

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXII—No. 30

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER.]

Price Fourpence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Christian Theology and Evolution

THERE have been few more remarkable and far-reaching changes in human thought than those induced by the discovery of evolution and, we may add, by the subsequent evolution of the evolutionary theory itself. The belief that nothing is static; that "all things flow," as an early Greek philosopher (Heraclitus of Ephesus) expressed it in a striking phrase, is, indeed, far older than Darwin. It can be traced back to the classical Greeks and, perhaps, to the sages of ancient India and China. However, the criticism which the great Leonardo Da Vinci applied to the Greeks in general; that their speculations were unsupported and unproved by experiment; also applies to the Greek speculations about evolution and, indeed, to all the fairly numerous anticipations of the doctrine propounded in *The Origin of Species* (1859) such as those tentatively advanced by, say, Goethe, by Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, and by that curious Scottish sage, Lord Monboddo, who, to the great indignation of the pious Dr. Johnson, propounded the then original theory that the Orang-Utang, the "Wild Man of the Woods" of Borneo, was the authentic ancestor of the human species, including the redoubtable lexicographer himself!

Since Darwin, however, evolution has come to stay. It is a truism, nowadays, to add that it now forms the recognised basis to the entire structure of human thought, however much the details of the process may be disputed or varying conclusions drawn about its ultimate direction.

Nowhere have the results of the application of evolution to human history been more drastic and far-reaching than in its impact upon Christian theology. In this last respect, Darwin in, at least, an ultimate sense, ranks with Copernicus as the great iconoclast who, a Samson of the intellect, tore down the fundamental pillars of Christianity. That neither Copernicus, a beneficed cleric, nor Darwin who, at one time at any rate, claimed to be a Deist, set out with this iconoclastic intention, made no difference to the devastating nature of the mental revolutions which they, respectively, launched upon their epoch-making paths.

Prior to Darwin, Christian theology, both Catholic and Protestant, was based upon an infallible revelation. All Christians were agreed as to the *fact* of this revelation, even though they could, and did, quarrel furiously as to what were the precise deductions to be drawn from it, and where its ultimate guarantees were to be found. As far as the creation and antiquity of the world were concerned, all schools of theology agreed that the divine record in *Genesis* was final and unalterable. God had made the world and all that it contained, species by species, precisely as we find them to-day. In the definitive edition of the *Vulgate* published in 1592 under the auspices of Pope Sixtus V, God is shown on the cover illustrations blessing the beasts of the field the moment he had created them. There is not a single prehistoric animal amongst them! God created the animals, no doubt, the plants also, as well as Adam and Eve, precisely as they are to-day.

Not a glimmering of the idea of evolution was present in the mind of the "sacred" writer of *Genesis*. Nor did the countless theologians who, prior to Darwin, commented on the sacred volume ever profess to find in it what, so very obviously, was not there and, indeed, at the time *Genesis* was actually written (or copied from older Babylonian documents—c. 800 B.C.?) could not possibly have been there.

It is unlikely that, when *Genesis* was actually compiled, originally from Babylonian sources, even the Greeks had got as far as the most rudimentary conception of evolution. Whilst in the Hebrew Bible—our "Old Testament"—no vestige of the evolutionary concept can be traced except, perhaps, in *Ecclesiastes*, in any case, a much later document than *Genesis*, and itself written by a Jewish sceptic perhaps acquainted with Greek philosophy.

It must, accordingly, be conceded that the Christian theologians of the pre-Darwinian era were both consistent and honest in interpreting *Genesis* in a sense that left no room for either *The Origin of Species*, as interpreted in accordance with the evolutionary concept, or—still less!—for *The Descent of Man* from a pre-human ancestry, as envisaged by post-Darwinian zoology. One must, at least, respect the integrity, if not the intelligence of the old "die hard" theologians of the Wilberforce-Burton era, who rejected evolution as a pernicious heresy destructive of Christianity and who resolutely refused to see in the opening narratives of the Bible what, so very obviously, is not there.

Their successors in the recent past and to-day, have been more accommodating and, in our opinion, less honest. For, since evolution "took on" in scientific circles and in time began to penetrate the general public, Christian theologians of all shades have been tumbling over each other proposing schemes to "reconcile" Christian theology—and even the "fundamentalist text of *Genesis*—which, at first sight, might have seemed too tough a proposition for even theological ingenuity!—with evolutionary theory. In the last century a whole library has appeared on the subject, which is still being added to. In the past year or two, the present writer has met in debate a rising light of the Congregationalist Church and a former professor of philosophy in one of the leading Catholic Universities in Europe, and both clerics loudly asserted their belief in Evolution. Nor do they stop at that. It is now widely asserted in theological literature, both Catholic and Protestant, not only that the text of *Genesis* can be fitted into an evolutionary pattern but that, long before Darwin, evolution was actually taught by Church-Fathers and ancient theologians.

Let us glance at this last argument. The overwhelming majority of the Fathers of the Church accepted *Genesis* in its literal and obvious sense: viz., the World, the Universe—conceived as a mere setting and background for the Earth in the geocentric fashion universal amongst primitive peoples—and, finally, man "made in the image of God," were all "made" in six days. (Woman was put in as a biological afterthought. The writer of *Genesis* was,

obviously, no feminist!) After which exhausting labours, God "rested on the seventh day"—as well he might!

Moreover, man, as well as the animals, was made exactly as he is now—both clothes and "original sin" came later, *after* the Fall. Such was the orthodox Church interpretation of the sacred text. (The only thing on which some speculation was permissible was how much Adam knew when he was first created *before* the Fall. Some authorities held that he originally knew practically everything: that, in a picturesque phrase of an Anglican Divine, Robert South, "Aristotle was but the wreck of an Adam.")

