Hence the concrete, existent, individual, or object is but a more or less imperfect copy of the eternal and perfect archetype, or essence. Also it is the duty of the human being to conform to his archetype or Nature; as it is a function of the Devil to entice him away from it. Right up to the eighteenth century or later, a criminal charge always included the statement "instigated by the Devil, he did . . ."

Consequently the Schoolmen saw the Universe as a Great Chain of Being with a hierarchical order of rights and duties modelled on that of the Celestial regions. As there was a descending scale of perfection and importance from God, his Archangels, Saints, Seraphim, Cherubim down, so in the earthly spiritual realm, the Pope, his Cardinals, Bishops, Priests, lesser clergy, laymen, etc.; and in the temporal sphere the King, his Barons, Knights, Esquires, burghers, serfs. Similarly the eagle was the king of birds, the lion of animals, the whale of sea dwellers and the oak of trees. Rebellion in one sphere was likely to spread its canker, as witness the disturbances that occurred when Shakespeare's Cæsar was assassinated. Indeed, the idea of treason was so repugnant to Henry VII that he had destroyed his prize mastiff which so forgot its place as to attack the Tower lion; and his falcon which dared to attack an eagle.

The scholastic logic which interpreted such a universe was one of deduction from first principles, axioms and "self-evident truths." The individual, and particular was subverted to the universal or essence. From Renaissance times man has become more and more aware of his subjectivity, of time, choice and modern science has developed from experiment and induction. This implies examining individual instances; starting with existences rather than essences.

In that broad sense the young rebellious Hegel was an existentialistic thinker, while the later Hegel who considered philosophy had culminated with his system and its objectification in the Prussian State, gave us a realm of essences; similarly the young Marx, whose philosophy was to change the world not merely to explain it, was working from an existentialistic base, but those who place the emphasis on the older Marx of *Capital* and patiently await the time when evolving capitalism will overthrow itself (S.P.G.B.) are closer to a realm of essences.

The term *Existentialism*, however, comes from Kierkegaard, who, born five years before Marx, hunchbacked, and of unstable stock, feeling lonely and afraid in a world he never made, refusing to be merely a cog in a great Hegelian system (the then prevailing philosophy), started from his own subjectivity, his own existence as primary. He emphasised becoming rather than being. He repudia-

ted all systems. His tortured writings, however, are a goldmine of psychological insight. They influenced Ibsen (Brandt is definitely a Kierkegaardian figure) and Georges Brandes, who advised Nietzsche, if he could cope with Danish, to read him. There is no evidence that he did, but Unamuno learned Danish specially to do so. Kierkegaard's deep pessimism forced him into a leap from the absurdity of existence into Faith, which was beyond reason, and the very attempt to apply reason to justify it, already implied a lack of faith, a doubt.

In Germany, after the first world war, the disillusionment with Idealistic philosophies and Liberal theology produced the crisis theology of neo-Calvinists like Barth, and a complete German translation of Kierkegaard, whose influence then spread, and brought such men as Auden into the Church. A fusion of Kierkegaard and the phenomenology of Husserl, produced the philosophy of Heidegger (who joined the Nazi party as soon as it came to power). A development of Heidegger plus the camaraderie and stoicism of Resistance fighting, when concrete values were shattered and one could hope for little more than being able to preserve one's integrity, produced the atheistical existentialism of Sartre and Camus. An amalgam of Kierkegaardian subjectivity and Platonic transcendentalism is expounded by Jaspers, who now professes himself a Christian. Gabriel Marcel is a Catholic existentialist with some affinity to Pascal.

The five existent writers named, plus Nietzsche, the subjects of the book under review, have this in common, the view that human nature, existence, is in the making, therefore cannot be defined—it is the potential, the realisable, rather than the realised that is important; hence their agreement is in a certain attitude, rather than the implications of that attitude. Nietzsche and Sartre are defiantly atheistical, Kierkegaard, Marcel and (I think more nebulously), Jaspers are Christian, and Heidegger appears to be a Catholic unable to believe, but wishing he could.

