

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Leonardo da Vinci—"The Universal Man"

THE civilized world or, at least, what used to be called by that name, has just been celebrating the fifth centenary of one of the most remarkable, if not, indeed, *the* most remarkable man of whom recorded history has any knowledge. We refer, of course, to the Florentine artistic and scientific genius, Leonardo da Vinci, who was born at Vinci, near Florence, in 1452, and died at Amboise in France in 1519 in his sixty-seventh year. In the extraordinary variety of his intellectual and artistic attainments, strikingly manifested in the memorial exhibition of his works now on show in London, da Vinci is unequalled in human annals and fully deserves the eulogistic description of one of his biographers: "Considering the range of his speculative as well as that of his practical powers, he seems certainly the man whose genius has the best right to be called universal of any that have ever lived." As artist, engineer, inventor, and natural philosopher, da Vinci demonstrated abilities of the highest order, whilst his impressive physical appearance matched his astonishing intellectual gifts.

To Humanists who reject the supernatural and to whom, accordingly, mankind represents the highest known possibility of mental development that exists in the Universe, a supreme genius like Leonardo da Vinci must represent a most significant and promising phenomenon. For, if mankind could produce such a mental colossus once, there remain, obviously, immense possibilities for the future of our species. A race of "Leonardo da Vincis," is, perhaps, hardly a possible contingency; certainly a glance at present-day *Homo Sapiens* (sic) busily engaged in elaborately preparing to use its modern inventions to commit collective suicide—precisely as da Vinci, who foresaw so many of them, predicted that it would!—is still a long way from such an ideal. We are still very far away from such an ideal!

However, if the combination of human ancestral genes with a favourable social environment can produce a Leonardo da Vinci once, who can say what is impossible in the Future? Perhaps certain hopeful spirits are not entirely wrong in seeing in the highest manifestations of human genius the prophecy and guarantee of a higher race of "super-men" in the ascertainable future: the trustees, as it were, of Humanity's dazzling future. It is in this above sense that in his brilliant historical novel of the Renaissance: *The Forerunner*, the significant title ascribed to Leonardo da Vinci by the author; the Russian novelist, Dmitri Merejkovsky, has saluted the Italian Renaissance and its greatest individual representative, Leonardo da Vinci, as the hopeful forerunners of a future golden age of Humanity, of a race of "Super-men." It is, whatever its degree of probability, at least an encouraging thought, to-day, when mankind, faced with the perplexing problems of the age of science, of which da Vinci himself was one of the prophets and

founders, finds himself bogged down in an apparently insoluble mass of unprecedented problems.

In his *Faust*, Goethe, another great Humanist and "Universal man," has drawn an impressive figure of an insatiable dreamer striving to explore the infinite recesses of human knowledge and human experience. That spirit of infinite and universal curiosity was, perhaps, more actively evident in the era of the Italian Renaissance than at any other epoch in human history, as has been so admirably portrayed by the great Swiss historian, Jacob Burckhardt, in his masterly account of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. The thirst for fame and glory, the quenchless hunger for universal knowledge, represented outstanding characteristics of the Renaissance: a purely humanist, a secularist desire for advancement in *this* world, in striking contrast to the ideals of the Catholic Middle Ages from which the Renaissance itself had just emerged, which regarded this life as a mere "vale of tears," and as a preparation for mankind's "Heavenly Fatherland" in the *next* world. da Vinci has, indeed, actually been described as the "Faust" of the Italian Renaissance. His surviving *Note Books* reveal an omnivorous curiosity which ranged the whole Universe. If he did not actually invent the aeroplane and the submarine, at least, he foresaw their possibilities and, equally, what mankind would make of them! As a military engineer, he effectively served the princes of his day in their ceaseless wars, including the terrible Cæsar Borgia, the son of the Borgia Pope, Alexander the Sixth (1492-1503), and who seems himself to have been the actual prototype of Macchiavelli's ideal (or unideal) *Prince*. da Vinci also adorned the artistic centres of the Italian Renaissance with magnificent works of art which are universally accepted as works of the highest order. Nor is even this by any means a complete summary of his activities.

Amazing, however, as were his actual achievements, the man himself always seemed, both to his own contemporaries and to posterity, to be even greater, more stupendous a work of art even than his works. Declares the greatest historian of the Renaissance: "The colossal outlines of Leonardo's personality can only be dimly and distantly perceived" (Burckhardt—as above). The supreme embodiment of the Renaissance was "The Universal Man," a sub-species of genius which included such mental and aesthetic giants as Michaelangelo, Raffael, Titian, Macchiavelli, Rabelais, and Shakespeare: of this group of colossal figures the voice both of his own age and of succeeding criticism has pronounced da Vinci to have been the most colossal: the most stupendous genius that our species has thus far known.

Heredity is still a *terra incognita*, a largely unexplored country. We still do not know what is the exact relationship between the ancestral genes and protoplasm and the strange phenomenon of human genius. About that other factor in the human make-up, environment, we are somewhat better informed. The era of the Renaissance, a fascinating age of intellectual revolt against the dead hand

of the Middle Ages, and of a startling geographical revolution against the shut-in mediæval world, was a period very favourable to the emergence of powerful individual personalities and of daring new experiments. A century later, the Jesuit-led Counter-Reformation had extinguished the free scientific spirit south of the Alps. Had he flourished then, da Vinci would probably have shared the fate of his scientific successor, Galileo. Whilst, to-day, ours is not an age of "Universal Men!" One can hardly imagine da Vinci in our world of narrow specialisation, of exclusively commercial values, and of competitive examinations apparently designed to make all originality impossible. Leonardo da Vinci was fortunate in his age; perhaps the greatest age in human annals represented and summarised by, perhaps, the greatest genius in human history.