However, there were a few daring Church writers who interpreted *Genesis* allegorically—as, of necessity, our modern Christian evolutionists must do. According to them, the "days" of Creation were, in reality, periods of uncertain length. This was the view of the learned Origen who, however, is not a very reliable authority, as his theological views were pronounced suspect after his death—though, probably, more on account of his hope for the Devil's eventual salvation than for his views on the Old Testament. The Church could not conceive a time ever coming when it could do without the Devil! St. Augustine also expounded the allegorical view in his book: *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*. However, he later withdrew this belief in his treatise, *Withdrawals (Retractiones)*, as Joseph McCabe has reminded us in his fine book, *St. Augustine and his Age*. This, however, does not prevent our modern Christian evolutionists from still quoting him as an allegorist: (cf. Canon H. Dorlodot—*Darwinism and Catholic Thought*).

However, there were a few orthodox writers who continued to champion the allegorical theory without condemnation by the Church, the most important of whom was Gregory of Nyssa (c. 400) who taught that God "created everything in germ only" leaving it to develop subsequently. Even Gregory, however, was not an "out and out evolutionist," as a modern Catholic evolutionist (Prof. Renouf) tells us: he taught "development" not "evolution." Men, elephants, trees, etc., were always what they are now, only in a more rudimentary form. No transformation of species was envisaged.

Actually, our Christian evolutionists have not got a leg to stand on: the more intelligently they have assimilated modern science, the more dishonest is their attitude to Christian Theology.

F. A. RIDLEY.

THE STORY OF THE MAGICIAN

The Myth of the Magus (C.U.P., 1948; 30s.) has been composed by Professor E. M. Butler, who handsomely acknowledges his indebtedness to his predecessors and contemporaries, as well as to the benefits conferred by the Cambridge Press. In his treatment of his theme, our author adopts the methods of modern science. The various magicians and mystics with whom he deals range from the ancient Wise Men of the East, Zoroaster, Solomon, Moses, Christ, Apollonius of Tyana, Merlin, Faustus, and others down to Madame Blavatsky and Rasputin. With slight variations, the alleged magi usually had super-normal births and these Professor Butler arranges under several headings.

Not only were their births attended with marvels and perils which beset them, but they had remarkable escapes from death. An instance of this occurs in the New Testament and, as Butler remarks: "The story of Krishna's rescue from his maternal uncle Kansa is one instance among many of the dangers supposed to beset wonder workers and sages at their birth."

In fact, all the stories told of Jesus are analogous to those recorded of pre-eminent personages and prophets. Many of the seers of antiquity attained divine authority. Yet Butler suggests that the supremacy of magicians in popular esteem was superseded by the triumph of the Christian religion. For he opines that the Christian fables outshone all the legends relating to the Pagan gods and heroes, and with the downfall of Paganism, the leading features of the new faith were virtually repetitions. As Butler notes, we find: "The divine origin and the miraculous birth; the annunciation and nativity, portents; the menace to the hero during his infancy; the initiation by John the Baptist . . . in much the same manner as Abaris made obeisance to Pythagoras. But the real contest was with Satan, in which the old god magician was worsted in a trial of spiritual strength." This contest between the Devil and Christ, like that of the far earlier Zoroaster's was preceded by a fast and if Jesus disavowed magic in theory, his healing miracles showed his practice of what he condemned.

In the Apocryphal Gospels, the child Jesus repeats the turbulent conduct of the infant Heracles, Krishna and Siegfried. According to the Gospel of Thomas, he created sparrows from clay and made them fly, while many other of the Jewish boy's miracles are markedly similar to those of Indian legendary lore. "Utterly different from his associates," remarks Butler, "he naturally would stand no nonsense from them, killing without scruple any of his comrades who attacked him." It is true that he restored them to life if they repented. Still, he was regarded as an *enfant terrible* like other prodigies before his time, for the boy Jesus "made the lives of his pastors and masters a misery to them . . . but he was an invaluable member of the family, performing prodigies of reaping and sowing . . . A baby Samson or an infant Heracles for strength, he could pull a wooden beam to the length required by his father Joseph and he cured his brother James of the snake bite, a miracle also performed by Krishna in his childhood."

The wonders of the New Testament are anticipated in the Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. As Butler testifies: "Impatience with maternal control, irrational fury with a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season, finding vent in a withering curse; bitter abuse of his enemies who were all to be damned in hell; the outburst of rage and physical violence against the money-changers in the temple; they all remind one of the unregenerate child who could not bear to be thwarted."

According to the story, the Jews charged Christ with Sabbath desecration, performing miracles with the Devil's aid, and pretending divine descent. If Butler rejects most of the Gospel narratives as quite legendary, he makes an exception concerning the tragic end. He urges that: "the bitter cry in the Gospel of Peter—'My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me'—sounds like a great wave breaking from the sea of legend to the shore of life. It is even more charged with emotional truth than the heartbroken canonical lament, and someone surely must have uttered it; for no writer, even if a writer of genius, could ever have invented that." This certainly seems a strange concession when we consider Butler's attitude towards magicians in general. Perhaps, however, this passage is conciliatory, when we note that he excuses himself for having included Christ among the outstanding magicians of history. As he avers: "All the great gods were magicians and all the great magicians were believed to be divinely inspired. The Christ of the Apocrypha and the Gospels was no exception to this rule."