It is probable that the future historian of thought will find these thinkers more important for their insights, psychological and otherwise, and the problems they raise than for the solutions proffered. Lukacs with much truth finds modern Existentialism the confused mutterings of bourgeois intellectuals being crushed and thwarted in a class struggle.

In the meantime existentialism is in the air, and Mr. Blackham's book is the only adequate summary in English. He is to be congratulated in making readable some very refractory material.

J. S. BARWELL, M.A.

A DEFENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

I READ with interest the comments of Miss Peckman and Mr. Huxley on the letter of mine published in your issue of April 6, 1952, under the enlightening title "You've Had It."

They both greatly mistake me if they think I have anything in common with Popery. I disclaim any resemblance whatsoever to the priest who said he would go mad without God, to the instigators of the Inquisition, or to the priests who claim to be able to do anything for suffering men and women. Let me make it quite clear—I am a Christian, not a Roman Catholic, they are two quite distinct entities, as any intelligent reader of the New Testament will agree.

I am rather sorry for Miss Peckman who is only nineteen. When I was nineteen, I believed similar things, and prided myself in being "intellectual," "revolutionary" and

so on, but time and experience in a hard world sometimes causes one to review one's philosophy, and thrash things out for oneself. That, Miss Peckman, is exactly what I have done. I think she is being a trifle unfair in accusing me of only believing what I want to believe, and concluding with typical "Freethinker" logic, therefore, that I am sentimental, unreasonable and a bit emotional. Being reared in a hard school in the Gorbals district of Glasgow is hardly the background of sentimentality and emotionalism. No, Miss Peckman, my faith in God has been hammered out on the anvil of experience, I have experienced both the barrenness of the "Rationalist" philosophy, and the sunny uplands of an optimistic and practical faith in God. I think therefore that I have at least tried both, and cannot be accused of thinking and accepting just what I want, and what suits me. I advise you, Miss Peckman, and your Rationalistic friends to read the Bible honestly, with no preconceived ideas or prejudices, saying this: "Oh, God, if there is a God, reveal Yourself to me. I am going to read this book honestly, if I find it is true, I am going to follow its teachings no matter what the cost. If I find I can't accept what it says, after having read it honestly, without any preconceived notions, then I at least have been honest." If Miss Peckman is unwilling to do this then, to my mind, she is just being a plain, straightforward hypocrite.

As for me going mad without God, I lived for many a day without Him, and never lost my reason, now that I am enjoying His fellowship, I am the possessor of what the Bible calls "a sound mind." However, Miss Peckman is entitled to her own opinions about that.

As for me being complacent over the fact that "The Lord is My Shepherd," I'm afraid Miss Peckman greatly mistakes me. Instead of producing a smug complacency in my outlook, this fact has made me want to share the glad knowledge with others. I know many who can say with the Psalmist: "I have been young, and now I am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Isn't that worth shouting from the housetops? I am well aware that there are many in foreign lands who starve, but isn't it a fact that, to quote our Anarchist friends: "They starve in the midst of plenty." God has provided enough in His world for all: if the wicked, sinful, selfish heart of man corners it, then it's not God's fault.

Mr. Huxley's mind is typically materialistic. He imagines that anyone who can't swallow the bitter pill of Rationalism must necessarily be out for what he can get. On the contrary, Mr. Huxley, I can put you in touch with many men, from eminent medical specialists down to humble labourers, who spend time, money and not a little energy preaching the Gospel with no financial reward. If you have never met Christian folk who knew much about Christianity, I could, maybe, introduce one or two to you, that is, of course, if you really wished to meet them. The Bible says, "The love of money is the root of all evil," and it's hardly likely that men who were in it for what they could get, would preach such damning sentence on themselves, hypocrites excepted.