F. A. RIDLEY

### THE ROMANIST REACTION IN POLAND

IN his luminous essay: *The Counter-Reformation in Poland* in the Cambridge History of that dominion (C.U.P. 1950), Prof. J. Uminski contends that the reaction against Protestantism began there, and that this has been curiously unnoticed by many modern historians. Also, he avers that the scandals connected with the Avignon captivity of the Popes and the notorious corruption of the clergy in Western Europe, which created so great a demand for reform in their religion, scarcely affected religious opinion in Poland itself which, at that time, was relatively prosperous and contented. Yet, he admits that there was an increasing desire for the reformation of the Roman Church and, in this, eminent ecclesiastics participated. Indeed, clerical evils were too glaring to escape censure. Our historian declares that: "The result of this was that the wave of Protestantism which came to Poland from the West flooded the whole country with elemental force. It overwhelmed chiefly the towns and the aristocracy as well as the wealthy nobility; for the smaller gentry remained on the whole true to the old faith of their fathers, while the peasantry were not sufficiently familiar with religious affairs and had no possibility of deciding for themselves."

So great was the religious transformation that, by the middle of the 16th century, a majority of the Diet—the Polish Parliament—and even the Senate was either Lutheran in sympathy or converted to its creed. But the Papal Bull which condemned Luther's teachings induced the Polish Primate and the Vice-Chancellor, Tomicki to issue stern decrees against the heretics, but of these little notice was taken, and Protestantism continued to spread, although it was less openly acknowledged and no anti-Catholic feeling was displayed.

The Crown decrees of the Catholic Sigismund, if put into operation imposed severe penalties including capital punishment. "They threatened to debar from offices students at universities infected with Protestantism," states Uminski, "they ordered the secular authorities to cooperate with the spiritual, to supervise the integrity of the faith, to search for Protestant books and destroy them." Inquisitions were to be held; married priests to be deprived and heretical advocates banished.

Catholic reformers urged the clergy to set their house in order and thus, by example, reduce the increase of heresy. Still, every endeavour to restore Romanism was ineffectual until the formidable Cardinal Hosius, in the middle of the 16th century, commenced his crusade against Protestantism. He opened operations by means of friendly discussions, either in churches or town halls. He arranged public debates with Lutheran and other heretical

preachers and even assisted them in the training of their children, but when all his blandishments failed, Hosius resorted to a less direct method of approach. He courted influential magnates, especially those tainted with heresy, thus combining political activity with spiritual interests, and penned polemical pamphlets against his adversaries. Also, he played a leading part in the selection of bishops most likely to prove adamant in their opposition to the Protestants.

Hosius' exposition concerning Christian Faith and Morals which he avowedly based on the Scriptures and the teachings of old-time Christian writers, greatly enhanced his authority. Evidently "this work became so widely read both in Poland and abroad that in Hosius' lifetime it was translated into almost all West European languages, some thirty editions being printed, chiefly abroad."

Another of Hosius' actions against the Reformers led to the arrival of Aloysius Lippomano, the Papal nuncio, but the Polish dignitaries deemed him an intruder and he was so coldly received by the ecclesiastics that he soon departed, although he obtained information very useful to the Roman Curia.

Hosius was soon summoned to the Eternal City, and later was appointed nuncio at Vienna, but his absence in no way lessened his anxiety for the reconversion of Poland. He also attended the Council of Trent, whose decisions were ultimately accepted by the Polish King. Meanwhile, the Catholic clergy had materially strengthened their Church, while the Protestant Poles became more and more at variance. Calvinism and anti-Trinitarianism had increased at the expense of Lutheranism, a discord of which the Catholic clericals took the opportunity of assuring the faithful that the tenets of the Protestants were unsound. They also contended that the religious conflicts then devastating the Netherlands and France, would invade Poland, unless the heretics were suppressed. Also, the spread of Unitarianism so infuriated Calvinists and Lutherans that they demanded its expulsion. The first to oppose this suggestion were the Romanists who asserted that Anti-Trinitarianism was the logical outcome of Protestantism. But, as our historian observes: "As a matter of fact their behaviour was influenced by the fear lest the expulsion of the Anti-Trinitarians should consolidate and strengthen the Protestants."

The tolerant and easy-going prelates of an earlier generation had been gradually replaced by bishops of the stern school of Hosius. Catholic Brotherhoods were created to sustain the Faith, while Court pressure was brought to bear on the King and his ministers.

One cause of the rapid spread of Polish Protestantism was the absence of schools, with the consequent decadence of the clergy. This evil Hosius determined to remove, so he urged the Jesuits to enter Poland in 1564. Colleges for the training of laymen as well as the clergy were founded in various parts of Poland and placed under Jesuit direction. In the years succeeding the Council of Trent, centres of learning were established whose ultimate objective was the triumph of the Counter-Reformation. Seminaries were also established in which priests were trained as missionaries to the dissenters, but many of these migrated to the domains of the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order who had embraced Lutheranism.