The miracles of the loaves and fishes, the conversion of water into wine, and other additions to the food supply, all

relate to the achievements of the medicine men of primitive peoples whose enchantments regulated the abundance of the crops.

Simon Magus was a celebrated magician of Imperial Rome and all the evidence we possess concerning his career suggests that he himself had unlimited confidence in his supernormal powers. To prove his prowess, when derided as a charlatan, he attempted to fly through the air, but soon crashed to death. Butler declares that: "The great classical age of magic was rung to its grave when Simon Magus fell into the Holy Way, and perished there." Yet, throughout the impending Dark and Middle Ages of Christendom, miracles were always forthcoming when the Church required them and are not unknown to-day.

The partial emergence of science is traceable in the chequered career of Roger Bacon. But his studies aroused the suspicions of his contemporaries and he was subjected to surveillance and imprisonment in Paris. He informed the reigning Pope that: "The prelates and friars have kept me starving in close prison, nor would they suffer anyone to come to me, fearing lest my writings should come to any other but the Pope and themselves."

Bacon was later released, and he returned to Oxford in 1268. Still, a decade subsequently, he fell into disfavour and he was immured again in Paris, because of his heretical conclusions and was even more harshly treated than before. His imprisonment lasted from 1278 to 1292 when he was released, went back to Oxford, and died there shortly afterwards.

Butler's work contains an informative account of the Man of Mystery usually known as Saint Germain, who was adopted by the Theosophists as a Mahatma. Although presumably born about 1710 and dying about 1784, Mrs. Besant claimed to have seen him in London in 1896.

Cagliostro is very generously treated and appears not nearly so black as he has been painted, while Madame Blavatsky remains somewhat enigmatical. Still, our author does not dispute the justice of the report of the Psychical Research Society's investigation into the seeress's claims. "For our part," it proceeds, "we regard her neither as a mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress; she has achieved a title to permanent remembrance as one of the most accomplished, ingenious and interesting impostors in history."

This adverse judgment naturally injured Madame Blavatsky's reputation, but it did not prevent the conversion to Theosophy of Annie Besant and other zealous adherents who retained their faith in this Eastern cult till the close of their lives.

T. F. PALMER.

FREEDOM AND FREETHINKING

SOLDIERS and priests are parasites on the peace machine, on humanity. In each nation the warriors and the clergy claim exclusive right to use the words of bloody-mindedness without defilement. We, for instance, are asked to believe that military strength brings peace; but who, in this country, says that the more bombers Russia produces the more she must want peace?

The evils of a war, blessed by the generals and the clerics, are immediate and the promised benefits as indefinitely postponed as pie in the sky. Freedom, inevitably, is the first casualty of war and of war-mindedness. True freedom knows nothing of war, for it has already transcended the myths of war-lords and clerics: true freedom belongs to the human mind, and not to the military or religious outlook. The way to freedom is the human way to prepare for peace and not for war.

It should be the privileged task of freethinkers—those who challenge shibboleths—to say so, unless we are content to go on paying the human butchers' bills and the sanctimonious tithes, unless we are content never to be free.

Naturally, the war-lords and the clergy enshrine the slave who dies to keep the masters in power. Both Church and State encourage the birthrate of fodder; while freedom tells us that over-population to-day is race suicide. And perhaps the strongest proof that there is no after-life is the fact that the Unknown Soldier has not climbed from his tomb to blow out the flame in disgust.

Freethinkers should know—for it is the *human* mind which thinks freely—that it is not enough to "conform to law and order" but to ask, "To what law and order is it that we are being asked to conform? Is it a promise of the only true security which is a by-product of happiness?"

Military strength is the negation of peace and freedom—it is the religion of religions. Those who are free to think should know that Freedom, Happiness and Peace are indivisible. And those who dare not face the logical extension of their professed free-thinking, are they any wiser or more courageous than the old lady who gave up reading a certain national daily because she felt that it has a bias against missionaries?

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

RATIONALISM AND MORAL PROGRESS

"Our morality grows with our civilization. At a certain period of human history mankind used stone implements and practised cannibalism and group marriages. At the time of the *Mahabarata* [ancient Hindu scriptures—Editor] they used bows and arrows and practised polyandry. Neither will our present-day morality be approved by canons that will be set up in the future. Rationalism utters a stern warning against complacency. The rival standards set up by the conflicting ideologies of the two power-blocs into which the world is divided to-day will be condemned and superseded in the future. The Capitalists are driven by greed, and the Communists by fear. Neither passion will hold sway if society gains a more stable equilibrium and there is a juster sharing of the fruits of labour between the individual and the community. Rationalism calls for a vigilant recasting of moral values to suit the changing pattern of society."

[*The Indian Rationalist.*]

TERROR

I have journeyed in many a haunted place
And met old Sorrow face to face;
And lain me down by hill and star
To think upon the things that are
Permanent where all does seem
To be the figment of a dream.

And night has come and day has gone,
With all the fury of the sun
Turned to a tired, heartless flame.
What is this everlasting game
Of light and shadow, rise and fall?
Can it not matter, after all?

Cold thought to terrify the mind!
To think that all the world is blind,
And we—the gropers—go our way
Beyond the sunset and the clay,
Meaning nothing more than we
Think we are or ought to be.

JOHN O'HARE.