Your ideas of God, Mr. Huxley—the God of the Bible I mean—are maybe more due to imagination than sound reasoning. A wicked, evil God does not produce saints, the cause and effect law operates here, I think. I freely admit that one has to take a lot for granted when one is a Christian, but dear, oh dear, what one has to swallow when one disbelieves the Bible, and the God of the Bible. I wonder where Mr. Huxley gets his ideas of "priests" from? Certainly not from the New Testament

church. The idea of a special separate "priesthood" or "ministry" is an evil offshoot of Popery, and not a Biblical conception. I have no desire to defend the traditions of men, and wouldn't dream of doing it.

Finally to Miss Peckman, Mr. Huxley and all your readers let me say I can produce evidence from history, and from my contemporaries that "conversion" is real, that the results are lasting, that Jesus Christ is able to do what He says. That surely is the acid test, "Does it work in everyday life?" If anyone wishes to verify the fact of the genuineness and staying-power of "converts," I will gladly supply details capable of verification. The "unique phenomenon" is a practical reality. I don't think I can be any fairer.

Thank you, Editor, for an incursion on your valuable space, and thank you, Miss Peckman and Mr. Huxley for your stimulating criticism.

RAYMOND MCKEOWN.

THE VATICAN HAS A FINGER IN EVERY PIE!

"A Catholic journal, the *Christian Witness*, which publishes regularly articles and facts on Asiatic problems and on the importance of Asia in contemporary world politics.

"It follows with special interest and with the utmost sympathy the efforts now being made by India to restore peace in Korea and in the Far East.

"This journal, which is read by militant Trade Unionists, by politicians and by numerous active workers for *Catholic action*, thus helps to enlighten what we may describe as the Christian Left Wing upon such questions.

"Read *Christian Witness*, (100 Rue Richelieu, Paris 2e)."
[Advertisement in *Pacific*, Asiatic quarterly published in Paris. Translated by F. A. R.]

CORRESPONDENCE

ARE WE FREETHINKERS?

SIR,—Having been a reader of *The Freethinker* since it first appeared more than 70 years ago, I must say that for some time I have been very disappointed with it, and can hardly look up to it as a Freethought journal.

Recently another freethought paper has been killed by the same tactics. The articles by Parikh finished *The Freethinker* for me and I have since told my newsagent to discontinue ordering it for me. In the days of Foote and Wheeler it was a real Freethought paper, but now —!

I am a militant Atheist and am very sorry to see *The Freethinker* does not keep to freethought.—Yours, etc.,

AMBROSE G. BARKER (*Ætat* 93).

[Our correspondent appears to take a very narrow view of what constitutes Freethought. How is it possible to avoid politics, and, in particular, the war issue, in the current state of the world? As for particular articles, obviously they can't please everyone, since they reflect opposing points of view. Our paper, after all, is called *The Freethinker*, not the *Party Line*. Would Mr. Barker tell us what other journal gives so many diverse points of view? —EDITOR.]

MORE DYNAMICS

SIR,—Mr. Oswell Blakeston must be thoroughly congratulated on having at last found out the true cause of war. It is now quite obvious that one of the bitterest wars ever fought, the American Civil War, was entirely due to boredom, and not at all to the causes generally assigned to it. The same may be said of the Franco-Prussian War and, of course, the First World War. If it had not been for boredom, the 20 million then killed and wounded would all have escaped death and injury. As for the *Boer War*—well, there he must be right. Both Kruger and Chamberlain were bored stiff and they just had to have a jolly old war. Please let Mr. Blakeston give us plenty of similar bright ideas.—Yours, etc.,
J. RENTON.

WE ARE NOT AMUSED

SIR,—It would, I feel, be an insult to the intelligence of your readers if I wasted my time and theirs on a reply to Mr. Cutner's "A Word(?) to Critics"; I knew he would retort; however, I did not expect such a pitiful show. He says he was amused; I was not. When I had finished his "reply" culminating in the statement "I oppose Dialectical Materialism because it is the declared enemy of Mechanistic . . . Materialism," I only shook my head and was very sad.—Yours, etc.,
P. G. ROY.

MEMORIES OF LONG AGO

SIR,—Allow me to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. E. Smedley on their wedding of 59 years together and hope they will continue to enjoy good health for years to come.