Unlike his father, Sigismund Augustus was more of a Gallio who corresponded with Protestant preachers on very friendly terms. He became more devout in later years, but even in the closing years of his reign, "Hosius, who did not understand compromises complained in

letters to his friends of courtly 'political wisdom' which 'worshipped God in such a way that the devil might suffer no detriment,' or again that 'denying Christ is considered at Court a praiseworthy act,' or that 'against obnoxious people [i.e., Protestants] one may not even breathe a word, while God may be offended even before the King and the Senate'."

The three succeeding reigns, however, proved fatal to the Reformation, for in religious influences the Jesuits were supreme. Official preferences and other favours became dependent on reversion to Romanism, although ordinary toleration was more or less retained. Still, Protestantism, largely through internal dissention and animosity, and the return of powerful magnates to their original faith, accompanied the social and economic disaster which overtook the country. After 1648, toleration began to succumb. Wars had devastated Polish possessions; culture went to rack and ruin and, while the wealthy landowners more deeply depressed their serfs, the trading and industrial community became virtually insolvent. As Prof. Brückner states in his *Polish Cultural Life in the Seventeenth Century*: "The fatal year of 1648 seems to be the starting point of this entire process. It brought to Poland a Thirty Years' War, which produced as sad results as the Thirty Years' War in Germany. General impoverishment and retrogression in all respects were among these results, together with the loss of Poland's prestige as an international power and the victory of her enemies, who were getting strong at her expense."

The power of the central authorities rapidly declined; the nobles acted as independent sovereigns and fought each other. Affairs went from bad to worse until in the 18th century, Prussia, Austria and Russia partitioned the country and with one brief interval, Poland has been subject to alien rule ever since.

T. F. PALMER.

### SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

WOE is me. For I am a voice crying in the wilderness. In Shaw's play, "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," we meet a Scottish missionary who tells a drunken hypocrite: "For forty years I have laboured among the heathen, and you are my only convert, Mr. Drinkwater, yet I have hopes. . . ."

Alas, for sixty years I have laboured among the civilised; I have not even had one convert, and I am without hope. As a child I was possessed of a devil—a fiend who impelled me to a "cursed spite" attitude to the world. I laboured under the delusion that men would live sensibly if only the better way was indicated. Experience compels me to abandon that belief. For a lifetime I have been writing, using words and phrases, arranging, selecting, pruning, extending, and above all, endeavouring to make clear what I mean. But my efforts have been in vain. I point out that most of our educated men and women speak and write many things where the meaning is not clear, and that ungrammatical expressions have so taken root that, seemingly, nothing will upset them. Why do they persist in saying "these sort of things," "try and do," "true facts," and so on? I have not the answer.

Asked how I can condone faulty grammar in the ignorant, my reply is that the *meaning* is of greater importance than adherence to arbitrary rules. I give an illustration. A Cockney girl was looking at a pastoral painting by a cranky artist. She said: "Them sheeps is drawd bad." One sentence of five words, every one wrong grammatically. *But the meaning is crystal clear.* Yet frequently I listen for minutes to talks on the radio,

I read articles and speeches by alleged experts and I am bewitched, bothered, and bewildered. Of course there is a deal of truth in the old saying that speech was given to man to *conceal* his thoughts. But when we discount the time servers, there are a goodly few who want to *express* their thoughts. Yet much of it is done so badly that lengthy arguments ensue, not about the vital issues, but about "it depends on what you mean by that."

Never a week passes but a Mr. Skinchurch or a Mr. Kirkwell is asked what he meant by some cryptic utterance, and the answer invariably makes confusion more confounded. Never a day passes without the Press issuing statement open to different interpretations. In my school days we had to recite a poem which contained the following line:—

"The gallant hound the wolf had slain. . . ."

Who got slain? I did not know then, I do not know now. The poet did not know the first duty of a writer, to make his meaning clear. Where there is dubiety there is faulty writing. Here seems to be a serious reflection on the character of a famous film star. I quote from a "columnist" in a recent daily paper:—

"Linda Darnell was still paying for that 1,500 dollar mink coat she had stolen from her flat. . . ."

Now if the gossip had written "which was" instead of "she had" suspicion could not have fallen on the actress. Why didn't he? And how does such slipshod stuff get by? Search me.

I have just finished reading *Does Materialism Explain Mind?* To me it was a fine refresher course; it is an excellent book, and I do not wish to pick faults in it. But the gifted author makes a fearful blunder on a matter of fact. On page 64 we read:—

"The Jew's conscience will not allow him to eat pork, that of the Catholic demands fish on certain days."

That alleged "demand" for fish is nonsensical. There are thousands of Catholics who never eat fish. It is in abstention from certain food on certain days, not with indulgence that the Catholic conscience is concerned with.

J. EFFEL.

### VAGARY

My mind is a wild, woolly ocean,  
A flux of the dark and the fair;  
It moves with an up-and-down motion—  
I know there is Something, Somewhere.  
With San Fairy Annie they fed me,  
And to San Fairy Ann, now, I cling;  
It was nothing concrete that misled me—  
I know that, Somewhere, there's Something.  
When I didn't know Daddy, Dad knew best,  
(Tho' a doubt often came up for air);  
And he started me off on a new quest—  
For he told me there's Something, Somewhere.  
Well, I've found that there's Something in Science,  
Made us Lords of the Land, Sea and Air;  
To vain Belief, bidding, defiance—  
That Something that's got Man Somewhere.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

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### ACID DROPS

An army chaplain bitterly complained the other day that some of the newly conscripted service men appear never to have heard of the real reason why we kept Good Friday. One of them thought that Good Friday was Robinson Crusoe's batman. This reminds us of another who thought that the words "Jesus Christ" were merely forcible "expletives" used by all ranks in all the services! So much for our much-vaunted religious education.