ACID DROPS

We congratulate Bexhill on its abject submission to the Lord's Day Observance Society—a submission which would have been enhanced still further if the people responsible had done a little grovelling à la our Roman Catholic friends. There was to be a Regatta in August on a Saturday and Sunday and, in the name of the Lord, the L.D.O. forbade it to be held on the Sunday and, after "a lengthy correspondence," the Regatta authorities gave in. What we do not understand is, why this lengthy correspondence? Why did they not give in at once? Was the Regatta Committee actually *arguing* with God Almighty—that is, with God's representative on earth, the genial secretary of the L.D.O.? Good old Bexhill, we are proud of you!

We always understood that once a ghost had been exorcised by a monk it would never dare to show its horrid presence again—but, alas, we are mistaken. The Witch of Wookey Hole in Somerset, who was sternly removed from this materialistic earth 1,000 years ago by a holy and venerable monk armed with the Divine Cross, has—according to some rather frightening reports—returned. It (or she) was first seen by a boy of eight who ought to be rewarded for not immediately saying he had seen the Virgin Mary with a special message for this Atheistic and unbelieving world. Had he seen it in Portugal, another shrine would have been immediately dedicated to the Mother of God.

The owner of the property is a Wing Commander, and therefore a thorough believer in both ghosts and exorcism, and he is bringing in another monk who will, he hopes, make a better job of exorcising than his predecessor. All the same, a ghost which can put on electric lights without touching the necessary switch, who can open fully bolted doors without pulling back the bolts, reminds us of our thousands of spirit healers who can cure incurable diseases by a mere touch. Why exorcise it? Why not get it to sign a contract to appear twice nightly on the variety stage, or before our T.V.? Why banish it again for ever?

There are few things we enjoy more than a scientific explanation of the Resurrection which, we hasten to say, is still accepted by some "scientists" as God's truth, or at least as Gospel truth. A very reverent scientist was recently allowed by the B.B.C. to broadcast his explanation of the Miraculous Event—considered by heaps of people the best-attested occurrence in all history—and he managed to get in the inevitable "atom." As Jesus was God Almighty, all he did was to change his body into millions of tiny atoms which then proceeded to find a hole in the coffin, out of which they poured and reformed once again into his Divine and Living Body before, a little later, gracefully soaring upwards to join Himself in Heaven.

This beats anything that redoubtable converts like Arnold Lunn or Graham Greene or Evelyn Waugh could conjure up—though it is only fair to add that they believe because they are told to, and not because of any scientific explanation. And if we are allowed a little advice, we think that the best method of encouraging Divine Blessings is wholeheartedly to believe without question. The Church requires no scientific explanations of its dogmas, though if any are required it can provide them by dozens. Perhaps the new Director of the B.B.C. will not object to our reminding him of this, even if another scientist comes along with a much more thrilling explanation of the Resurrection.

That vigorous champion of Spiritualism, Mr. Shaw Desmond, who can swallow almost any of its phenomena and then some, appears to dislike the churches and considers that Christianity is "not in the Churches." Well then, where is it? In Mr. Shaw Desmond and in his fellow believers? The truth really is, of course, that the Churches have *civilised* Christianity, they have done their best to make it square with commonsense and, where possible, with science. True Christianity is a hopeless conglomeration of legend, myth, and absolutely silly "moral" teaching, which people even like Mr. Desmond have to "explain" or apologise for. How would he explain, for example, the explicit teaching of Jesus that you must hate your parents? Did Mr. Desmond hate his parents?

THEATRE

"The Innocents." By Stephen Mitchell. Her Majesty's Theatre.

THIS is an unusual play, for from a purely logical and practical standpoint it is unsound. On the other hand, it is difficult not to be carried away by the drama.

What makes it difficult to accept for some is the presence of apparitions. We can regard a "ghost" as a projection of our own imagination, and we could be aware that certain characters believe they see these apparitions (which are symbolic) even if they were not shown.

This is no play for innocent minds, for they would miss the point. It deals with sex perversions and abnormalities where children are concerned, and to the susceptible may be shocking, but it is a remarkable drama both for the writing and the acting.

Two very young actors are Carol Wolveridge (aged twelve) and Jeremy Spenser (aged fourteen), who thrill us with their performances. These are achievements that one does not normally expect in children, least of all when it is unlikely that they understand the full significance of the play. All the more credit to Peter Glenville as producer, for I guess it needed some hoodwinking to obtain the excellent results from these children.

Barbara Everest, as the housekeeper, was not too well cast in the least interesting of the parts. It is Flora Robson who carries the play on her shoulders as the governess who has just arrived, and who is horrified when she learns of the evil that surrounds the house and the children. She it is who makes us feel the eeriness of the play, and to her very justly goes most of the applause, although the children are deservedly acknowledged.

The play is improbable by its lack of reality in certain respects, but there is enough to it to draw audiences for a long time.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

SIMPLE REMEDY

I do not fear a wrathful god,
Nor torture in his hell,
And though believers think this odd,
I happy am and well.

I do not fear his paradise,
To which I shall not go,
But just lie down and close my eyes,
And cease to think and know.

The cause of all unhappiness
In this sad world is fear;
Belief in gods will not distress
The men who Truth hold dear.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

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ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

JEAN TOUDIC.—Thank you for letter and cutting. We hope to use the latter soon.

J. FLOWERS.—Thanks for correspondence re Thomas Paine. We will deal with the alleged confession later.

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

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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this 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

Our readers will, no doubt, remember the fine article upon the whole problem of secular education in France which M. Marceau Pivert contributed to *The Freethinker* a few months back. M. Pivert, who is Secretary of the Federation of the Seine, and a member of the Executive Committee of the French Socialist Party (S.F.I.O.), has very kindly sent us a copy of the parliamentary debates in the French Assembly last autumn upon Secular Education in France. We shall hope in the near future to publish some extracts from the remarkable speeches delivered by anti-clerical spokesmen on that occasion. Freethinkers all over the world are watching with keen interest the struggle now waged against clericalism in the land of Voltaire.

