

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE study of human history reveals that there have been a number of what we may, perhaps, term key periods, decisive ages in the chequered evolution of the human species. One such, perhaps the most important of all, is represented by the rise of Greek philosophy between the sixth and the third century B.C. For it was precisely during this period that human thought emerged from its immemorial theological bondage and for, as far as we know, the first time in human annals, looked at the external universe and at mankind itself, through its own unclouded vision.

That systematic philosophy began with the ancient Greeks, or Hellenes as they called themselves, is, indeed, one assertion upon which virtually everyone is in agreement. For it affords the most convincing proof of the amazingly comprehensive genius of the ancient Greek thinkers that all schools and shades of modern thought are about equally indebted to them. We have in earlier features in this column drawn attention to the ultimate derivation of Christian theology from Greek ideas; and the same is equally true of idealistic philosophy in general. Plato still remains the fountain-head of all anti-materialist trends of thought. Indeed, ever since the Renaissance rediscovered the culture of antiquity, the education of the ruling classes in modern England and Europe has been based on a misunderstood version of Greek culture and philosophy: including, we may add, very particularly, "our old universities" and their preliminary schools which have educated their pupils for centuries in an archaic culture, analagous to that of the traditional Chinese mandarins, entirely remote from the modern world of science and industrial development.

In modern education and in ancient philosophy as taught in our "old universities"—at Oxford, in particular—a one-sided method is exclusively followed: the only Greek philosophy taught is that of the idealistic school or, at any rate, anti-materialist schools. The great figures in "classical philosophy," as interpreted by our University Dons, are Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; Socrates and Plato who are complete idealists, and Aristotle, the so-called "realist" philosophy of whom is a common-sense attempt to combine the incompatible and to "reconcile" the contradictory categories of Idealism and Materialism.

However, in "respectable" academic circles there is one school of philosophy which is passed over and ignored, apparently deliberately in a "conspiracy of silence": we refer to this precise connection, to the materialist schools of philosophy in ancient Greece, the Ionian atomists and the Epicureans. Nonetheless, though ignored in modern education and though their writings were suppressed and, for the most part, destroyed by the Christian Church during its long hey-day, the Greek materialists were the intellectual glory of the ancient world, and it is to such now neglected thinkers as Democritus and Epicurus, rather than to the ultra-reactionary, Plato, or to that synthetic encyclopædic compiler, Aristotle, that we must look for

the high-water mark of Greek philosophy and for its most original contribution to the evolution of human thought.

This last point is well brought out by a number of writers, chiefly French, in recent contributions to this subject. The most recent of these writers, M. Charles Mayer, was recently reviewed in these columns. Another French savant, M. Paul Nizan, has devoted a lucid treatise

to this precise subject: *Les Materialistes de l'antiquité*, in which he gives a concise account of the evolution of Greek materialism and its Roman off-shoot. Among his predecessors in this field was none other than Karl Marx, who received his doctorate in a German university for a thesis on

Epicurus, the best-known though, probably, not the greatest of the Greek materialists, and who had planned to write himself a general history of classical materialism, a plan which, we understand, was never actually executed.

M. Nizan traces the evolution of materialism in ancient Greece from its origins in the atomic physicists of Ionia—Greek-speaking Asia Minor—down to its final obliteration before the rising tide of oriental religion which culminated in the victory of Christianity: the whole development lasting about eight hundred years; beginning about 500 B.C. and ending with the eclipse of ancient Rationalism about A.D. 300. In the main, Greek materialism anticipated that of modern times: it held that the ultimate basis of matter and mind alike is to be found in the physical atom; it denied the subjective existence of the "soul" and rejected immortality. In its best-known form, that of Epicurus, whilst not technically atheistic, it denied to the gods any effective control of the universe or part in determining human affairs, and it regarded life as a purely natural product, with human civilisation as a late evolutionary development.

These are familiar ideas nowadays, but, in the time of their original inception, they marked an almost incredible moral courage and intellectual daring: to defy, as they did, immemorial convention, was an incredible feat: in the moral, if not in the material sense, these ancient Greek pioneers were, surely, the *bravest* men who ever lived; for they effectively defied both all religion and all history prior to their own time. However, M. Nizan points out, that ancient, unlike modern materialism never entirely transcended its technical limitations. As the great Leonardo da Vinci observed long ago, the science of the Greeks was always limited by its lack of technical and experimental implements of research.

M. Nizan reminds us that three great names tower over the known development of classical materialism: indeed, the sub-title of *Les Materialistes de l'antiquité* consists of their names: *Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius*. The first-named flourished in the fifth century B.C. and was probably the most original of the ancient materialists, perhaps, indeed, the greatest of all the Greek philosophers. Epicurus, also a Greek, flourished rather later (341-271 B.C.).