Angry letters have been sent to our contemporary, *Picture Post* denouncing the list it recently gave of the heroes and heroines of the new Elizabethan Age. This list, readers may remember, contained no parson, priest, or bishop—as astonishing omission. As one of the indignant writers pointed out, "not one of the great Christian prophets or Church leaders or philosophers earns a mention." "Perhaps this writer failed to notice that perhaps the unlucky Editor of *Picture Post* was unable to find a Church leader or philosopher or a Christian prophet worth mentioning.

The same writer referred to the first Elizabethan Age as "an age of faith." It certainly was as far as torture, imprisonment, mutilation and burning at the stake were concerned. But what about its great men? The "irreligion" of the writer of the plays of Shakespeare has been angrily commented upon by many of even his greatest admirers, while people like Marlow, Raleigh, and other Elizabethan stalwarts were openly charged with Atheism. And is it not a fact that many of our own prominent men, if not openly Atheists, are either hostile to religion, or contemptuous of it?

In any case some of the younger generation consider it absurd to refer to "Georgians," and particularly elderly Georgians, as "Elizabethans." It is they, the young people, who will make the second Elizabethan Age, they declare. Let us hope that they will have sense enough to keep the infantile Fundamentalism so beloved by the B.B.C. well out of it.

When the newspapers first heard of the "Hebrew Scrolls" discovered about four years ago near the Dead Sea they, and all believers, hoped here at last would be some genuine proof of the authenticity of the Bible. "Experts" have been working on them ever since, and Prof. G. R. Driver has recently published a full account of their findings. It will prove a terrible shock for all who think that the Bible would be vindicated. Not only is the material available "too scanty or too vague" to decide anything of use, but the final conclusions are that the scrolls can be placed at a date anywhere between A.D. 200 and A.D. 800! God has let the faithful down very badly again.

That drab, humourless, relic of the worst side of religious Victorianism, the Mothers' Union, would never, never allow a divorced woman, even if quite innocent, to join their sacred ranks while her "husband" was alive; so nearly 200 Birmingham vicars are being asked to support another three who are imploring the foolish old gang to change their rules. They are shrewd enough to see that if the female bigots don't change their tune, the Church might lose a whole crowd of Churchwomen—and women are often the real backbone of the Church.

One of the vicars has already disbanded his branch of the Mothers' Union, and a Women's Fellowship, with

more liberal rules, has been formed. Perhaps the new Fellowship will one day realise that it can still remain a good Fellowship—even without the Church.

### DOGMATISM AND FREETHOUGHT

THE interjection of Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe upon this subject, calls for an article rather than a letter. One of the most difficult matters is the question of language, for despite the very large vocabulary, all the words—of which few of us know, and even if we did, the use of them would convey very little to mixed readers—fail to convey accurately our meaning. The construction of the language tends often to hide rather than clarify our vision.

It is necessary, if possible, to equate our statements so that they are on a par, say with ordinary arithmetic; mathematics can be avoided in this respect as some problems are unsolvable; such as the accurate determination of the circumference of a circle in terms of its diameter. There is, as far as can be ascertained at present, no means of correctly conveying from one mind to another, exact meanings.

Let us deal with the word "belief"—probably millions of writers have discussed and re-discussed it, tripping and stumbling in their efforts to clearly understand its meaning. Now it seems clear that the word "belief," as generally understood, means that we are not quite sure that the facts of the case are beyond dispute.

Now, although the mechanistic state of affairs can be proved beyond all doubt, yet one should adopt the attitude of "thinking freely without belief" if the nature of things are to be understood as far as possible. Of course, the idea of mechanism should not be accepted until it can be clearly seen to be a fact and not a belief. This statement does not in any way upset the theory of the materialistic interpretation of history.

Mr. Ratcliffe makes the following statement and quotation: "For instance, P. Turner thinks 'All life is idiotic.' He goes on to say 'the assertion is assumption, belief; not knowledge.'"

Curiously enough, by assuming the contrary, as a means of discussion, can it be shown that life is not idiotic?—and even if it was for the benefit of an external power, it would still be stupid.

All life is born without the consent of the born, after which event, it is an unceasing struggle—the religious have turned this to account by preaching immortality—then it dies, very often a horrible death. The mere fact that among humans, many or probably most of us, make the best of it; a great number may even derive considerable pleasure and enjoyment from life, does not alter the fact that life, chiefly because of frailty or perhaps stupidity, entails, generally, much suffering.

Coming back to freethought, may I say without any desire to score a point: that much of the suffering that happens is due to the repression of freethought, especially when it comes to illness affecting the sexual organs.

It is well known that full and frank discussion on this urgent and important matter is strictly taboo, both in private and public, and apart from causing much intense suffering, very often, through lack of knowledge, it brings about early death.

P. TURNER.

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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.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, giving as long notice as possible.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Last Sunday the Secretary of the N.S.S. went to Leicester for a discussion with officials of the Leicester Secular Society of Whitsun Conference arrangements. With Mr. G. A. Kirk (President of the L.S.S.), Mrs. W. A. Vernon (Secretary) and Mr. A. E. Hassell (Lecture Secretary), he arranged local advertising, details of the Saturday reception and Sunday public meeting, and a Whit-Monday outing (weather permitting). He was left in no doubt that Leicester Secularists are keen to make the first N.S.S. Conference held in their city a memorable success. The decorators are in at The Secular Hall, where local traditions of uncompromising Freethought should inspire N.S.S. members assembled from all parts of the country to lay the foundations of another year's work and progress.