Freethought is international and so is the National Secular Society. One of our most promising branches is at Fyzabad, in the West Indian island of Trinidad. In this island off the coast of South America—an island named by its Spanish discoverers after the Holy Trinity!—a flourishing branch of the National Secular Society has existed since 1950. The branch goes from strength to strength and has just reported an increase of nine members. Its President and Secretary are, respectively, John Jules and E. Saugrien. Like most former Spanish colonies, Trinidad is predominantly Catholic and to pioneer Freethought in such surroundings must require remarkable courage. Our Nigerian Branch also continues to report favourable progress and we hope that it will soon be joined by a new branch on the Gold Coast. As the old Roman writer expressed it: "Out of Africa something new is always coming."

Just a word to remind readers who can attend that Mr. H. Cutner is opposing Mrs. Muriel Hankey (London Spiritualist Alliance) at the Streatham Debating Society, on Friday, July 25, 7-45 p.m. The subject is, "That this House Agrees with Spiritualism," and the discussion is held at the White Lion Hotel, Streatham High Road, S.W.

A light on the origins of the Secularist Movement in Scotland is provided by a booklet that has been in the John Wright family (see "Obituary" on page 239) since 1841. In it is a report of a lecture delivered in Glasgow in that year by a member of the "Glasgow Eclectic

Society." The lecture was definitely of a Freethought and anti-religious character. By a change of name later, this Society became the Glasgow Secular Society. On the authority of Chapman Cohen, the history of the Society under its description "Eclectic" goes back into the late eighteenth century, probably to 1790.

Mr. F. Kenyon having tendered his resignation, which has been accepted, the Directors of G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd. announce that he ceased to be Secretary of the Company and Manager of the Pioneer Press on July 19.

POLITICS AND THE NOVEL

(Concluded from page 231)

THE point which I am here trying to make, however, is this: the imaginative artist of the mid-twentieth century, when he dares to look at future developments of political tendencies, almost always looks at them with genuine fear and dislike. He sees the way in which politics in all countries (Communist, Catholic and Capitalist) have gradually become more and more totalitarian and inhuman. He appreciates that great wars, fought ostensibly to protect freedom, lead invariably and necessarily to a decrease in freedom all round. And, as far as he is able to look into the future, he finds that future in every way a wholly undesirable affair.

When, therefore, we look at the work of writers like Orwell, Mr. Huxley, Mr. Evelyn Waugh, and Mr. Graham Greene (to take the more eminent of those who have published novels in the past five years) it would seem that this hatred of the future and dislike of present tendencies is absolute. It is only in the exceptional writers, like Mr. Joyce Cary (and he, needless to say, is not fashionable, though his fine novel *The Horse's Mouth* has more gusto than half a hundred books by some highly praised writers) that an opposite tendency can be seen.

But if we think backwards twenty or thirty or forty years what do we see? The political writer and the writer most famed for dealing with the future of mankind at the turn of the century and after was undoubtedly H. G. Wells; and, whatever his real drawbacks, Wells was an optimist until his last phase of illness and frustration. The other two of the great trinity of writers of the early 1900's—Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy—were equally optimistic, even though they did not try to look into the future with the Wellsian prophetic eye. They tended to think that the world was getting steadily better. They had a kind of shrewd Radicalism which considered that the tendencies towards human betterment would soon lead the masses and the classes into a more complete life.

Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett. Who have been the comparable figures of the 1940's? Orwell, Huxley, Waugh? If so, it is difficult to escape the thought that something has gone out of life. If we compare *The Old Wives' Tale* with *The Loved One*, *The Forsyte Saga* with *Brave New World*, or (most marked contrast of all) *The Food of the Gods* with *1984*, it is clear that here is a change not merely in degree but in kind.

Yet what has gone wrong? It is not at all easy to say. It is not entirely, as some of our younger contemporaries would remark, that life has gone sour on us. There is still beautiful music to be heard—though it is true that the beautiful music comes mostly from the past, from Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. There is still beautiful scenery to be admired—though it is true that the scenery is for the most part artificially preserved by such organisations as the National Trust. There is still skill to be seen on the cricket and football ground—though it is

mostly skill artificially stimulated by a small group of professional sportsmen.

Perhaps that is what has gone wrong. Possibly our writers, more penetrating than "the man in the street," have perceived that there is something in our way of life which is so artificial that it can be maintained only by some degree of falseness. Perhaps that is the root of the hysteria which applauds good music and rubbish quite indiscriminately at the Promenade Concerts, or which makes devotees sleep on the pavement outside a London theatre where Sir Laurence Olivier is due to appear, or which impels apparently sane people to queue all night for the chance to watch a Test Match destined to be a drawn game before a ball is bowled.

Some readers may feel that here I have wandered from my thesis. I do not think that I have done so. The same change in the climate of everyday life which has substituted the pessimism of George Orwell for the optimism of H. G. Wells has produced those hysterical phenomena which I have just mentioned.

But can anything be done to counteract such tendencies? That is where the writer can tell us very little. The writer—the imaginative writer, at any rate—has rarely been an active politician. And, as a rule, the more he has been a politician the less satisfactory he has been as a writer. The change which has overcome us, after all, is largely a political change. The revolution in which we are all living is a political revolution. And if most of us are to die within the next twenty years or so in an atomic war those deaths will be political deaths.