Mr. Smedley has read *The Freethinker* for 63 years and you ask "Can any reader beat that record?" Well, I was born 15th December, 1866, and I heard my first freethought lecture in 1879 at Crook, Co. Durham, on the "Design" argument delivered by Joseph Symes, who had recently left the Methodists at Leeds (where he was a Minister and became a leading figure of the National Secular Society).

At a small mining village nearby—Bowden Close Colliery—there were at that time (which I now think was remarkable) six well-known Freethinkers, including my father, all followers of Charles Bradlaugh, Charles Watts and Mrs. Harriet Law, and afterwards G. W. Foote and Mrs. Besant.

My father was a regular reader of the *National Reformer* and in which I became interested. I heard Mr. Bradlaugh speak at the Miners' Gala where he was always a great favourite in 1881, and afterwards on many occasions at Sunderland, South Shields and Newcastle.

In 1884 Mr. Foote was liberated from gaol; one month after (March) he lectured at Sunderland, where I was introduced to him by three veteran Freethinkers and I followed him ever afterwards. So from 1884 until the present time I have been a reader of *The Freethinker* 68 years, which is a good slice out of a man or woman's life.—Yours, etc.,

JOSEPH CLOSE.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, MAY 1, 1952

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Hornibrook, Ebury, Woodley, Johnson, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Barker, Gibbens, Tiley and the Secretary.

New members were admitted to Parent, Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Nottingham and W. London Branches. The payment of a legacy of £50 from the estate of the late H. Rosenthal was reported; interest from 1924 had increased the amount to £68 18s. Mr. Rosenthal, who lived in Leeds, was by birth an Hungarian, and technically "an enemy alien," and this had caused the holding up of payment of the legacy for twenty-eight years.

Financial reports were submitted by Nottingham and Bradford Branches, both showing credit balances. Reports of meetings held by J. T. Brighton and J. Clayton were considered and approved. A draft Annual Report of the Executive Committee was read and approved, together with the Financial Statement for the year ending March 31. The Conference Agenda was approved, with the addition of an Emergency Motion arising from correspondence with Halifax Branch.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: JACK CLAYTON, A Lecture.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.
- 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: MESSRS. STEED and EBURY. Highbury Corner, 7 p.m.: L. EBURY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, May 11, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, May 11, 4 p.m.

INDOOR

- Glasgow Secular Society (Central Hall, Bath Street, Glasgow).—Sunday, May 11, 3 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.
- South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Humanism on the International Front."

THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

(Concluded from page 144)

If boastfulness is evidence then this book is proof that Christianity is the root of all social good, for not only toleration, but also every kind of decent behaviour is claimed to be due to Christianity. To quote R. O'Sullivan, K.C., Corin's words: "Sir, I am a true labourer, I earn that I eat, get that I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm. . . ." Such characters in Shakespeare, and morality plays . . . show that the elements and the ideas of the mediaeval Christian tradition had made their way into the lives of the common folk. Could Christian arrogance go farther? This speech that contains not a single reference direct or indirect to any form of religion is dragged in to bolster up the Christian claims. Such is Christian evidence. In the same article the institution of Indissoluble Marriage is credited to Christianity, conveniently ignoring the fact that few could be prepared to support indissolubility in the face of history and everyday experience. Christianity, it is claimed, ended slavery and inspired the English lawyers of the twelfth century to frame the Common Law on its precepts, "the constant effort of the Common Law was to raise every man to the status of freedom." The ordinary student of history will note that the Peasants' Revolt occurred in the fourteenth century (1381), some 200 years later, and will judge for himself which had most effect in promoting human freedom and justice. But it is not on these historical happenings that the attention of the Militant Secularist will be most concerned, but rather with what Christians are doing To-day and intend to do in the Future. And this book is not lacking in supplying data on this. For example, Sir J. Maud, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Education, says: "Education, in fact, is helping people to choose for themselves the setting before us of life and death so that we may choose life," and after giving a resumé of his version of our Educational History, continues: "Then, in the 1944 Education Act, Parliament decided that in every school, whether voluntary or county, there should be one exception to the rule that teachers and local authorities should decide themselves what to teach and how to teach it. While reading, writing, and arithmetic were still left to local discretion, to be taught or not taught, Parliament said that at the beginning of every schoolday there *must* be an act of corporate worship, and that in every one of these schools religious teaching *must* be available. Those are examples of the way in which as a nation we have followed the initiative of the Christians, and have come to agree that education should give everybody who goes to any school the chance of experiencing the possibility of divine life." Here we have naked and unashamed the claim made by a very small minority of the population, to use their closely knit organisation and its wealth to instil into the minds of the young, their own brand of religion and to effectively obstruct any opposition. This is what Christians call Education: Democracy and the claims of others are ignored. I must now content myself with one final quotation, it is from the last article in the book, "Christianity and Britain's Future," by Dr. Langmead Casserley. "We can't find the Kingdom of God in the early Church, or in the Church of the Middle Ages, or in those passionate, bitter times during which the reformed Churches struggled into existence. The Kingdom of God in all its fullness lies ahead of us," and