For many years past, one of the most outstanding contributors to *The Freethinker* in poetry and, more occasionally, in prose, has been Mr. Bayard Simmons. We shall soon be publishing what will be Mr. Simmons's two-hundredth poem in this journal. We feel that such a contribution should not pass unmarked, and we shall accordingly print an appreciation of our distinguished contributor.

Almost all his life, Bayard Simmons has been active on behalf of numerous progressive causes. He was actively associated with the early pioneers of Socialism in the Keir Hardie era, and went to prison for his militant activity on behalf of the Suffragettes. In his own special field, that of poetry, he has, in addition to his published verse and to his frequent contributions to this journal, recently completed an English translation of the great Russian poet, Pushkin, which will, we believe, shortly appear in this country. We trust that this militant Freethinker and distinguished man of letters will live to complete at least his *third* century in our columns.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. J. W. Davis, Vice-President of the South London and Lewisham Branch, N.S.S., has now recovered from a recent serious illness. Mr. Davis has now left hospital and hopes soon to complete his recovery and to resume his Branch activities.

## A DOCTOR ON THE MIND

ALL readers who are interested in the problem of the mind should make a point of buying, or at least reading, *Mind, a Social Phenomenon*, by F. S. A. Doran, M.A., M.D. (Cantab.), published by Messrs. Watts & Co., at 10s. 6d. Dr. Doran discusses the question from the point of view of a medical man, and his book will not be welcomed by orthodox Christians.

Mind, for the author, is "an expression of brain function." But "its contents are largely determined by the social force of tradition, and by the fears, hopes, beliefs, prejudices, and values of those with whom we come in contact." Nowhere does he assume or assert that mind is an "entity," a "spiritual entity," something bestowed by the Almighty on Man, together with "free-will," so that he can choose to do the will of God with a view of later entering Paradise and sitting on the right-hand side of Jesus Christ—whatever that means. In fact, although Dr. Doran does not mention Materialism, his view of mind is that of the scientific Materialist.

There are still two views as to the "nature" of the human mind. The orthodox one, held by nearly all believers in religion, is that "it is of a non-material, spiritual, or even semi-divine and mystical character, akin to the 'soul' which inhabits the human material body without actually becoming part of it." The other view is that "mind" is "composed of the same kind of 'stuff' as goes to make up the physical universe, that it is 'material' in character, and probably connected with the function of the brain and the central nervous system." And Dr. Doran points out that the first view is essentially "dualistic"—a material body with a "spiritual" mind; the second is "monistic," regarding "both the mind and the body as essentially materialistic." And he adds that the main purpose of his essay is to demonstrate "that if the mind is regarded as a social, as opposed to an individual, phenomenon, then the materialistic hypothesis is strengthened, perhaps to the point where it does deserve the serious consideration of its opponents."

Dr. Doran does not inflict on his reader the usual metaphysical terms and ideas which so many "philosophers," directly they deal with the mind, think it necessary to discuss minutely—from A to Z and from Z to A. Neither Berkeley nor Idealism, for example, are even mentioned in the index. Instead, the author deals with the history of both the dualistic and monistic conceptions beginning with the great thinkers in Greece—Pythagoras, Plato, Democritus, and many others—showing their tremendous influence on human thought for centuries. In particular he deals—and very fascinatingly—with the physiological and medical side of the nature of the human mind.

Of course, the latest advances science has made in regard to our conception of "matter" has played havoc with the old metaphysical dualism. Dr. Doran writes:—

The experimental evidence is in favour of a "wave theory" of matter as opposed to a "particle theory," the latter now being held to be a clumsy approximation of the truth. The old solidarity of matter has gone, and with it the characteristics that have for so long held mind and matter apart. Thus, the popular objection that mind and matter are essentially unlike has been abolished and the argument based upon the distinction no longer holds good. Likewise, biological research has undermined another of the dualists' fundamental concepts: the sharp distinction between animate, living things and inanimate ones.

Moreover, "recent advances in the physiology of the brain and the nervous system have considerably weakened several other objections which have been advanced in criticism of the basic ideas of the Associationist School..."

for it cannot be expected that our Idealists and Dualists are going to give up without a struggle their long disquisitions in metaphysics many of which might just as well have been written in a mixture of Greek and Chinese so unintelligible are they. It is a fact, however unpalatable to Idealists, that "the development of physiology, and of modern physics, has profoundly weakened the basis of the dualistic point of view"; and our "free-willers" will not like to be told that "even the 'will'—long a cornerstone of the dualists' position, is dismissed by Sir Charles Sherrington as a 'naïve inference'."

Dr. Doran's chapter, "The Past and Present," is particularly valuable dealing as it does with many historical aspects of his subject, and undermining, with its subtle references, various "truths" of Christian theology. "The idea of the king as the son of God (in Egypt)" we are told, "was established, therefore, about the year 2750 B.C. Henceforward the god of the Egyptians—the divine ancestors of Osiris—on whom the crops ultimately depended, was identified with the sun, and consequently with the sky, or heaven. The doctrine of the miraculous conception arose at the same time." Again, it was Amenhotep IV (also called Ikhnaton) who "introduced for the first time the idea of one god for the entire world and for all mankind. This remarkable young man came to the throne in 1375 B.C. He closed all the temples of the old gods, cast out their priests, and erased the names of the gods wherever they were found." And, of course, the one god was endowed with the qualities of "a kindly father." But it is impossible to summarise this very valuable historical chapter.