But if the main interest of a reader lies in the literary sphere, he can still see a reflexion of the change of climate in the literary world. It was, I think, Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson who pointed out in the course of a recent broadcast talk that the English novel was in a dangerous position, in that those who were accepted by the critics as being worth-while novelists were for the most part unknown to the ordinary reader, whereas those accepted by the ordinary reader were condemned by the critics. This, too, is a symptom of the change which I have been considering. Those writers whose interest is primarily with the development of humanity—like Orwell and Huxley—are not much read by the member of the normal lending library. He (or she) will concentrate on Mrs. Agatha Christie, Mr. Peter Cheyney, and Miss Maysie Grieg. Mystery and romance now provide the staple reading of thousands, whereas the more thoughtful novel, depressing because it is thoughtful, is thrown aside by most ordinary folk.

"Escapism" is a word which we seem to see less often now than used to be the case, perhaps because we have all become to some degree escapists. And when one tries to view the possible future who can be blamed for wishing to forget it for awhile?

I think, however, that those of the more thoughtful of our novelists who try to point the consequences of totalitarianism may yet succeed in their task of warning humanity of the "state of things to come." Admittedly, H. G. Wells spent the better part of his life in working for a sensible organisation of society, which was probably further away at his death than it was when he wrote his first book. But Wells was only one among many writers, after all. Who can say how much influence the seminal thought of Mr. Bernard Shaw may have had on the present generation? And if politicians, driven by thoughts of mass weapons of destruction, manage to learn a little sense, it may be that one day even they will occasionally listen to what the forward-looking novelist or playwright has to say. In other words, the politics of the novel are changing.

In these days of armed truce between the great powers it is not possible for the easy optimism of the past to be repeated. And whether it is in any way desirable for such repetition to take place is beyond the scope of the present article.

JOHN ROWLAND.

[Mr. Rowland asks us to indicate that the above article was originally written some time ago and that he does not necessarily subscribe to the precise views therein expressed.—EDITOR.]

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

(A Satirical Dialogue)

CHILD (at the inquisitive age): Father, who made the world?

FATHER (confidently): God. He created this wonderful world, with its countless marvels, expressly for our benefit. Without His constant supervision, everything would be chaos, instead of harmony.

CHILD: But, father, who made God?

FATHER: Nobody. He made Himself—I mean, He always existed. He is eternal, omnipotent and unchanging, whereas we and this world are just the opposite. We are imperfect, but He is perfect, and glorious in His majesty.

CHILD: What does God look like, then?

FATHER: He doesn't look like anything. God has neither body parts, nor passions. He is formless and inconceivable.

CHILD: Why, that's a description of nothing!

FATHER (annoyed): God is a spirit, and therefore invisible. But although we cannot see Him, He can see us, and knows everything that everybody does, says or thinks. Often He tests us to see if we do what is right, and punishes us if we don't.

CHILD: That sounds just like a nosey government snooper.

FATHER (very gravely): Blasphemy is a sin even worse than murder. Men have been stricken dead for blaspheming the Holy Name. We must always love, worship and praise God for His great goodness to us and to all living creatures.

CHILD: But if God is good, why did He let the cat eat my pet mouse? And why did He let my friend get run over? And why—

FATHER (irritably): You ask too many questions. God knows what He's doing. He has very good reasons for everything—reasons we cannot understand; our intelligence is too limited.

CHILD: Then why didn't God give us more intelligence? Doesn't He want us to understand Him?

FATHER (realizing he has argued in a circle): It is wicked arrogance to question these matters. We must have faith.

CHILD: Oh, I see. You don't really *know* that God knows what He's doing. You only *hope* He knows. I don't believe God is real, after all. He sounds made up, like fairies and witches and Santa Claus. I think He's just a sort of grown-ups' bogey-man, to make them behave and keep them quiet!

FREDA PECKMAN.

ALL IS QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

We noted recently in the Sunday press that the American Senate has voted an appropriation to provide a million shrouds against possible emergencies.

CORRESPONDENCE

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

SIR,—I was particularly interested in "Does God Care for Oxen?" as I have been writing letters to the *Somerset County Gazette* for the past weeks regarding the cruelty to cattle and other animals in Taunton Market every Saturday, and, of course, in other markets. These letters caused other people to write on the matter, and I have received letters from people who agreed with me. I have tried so hard to get something done to prevent this cruelty, but still it goes on.

I do wish God had made people with a little more feeling and understanding for animals.—Yours, etc.,

KATHLEEN TACCHI-MORRIS.

WORLD POPULATION

SIR,—Mr. Cutner asks for "authority" for my statement that Human Beings can double their numbers in a few years—this from a man who denies any "arbitrary assumption or authority"! The words "in a few years" should have been placed within inverted commas.

It is just plain common sense that they *can*, and plainer common sense that they have done "in a few years," and even plainer common sense that they will do so if there is no check, and the only practical non-superstitious check *is* Contraception.

Did not Ireland (R.C.) nearly double its population "in a few years"? What has England done "in a few years"? What would it do without Contraception? Even with Contraception, England, alone, has 33,000 "illegitimates" born every year, and has had a great many more in the past. No doubt Contraception has vastly reduced the number, and consequently the very great suffering not only to the child but to the poor mother also. These are statistics listed by The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child—21, Coram Street, W.1.

If Mr. Cutner quibbles at the words "in a few years," it strikes me as most callous to think only about our epoch in time. Are we to go on breeding "work-slaves" and "cannon fodder" for the future generations? Or does Mr. Cutner consider that we should adopt abstinence, "self-control," "safe period," or some such high-sounding superstitious nonsense?