with this item of information, straight from the Christian's mouth, I will conclude. I am convinced of the value of this book to the Rationalist, for armed with it and with a knowledge of history and the condition of the world to-day he will have such a weapon as very rarely the Christian has put into our hands, for it is no longer possible to object that it is only the opinion of one man, on the contrary, we have here the best that can be said on the Christian side by six Representative Advocates of their creed, and is up-to-date. My advice is to get it, study it carefully, and use it. JAMES H. MATSON.

THEATRE

"The Deep Blue Sea." By Terence Rattigan. Duchess Theatre.

MR. RATTIGAN'S latest effort to display his ability as one of our foremost playwrights leaves much to be desired.

Let me assure you that Mr. Rattigan's writing is as good as ever, but he taxes our credulity in expecting us to believe in certain characters and the things they do.

Hester has left her ageing husband for a worthless cad as an ex-airman who tries to make a living playing golf and who is hardly sufficiently attentive to her to satisfy the expectations of a normal woman, so either because she is a little oversexed or because she has been unlucky in her choice of men, she thinks falsely that they have never loved her. When Page, the golfer, stays out all night instead of remembering it is her birthday, she decides to commit suicide and takes aspirins—only twelve—and turns on the gas, conveniently forgetting to put a shilling in the meter. She is discovered and recovers after attention from an ex-doctor, whereupon a note she had written for Page before her suicide is hastily put in her dressing-gown pocket which is hung on a door. When Page returns and asks for cigarettes, he is calmly referred to her dressing-gown pocket, discovers the letter with the cigarettes and reads it.

Now Page is the last person she wished to know about this, and yet she did not do the most obvious thing, viz., destroy the letter without delay. So he drinks almost a bottle of whisky trying to console his conscience and then decides to leave her immediately for good, and all her efforts cannot retain him. So, not having accepted her husband's offer to return, or appreciated the friendliness of the ex-doctor, she sets to committing suicide again.

Which brings us into the confusion of one of the worst last acts ever to be written by a sound playwright. She is surprised in her second attempt by the ex-doctor, and though she tries to hide the signs she stupidly forgets—if you can believe it—to shut off the gas. And he spends the next few minutes appealing to her reasoning and succeeds in converting her from one intent on suicide to one ready to reform her future. This is a matter of mind—if we are to believe the author—where feelings do not enter into it.

Peggy Ashcroft is an admirable actress and bears in her personality a stamp of distinction which is so far above the type of woman Hester should be, that she is not well cast in the part. But she does succeed *almost* in making us believe in the woman who is, in fact, of low mental calibre. I cannot see that Mr. Rattigan visualised her for this part as he wrote the play.

There were other good performances by Peter Illing as the ex-doctor, Roland Culver as the husband and Kenneth More as Page.

Tanya Moiseiwitsch's setting of the sitting-room and kitchenette of a furnished flat was admirable.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.