It is necessary also to study man's beliefs on the nature of disease to understand, as far as we can understand it, the nature of mind. The hopeless mixture of superstition and magic which for long was believed even by (so-called) doctors, and encouraged by devout Christians, made any advance in medicine almost impossible. Even at this day, we get magic freely recognised as the basis of the "cures" made at Lourdes, or by "spiritual" healers, and believed as such by millions of people. Dr. Doran traces the history of all kinds of superstitions where medicine is concerned and their relation to a "soul-mind" which "generates innate ideas."

The chapter on "The Development of the Mind" is not only a valuable contribution, but is also a fine summary particularly from the medical standpoint; while the final chapter, "Patterns of Culture," rounds off this extremely fine work on the mind—a work which strengthens the "despised" Materialistic position.

The one difficulty I have found is to compress some of Dr. Doran's arguments sufficiently to give an adequate resumé of his main contentions. As I found this quite impossible, I can only send all readers interested to his book. His lucid and readable style has made a difficult subject enthralling; and all Materialists should be grateful for his fine essay. His long and valuable Bibliography will help all inquiring students.

H. CUTNER.

## THE RHYTHM OF THE COSMOS

(Continued from Page 147)

Notwithstanding any obstinate scepticism in that respect, science has abolished the hiatus between inanimate nature and the organic world. *Life grows out of the background of non-living matter. There is a causal connection between the two.* (Our italics—EDITOR). The physical Universe is a cosmos; living nature is a part of that law-governed system; it logically follows that the

processes of organic evolution are also determined. Empirical knowledge, which culminated in the discoveries of Darwin and Wallace, corroborated this logical hypothesis. It went into the formulation of the doctrine of evolution, which represented the discovery of reason in living nature.

Taking place in the context of the law-governed physical Universe, biological evolution is also a rational process. Life is neither an inexplicable category called intuition, nor is it a mysteriously purposive urge; it is a determined physical process. In metaphysical terms, it is the unfolding of reason in nature. But reason itself is not a metaphysical category; it was not conceived as such until the necessity for rationalising the irrationalism of the so-called revealed religions was felt. Then, the concept of reason was identified with the *ad hoc* doctrine of Providence in order to mitigate the absurdity of the notion of an anthropomorphic God, and to fit both the notion of God and the doctrine of Providence into philosophical thought (theology), which developed throughout the ages under the impact of reason inherited by the human species as a primitive instinct from its immediate animal ancestry. Reason is the simple instinctive notion that every object of experience is connected with some other object or objects which may or may not have been already experienced; but because of the belief in the connection, which holds the world of experience together, their existence is assumed. There, belief is to be defined as a conviction regarding matters of fact. This notion determined all the forms of early human thought, such as magic, fetishism, animism and natural religion.

Consciousness is the property of life in the zoological world. It means to be aware of the environments. Simple awareness is presently supplemented by reactions to the things of which the organism becomes aware. From that stage of biological evolution there begins the growth of the nervous system to serve as the means of inter-relations between the organism and its environment. *The growth culminates in the formation of the brain which, physiologically, is called the mind.* (Our italics—EDITOR). So, mind is the highest expression of the property of life called consciousness, and thought, that of reaction to simple awareness. The mind becomes conscious of the environments, the radius of which gradually expands until the entire nature is embraced. It being consciousness of a law-governed system, human mind is necessarily rational in essence.

In other words, the intellectual and spiritual life of the primitive man was conditioned by the elemental instinct of reason. *It is an instinct, because it is a product of pre-human biological evolution.* (Our italics—EDITOR.)

Conceptual thought distinguishes the mind of the savage from that of the anthropoid ape. But even then there is little anatomical or morphological difference. Conceptual thought depends on language. So, it can be said that man is fully differentiated from his animal ancestry only when he coins words for expressing definite ideas. But from this it does not follow that memory, some very primitive ability of associating things and events, and the habit of expressing emotions through behaviour, are altogether absent in lower animals. Indeed, they do communicate feelings through articulate sounds. Koehler's experiments with chimpanzees are the most instructive in this connection. He came to the conclusion that they had "a high degree of intelligence" enabling them to solve practical problems. But their thought and the resulting action are dependent entirely on stimuli from

objects in their field of vision. The step from that mental state to the human mind capable of conceptual thought is long. The causal chain of mental evolution, however, is not broken. Memory is the ultimate basis of conceptual thought, and animals do possess memory. That is evident from their observable behaviour. Language enables the savage to attach labels to the mental equipments inherited from the animal ancestry, and consequently it becomes easier for him to remember past experiences and differentiate one object of experience from another. The result is the origin of conceptual thought—thinking stimulated by mental images.

M. N. ROY.

(To be continued)

### A BOOK WE DO NOT READ

In many homes the Bible is used only to solve cross-word puzzles, the Archbishop of York, Dr. Cyril Garbett, told the British and Foreign Bible Society annual meeting in London to-day.

"Simple quotations from it are not recognised and often are attributed to Shakespeare and other writers," he said.

It would be wishful thinking to imagine that the Bible in our country was as widely read as in the past.

Many had no intention of reading it. There were many homes without a Bible.