Lastly, a "personal" case. Both my grandfathers had 13 children in their respective ("respectable" states of holy matrimony!) families. One "got away with it" because he was rich. The other did not. They both rejected Contraception for superstitious reasons. Are men of reason and goodwill to be expected to pay for this kind of inhuman conduct? It is not justice, but callous barbarism to men, women and children, and especially to the women and children. It may be perfectly legal to have as many children as we like, but this kind of thing is vile barbarism. The only practical method of avoiding this is Contraception, and for all people.

Yes! I do mean that world population can increase from 2,500 millions to 5,000 millions "in a few years," and would attempt to do so but for Contraception. Since my school days world population has increased from 1,500 millions to 2,500 millions! Nearly doubled itself in one not long lifetime—"in a few years." Mr. Cutner had better think again. The human race cannot go on without effective Contraception, and for all people, married or not. Who can afford to marry in these times? Is it not an expensive luxury?—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.

RUSSIA

SIR,—Being also a B.A., Cantab. (Economics), and one who has lived for five years in the U.S.S.R., and revisited that country this year, I hope you will allow me a few comments on Mr. Perrin's article. Naturally, space will not permit comments on all aspects of his very diffuse commentary.

Mr. Perrin refers to a "sombre" cultural picture in the U.S.S.R., yet this is the very last word to apply to the warm and colourful new films, or to the warm and colourful architecture of the U.S.S.R. to-day. Indeed, Mr. Perrin is not at all clear on this. He laments the abandonment of "steel-and-concrete functionalism" which, indeed, is often sombre, yet later writes of Soviet culture as "utilitarian." Exactly what is "utilitarian" in reintroducing sculpture, mosaics, bas-reliefs, and even stained glass windows into architecture (as is being done in the superb stations of the Moscow Metro) is not explained—nor what is "naive, utilitarian, and philistine" in translating the works of Shakespeare and Robert Burns in record editions.

To write of "rigor mortis" in the U.S.S.R. to-day, when every visitor is impressed by the tremendous vitality of Soviet civilisation, is also inexplicable. It is true that the U.S.S.R. has restricted abortion, discourages free love, and encourages discipline in the schools. It does not produce gangster comics, its Press and cinema do not exalt sex and crime, and it does not preach the necessity (or even morality) of atom bombs, napalm bombs, and germ warfare as the representatives of "Christian civilisation" do across the Atlantic (even debating as to whether germ warfare is the "ideal" weapon because it destroys lives and not property—see Theodor Rosebury's *Peace or Pestilence*).

To-day the U.S.S.R. is certainly the most moral country in the world as far as Press and entertainment are concerned. Their plays and films are filled with warm humanity and humour, but sexuality and vulgarity are completely absent. Freethinkers should be jubilant about this, as it is proof that a State that is completely independent of religion does, in practice, pursue a policy of encouraging morality far more effectively than so-called "Christian States" are doing. I am sorry that Mr. Perrin did not devote more of his article to this—for Freethinkers—most interesting aspect of Soviet life and morals.—Yours, etc.,

PAT SLOAN.

MR. CUTNER'S QUERY

SIR,—Mr. H. Cutner asks for a specific quotation proving my allegation in *One Man's Mind* that some elder Freethinkers were inclined to speak, "almost with a tone of approval," of the use of atom bombs in a future war. I have not a file of your paper by me, but, on glancing through my cuttings, I find this, by Mr. Cutner himself:—

"Karl Marx taught that revolutionary terrorism must be kept up as long as possible, and in this he has millions of faithful followers. . . . That it may force us to 'believe' with the threat of atomic bombs, I am inclined to admit. . . . The way to meet the threat of armed warfare is to be prepared to hit back—'an eye for an eye'."

That appeared in your pages on September 17, 1950. I am sure that regular readers would be able to find scores of such passages showing a complete misunderstanding of Marx and an anti-Socialist prejudice amounting almost to an obsession.

I am not intending to start another controversy here. You have had enough of me, I should think, in recent years! But, since Mr. Cutner asked for a specific quotation, I thought it only fair to give him one. And, with it, I present him with the welcome news that his reply to this letter (knowing him, I feel sure there will be one) will not be answered—at any rate, not by

JOHN ROWLAND.

OBITUARY

JOHN WRIGHT

We regret to announce the death of the above-named Glasgow Freethinker and Secularist in his 81st year. He had a long connection with the Glasgow Secular Society (Branch of the N.S.S.), he and his father and grandfather having given a total of over 111 years' service to the Cause. He has left no children, so his death closes a chapter of the history of the movement in Scotland. Our condolences go out to his widow, who arranged for his remains to have a Secular Funeral Service, which was duly conducted by the undersigned.

R. M. HAMILTON.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday evening, 7 p.m.: H. DAY. (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, July 27, 1-30 p.m.: Members and friends assemble for coach trip to York. All seats are now booked.

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.: (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: Messrs. EBURY and ALEXANDER; (Highbury Corner), Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, July 26, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

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

South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (Brockwell Park).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park, Marble Arch).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: Messrs. WOOD and O'NEILL.

INDOOR

Streatham Debating Society (White Lion Hotel, Streatham High Road, S.W.).—Friday, July 25, 7-45 p.m.: Discussion between Mrs. MURIEL HANKEY (London Spiritualist Alliance) and Mr. H. CUTNER (N.S.S.). Subject: "That this House Agrees with Spiritualism."

West Ham and District Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead House, Wanstead Green, E.11).—Thursday, July 24, 7 p.m.: A meeting.