The Archbishop called for a revival of Bible reading and teaching about the Bible. The Bible was a book of crisis and we were living in an age of crisis.—*The Daily Express*, May 8, 1952.

### CORRESPONDENCE

#### DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

SIR,—I must congratulate Mr. Cutner on his perspicacity in seeing that the instances I quoted of the dialectical method in Nature and Society are all self-evident. They are so self-evident, in fact, that I fear our friend overlooked them when he came to formulate his ideas on the subject. Or, if he did take them into account, how does he explain them in terms of his mechanistic philosophy?

Further, I would remind Mr. Cutner that I did not imply that Thomas Paine was an hitherto undiscovered dialectical materialist.

I said that he was aware of the dialectical trend in society—that's all. Thomas Paine was a deist and an idealist, so obviously he could not have been a materialist as well. I mentioned him solely because he is a character Mr. Cutner has eulogised in the past, but does not appear to have read very closely.

I fear that Mr. Cutner's antagonism to dialectical materialism springs from his feelings and not from his commonsense. He probably knows that with the Communists, Marxists, Leninists, or what you will, dialectical materialism is not an academic diversion

—as is so much freethought—but a practical means of achieving their goal. They look upon the nature of things as a struggle of opposites, development proceeding from the disclosure of contradictions thrown up by collisions between opposing forces. For this development not to be arrested or delayed, their policy in the class struggle must not be conciliatory or reformist but one of aggravation.

From which it is easy to see that, once this is recognised, Nature's course can be accelerated.

There is a lesson here for Freethinkers if they care to substitute religion and reason as the opposing force.—Yours, etc.,

D. KENNEDY.

P.S.—That mention of "King Charles' head" by Mr. Cutner reminds me that he is a Dickens fan. Has he by any chance read "The Real David Copperfield" by Robert Graves? If not, he should. It's not nearly so wearisome as the original.

#### ANOTHER OLD READER

SIR,—Re your note to E. Smedley in the issue for April 27. I would like to say that I have been a reader of *The Freethinker* for practically the same period. I bought my first *Freethinker* in December, 1888, and it was the Christmas number, with comic Bible sketches! I was 18 years of age then, living with my parents, who were good Congregationalists. My father took a class in the Sunday School, and I was a Sunday scholar up to the age of 14. We always went to Chapel in the evening. So you may imagine that Christmas number was a bit of a startler for me! But I was much interested by the reading matter, and went back to the news-agent for next week's number and have been a regular reader ever since. That newsagent, by the way, must have been a courageous man for he had that Christmas number hanging in his window in

a conspicuous place, where it caught my attention, and started my Pilgrim's Progress from S.S. to N.S.S. I am glad to find I am not the only survivor from that period. My salutations and congratulations to Mr. Smedley.—Yours, etc.,

A. W. DAVIS.

P.S.—And to Freda Packman, too, who must be one of your youngest readers. One of the oldest salutes her.

#### BIRTH CONTROL

SIR,—You refer to the hostile attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to contraceptives.

It may be desirable to resist any interference from outsiders in the relations between husband and wife, whether the right to such interference is claimed by the Pope or other meddler, but birth control is advocated on insufficient evidence as the certain solution of difficulties actual and anticipated and the Pope, like anyone else, may question the reliability of the promises made for the limitation of families.

The case of the human species is not very different from that of frogs, or rabbits, or blue-bottles.

If all the rabbits in England were to procreate to the full extent of their powers and their progeny survive to repeat the process the country would be overrun with rabbits in a very short time, but the birth rate and mortality rate of the rabbit population are fairly well balanced so that the numbers are more or less constant. The survivors may be regarded as the best specimens of their kind.

The practice of birth control to limit population does not ensure the carrying on of the race by individuals approaching most closely to perfection, because the first-born is not necessarily the best example any pair can produce, and in fact it frequently happens that the first-born suffers great disabilities than subsequent off-spring.

Because of the present-day mad worship of "equality," those individuals possessing innate virtues and talents are prevented from deriving the fullest benefit of the advantages of superior physique or mental ability.

The natural factors which might control population are nullified by the State schemes designed to provide for the incompetent at the expense of the competent.

State aid operates—very expensively—to defeat natural selection and the elimination of the less fit.

Now and again wars have to be staged to kill off the surplus population, but war is not now as selective as it may once have been. Compulsory military service and the bombing of enemy territory have rendered war quite indiscriminating.

Birth control is similar in being entirely non-selective in keeping down the population figures. The effect may be gradual deterioration and final extinction which is not much to be preferred to the world-wide hunger threatened.—Yours, etc.,

C. N. AIREY.

### LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

#### OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S.—Friday, May 16, (Crawshawbooth), 7.30 p.m. Sunday, May 18 (Padiham), 3.15 p.m.; Haslingden 7.0 p.m. Tuesday, May 20 (Scout Bottom, Rossendale), 7.30 p.m.

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 ALEXANDER. Highbury Corner, 7 p.m.: L. EBURY.

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, 4 p.m.: MESSRS. WOOD and O'DELL.

#### INDOOR

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

**THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST.** By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.

### THOMAS A BECKET AND T. S. ELIOT

MR. ELIOT'S poem, *Murder in the Cathedral*, now showing at the Academy Cinema, is a surrealist interpretation of the killing of Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury.

The contest between King Henry II and Archbishop Becket might well be called "the English Canossa." For it was essentially a continuation of the struggle between Church and State which a hundred years earlier had recorded that signal papal victory, when Pope Hildebrand had brought Emperor Henry IV literally to his knees before him at Canossa. In particular, the Henry-Becket dispute marked one more step along the road of bringing the schismatic English Church within the pale of Rome, a work begun, at the instance of a Pope, by William the Conqueror when he took possession of the English realm.

Thomas à Becket was himself a member of the conquering race of Normans. His father had been Mayor of London and Thomas was born within sound of Bow bells. Then, on Becket senior falling on hard times, young Thomas took service with Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. When, therefore, the See fell vacant, it was not surprising if King Henry thought of Thomas, now become his Chancellor, as a suitable candidate for the vacancy. What he apparently misjudged was the firmness and independence which his erstwhile friend and servant was to display in his new role.

For Archbishop Becket became more papal than the Pope himself. In fact, Peter's successor of that day was having quite a lot of trouble with the Emperor of Germany and was not at all anxious to add to his worries by antagonising the second most powerful monarch in Western Christendom—Henry, King of all England, half of Ireland and two-thirds of France—however he might secretly approve of the sentiments of this most loyal son of Holy Mother Church!

However, King Henry's circumstances were not all that he could have desired; for he was having trouble with his barons as well as his prelates. And the acute Becket was not slow to exploit the situation; even so he found it prudent to leave England for the Continent, where he remained for the next six years, energetically soliciting the support of the religious confraternity in his struggle against the English Crown.

In the seventh year of his exile, he decided to return to the land of his birth. Why, it is not clear. But whatever his motives, Thomas was under no illusion as to the danger he ran by returning; lack of courage, whether physical or moral, was not, however, one of the failings of the Cheap-side merchant's son. Evading the King's men at the coast he reached Canterbury unmolested, to receive a tumultuous welcome from the people.

Nor is this popularity to be wondered at; for it should be appreciated that the Church in this twelfth century was a progressive force. In administration the clerics were more efficient and the juridical procedure more just and humane than any of the King's institutions. "The canon law," says the historian H. C. Davies, "was more scientific, more comprehensive, not infrequently more equitable, than the uncouth tangle of precedent and custom by which the royal courts were governed." While, under the royal jurisdiction, penalties were savage and brutal, death, torture and mutilation (such as gouging out the eyes, cutting off hands and feet, etc.), being commonplaces of King's judgments, there was no death penalty in the ecclesiastical courts and not even long sentences of imprisonment.

The popularity of the Archbishops, and Church institutions, is therefore, understandable.

No sooner had Becket settled in than he proceeded to assume his most uncompromising and provocative manner. He excommunicated all his fellow bishops, including York who had crowned the heir to the throne, and published papal letters to denounce the Constitution of Clarendon, wherein the King had sought to preserve what he held to be his rights, as null and void. No wonder Henry exclaimed in exasperation, "Will no one rid me of this priest?"

Overhearing this, Sir Reginald Fitz Urse and his knight companions took horse to Canterbury where they rid their royal master of the "traitor" priest in a way that could hardly have commended itself to him.

Mr. Eliot, in dealing with this episode, underlines the nobility of character and fearless courage of his martyr-hero, while depicting the knights in a far less favourable light, though he allows Fitz Urse a brief speech to justify their action before the infuriated and grief-stricken people. Then with a bewildering rapidity of change he transports him into our age, to continue the argument. A screen close-up of Sir Reginald, his finger pointing menacingly at the cinema audience, taunts us with—"And yet you still call us murderers!" and goes on to demand where we should be but for their sacrificial act. That one I can answer, Sir Reginald. In the course of history since your day we have rid ourselves of both incubi; in the reign of Henry VIII we shook off the papal yoke and under Cromwell we made an end of authoritarian kings. True, we still have both with us, in the emasculated forms of the Church of England and the Constitutional Monarchy, and I would agree that it is high time we got rid of them, too.

Father Groser, as Becket, looked every inch an Archbishop and is to be congratulated on a performance that many a professional actor might envy. The ecclesiastical atmosphere struck me as unconvincing, a Protestant's conception of pre-Reformation Christianity. Genuflection, for instance, is a ceremony not indulged in before an altar furnished only with a crucifix but before one which the consecrated Host is reserved. I have no recollection in all Mr. Eliot's play of mention of that so prominent figure in Catholic mythology, Mary, Mother of God.

P. C. KING.

Our French contemporary, *La Raison Militante*, includes the following illuminating citation:—

#### TOWARDS A HOLY EMPIRE

"At Nice, before an international conference of Socialist students, Guy Mollet, General Secretary of the S.F.I.O. (French Labour Party—Translator), regretted the obvious reluctance of the English and Scandinavians to align themselves with a United Europe. What is the reason for their refusal? In the opinion of the Socialist leader, the real reason is to be found in the imperialist policy of the Vatican which is trying to create, in place of a genuine federation of Europe, a limited European federation of six countries only—France, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. Thus, there would be re-established, in effect, the German 'Holy Roman Empire,' which had been created by Charlemagne. It is easy to appreciate that Protestants would not be in any hurry to attach themselves to such a body.

"A long time ago, this paper warned its readers against the restoration of the Europe desired by the Vatican, the Europe of Charlemagne, as Kalergi has described it. Anyone who is not absolutely blind must realise what sort of policy is likely to be pursued by the Catholic trio, Schuman, De Gasperi, Adenauer. The creation of such a Europe represents the worst danger which, under the actual circumstances of the present day, threatens the West."

[Translated by F.A.R.]