THERE ARE NO CHRISTIANS. By C. G. L. Du Cann.

Price 6d.; postage 1½d.

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION. By F. A. Ridley. Price

1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

HIGHLIGHTS IN JEWISH FREETHOUGHT

THE Jewish religion is the mother-religion of the two great religions which have sought to dominate Europe—Christianity and Islam. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that the Jewish religion with its complex civilisation should furnish the historian with many interesting examples of the struggles that Freethinkers and Rationalists of all centuries have waged against obscurantism, fanaticism and intolerance.

The Old Testament itself is not as divine a work as some of the more zealous believers maintain. There are passages, nay, whole books, which tell of the existence of Freethought and Reason even in the darkest of ages—in the Holy Scriptures themselves.

Only the least discerning of readers can fail to grasp the import of such a remarkable book as Ecclesiastes. But for the introductory verses and the last concluding verses, we have preserved for us a classical refutation of belief in supernatural forces. It is not an accident that Ecclesiastes had some difficulty in finding its way into the canonical writings.

The greatest book on philosophy written in the Semitic world, the book of Job, is similarly a work revealing the existence of Freethinkers, who are personified as his three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite.

Even the Book of Proverbs had a rough passage, as many of the sayings expressed a very mundane and materialistic attitude to the world and its ways.

Shortly before the decision in the year 90 to delimit and define Holy Scripture, Judaism was able to produce in Alexandria a philosopher whose significance has yet to be fully appreciated. His name was Philo Judaeus. Philo tried to combine Greek philosophy with Jewish monotheism. To what extent he directly or indirectly influenced the Gospel of John, or the Gnostic school of thought, has yet to be determined. In any case, his attempts at explaining away the Scriptures in allegories paved the way for the later Jewish Rationalists of the early Middle Ages.

No orthodox Jew has troubled to examine the fate of that greatest of medieval Jews, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). Despite his vast output on apparently rigidly orthodox lines in the field of Jewish law, he ventured into spheres of thought which can only be described as distinctly heterodox. In one of his Introductions, Maimonides indicates his belief in a sort of Pantheism which excludes the material world but includes all humanity. On his tombstone was inscribed the words, "Here lies Moses Maimonides the Heretic." Maimonides tried to do the impossible—fusing Aristotle, the sayings of the Babylonian Rabbis and the Scriptures. In the attempt, he severely compromised his theological superstructure.

Another remarkable Spanish Rabbi was Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167), who was the first Bible critic. He was inclined to Neo-Platonic speculation and was a thoroughgoing Rationalist who believed grammar to be indispensable for an understanding of the Scriptures. From his Commentaries it has been deduced that he had free notions about the exilic origin of the Second Isaiah and the post-Mosaic date of passages in the Pentateuch.

The third early medieval Rabbi who found himself out in the cold was Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344), the precursor of Copernicus in his demonstration of the falseness of the homocentric theory of the structure of the Universe. Gersonides, as he is now called, came to the conclusion that the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* was false, and that the Universe was co-eternal with God. Such a "retrogression" to the semi-gnostic beliefs of the early so-called Christian

sects undermined the whole edifice of the monotheistic Universe.

Next in our gallery of Freethinkers must be placed Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410), who was Rabbi at Saragossa and an ardent admirer of Maimonides. His belief in a conditional Determinism of man's action undoubtedly makes him one of the original proto-Determinists in the line of Jewish Rationalism which found its supreme expression in Benedict Spinoza.

Spinoza was the logical extension of the deeply Rationalistic trend in Jewish philosophy assimilated as it was to Greek and Arab ways of thought. During his short life (1632-1677) he was ostracised by his own community and the Christian defenders of the Word of God. His philosophy of Pantheism is, in our submission, a philosophy of Atheism plus a great deal of unnecessary theological lumber. The Pantheist says, the Universe is God. The Atheist says, the Universe is the Universe. The difference is surely only literary (here we fear the logical Positivists and Semanticists will find an opening!).

The century of Voltaire demolished not only the Christian pretensions to historical truth, but also the Jewish claims to Divine Revelation. With the French Revolution, the Jewish and Christian Rationalist trends in philosophy merged, and Freethought and Reason began to corrode the rotten foundations of eighteen centuries accumulated superstition and uninvestigated authority.

No honest person can say that the Jewish people have not contributed to the general emancipation not only of themselves but of all nations, races and peoples. Reason and straight thinking are not the prerogative of one race or nation—they are a universal attribute of civilised men.

AKIBA.

RESURRECTION

In a Chicago hospital, a young nurse underwent an operation in the course of which her heart stopped beating. For an hour and three-quarters all attempts to revive her by massage produced no effect. The young woman seemed to have passed out beyond any possibility of recall. Then one of the medical staff decided to galvanize her with an electric current of 110 volts right through her unconscious body. A miracle resulted immediately! She moved, her breathing recommenced and, three-quarters of an hour later, opened her eyes: a little later she resumed her duties at the hospital.

However, as was to be expected, journalists crowded round to interview her. Having risen from the dead, perhaps she could reveal the mysteries of the Beyond to us unhappy mortals? "I don't recall anything at all," replied the young woman. The Unknown remains—the Unknown . . . and the Great Sleep—a sleep.

[*La Raison Militante*—translated by F.A.R.]

BRAKE FAILED

The Lord set the Great Machine going,
Got the Devil to polish and strop it;
Set mischief afoot past all knowing—
And hasn't learned yet how to stop it.

A. E. C.

AGE OF REASON. By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 9d., paper 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

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