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Greek Materialism

By F. A. RIDLEY

and founded the celebrated School of Philosophy named after him, which lasted for some six centuries down to the triumph of Christianity. Whilst Lucretius was a Roman and a poet, who lived in the first century B.C. and summarised the Epicurean doctrines in a magnificent poem: *On the Nature of Existence (De rerum natura)*, which is, at one and the same time, an epitome of classical materialism and one of the world's greatest poems. It is, no doubt, its latter character that has ensured its survival. The purely philosophical materialists have been less fortunate, only a few fragments of Epicurus have survived. Of Democritus and the Ionian Atomists, practically nothing: of the remaining Epicureans, very little. Compare with these the (literally) religious preservation of the

voluminous works of Plato, "that Christian before Christ" (Nietschze), the idealist forerunner of Bishop Berkeley, the prophet of the Inquisition! Yet we know that Democritus and Epicurus wrote extensively.

It is much to be hoped that modern materialism will be more fortunate in its survival than was its ancient prototype, and that the application of atomic energy will not cause modern materialists to share the oblivion of ancient materialism and of the classical discoverers of the atom! At least, even if catastrophe eventually overtakes our culture, we trust that it will be *The Freethinker* that will survive rather than, say, our contemporary, *The Psychic News*, or the voluminous writings of the professors of Theology!

Monism, E. Haeckel's Post-Christian Religion

By ARTHUR WILD

(Continued from page 359)

ALSO Haeckel gives in his popular works, *The Riddle of the Universe* and *The Wonders of Life*, a survey of the scientific knowledge of his time though he did not write anything comparable to Comte's *Course of Positive Philosophy*. As a scientist Haeckel is opposed to metaphysicians who deny the existence of the outside world. Our knowledge of the world is of real nature and consists of images corresponding to really existing things.

The Darwinian and Spencerian theories of evolution enable Haeckel to see the organic world as a unity—a great advance on Comte who rejects Lamarck's theory of evolution. Haeckel compares the growth of crystals and certain other phenomena of inorganic chemistry and physics with phenomena of life, particularly with the lowest forms of life known in his time. His conclusion is that there is no unbridgeable gap between the inorganic and organic nature, that there is only a difference of degree between both, that living matter developed from the misleadingly so called dead matter in which he agrees with Huxley. There is no dualism of Spirit and Matter. The principle or God is one (Greek monos—therefore monism). It is an eternal substance with two attributes (matter and energy), in later versions with three attributes (matter, energy and psyche). God is nature as in Spinoza's formula "deus sive natura." Haeckel's religion is thus a form of pantheism which in Schopenhauer's and Haeckel's own words is only a more polite way of saying atheism. "The maxim of the pantheist, 'God and the world are one,' is merely a polite way of giving the Lord God his congé." "Our earth shrinks into the slender proportions of a 'mote in the sunbeam,' of which unnumbered millions chase each other through the vast depths of space. Our own 'human nature,' which exalted itself into an image of God in its anthropistic folly, sinks to the level of a placental mammal, which has no more value for the Universe at large than the ant, the fly of a summer's day, the microscopic infusorium, or the smallest bacillus." Being himself an artist—a painter and a writer—Haeckel does not neglect the aesthetic possibilities of his new religion though he does not create any cult systematised like that created by Comte. He admits that myths, whether Christian or other, can have a high aesthetic, ethic and particularly educational value and therefore he does not intend to exclude them entirely from education. They must not, however, be taught as if they were true. In love with Franziska von Altenhausen, he himself speaks about the metempsychosis, Franziska by chance having been born in the year when Haeckel's first wife Anna Sethe died.

In ethics he agrees on the whole with Christianity though he stresses that the Golden Rule "Thou shalt love thy

neighbour as thyself" is of pre-Christian origin and was observed better by the original Christians than later by the Church hierarchy. He also rejects the Christian contempt for one's own self, for the body, the nature, the family and the woman. Unlike Comte and in accordance with Spencer he requires a kind of equilibrium between egoism and altruism, because egoism enables the individual to survive just as altruism contributes to the survival of the species. The Darwinian theory of the struggle for life and the survival of the fittest does not lead Haeckel to the ethics of a Superman as it does Nietzsche and Stirner. Haeckel knows that not only the egoist struggle for life, but also co-operation based on social instincts, which he assumes to have found even in protozoa and in the inorganic nature, is an important factor in the survival of the fittest. From human society he would like to ban entirely the primitive struggle in form of war and murder and reduce it to peaceful competition.

(To be concluded)

Theatre

"Murder Mistaken" by Janet Green. Ambassadors Theatre.

MURDER plots have been used so exhaustively that we may well wonder at anything completely new. But here is a play with an original approach, in which nothing is withheld from the audience, and in which we can watch the murderer give himself away through overconfidence and conceit.

The murderer is played by Derek Farr in an excellent performance. He does not spare himself to portray a shifty, unreliable young man possessed of abnormal mental traits, and it is largely due to his excellent work in the leading part that this play is convincing. But there are also good performances from the rest of the cast, who include Iris Hoey in a short rôle as the murdered wife, Anthony Marlowe as a family solicitor who sees through the crime but has no proof, Brenda de Banzie as the second wife—a moneyed ex-barmaid, Phyllis Morris as an attentive, faithful housemaid, and Patricia Burke who has a remarkable battle of wits with the murderer.

All these characters are clearly drawn and the play, which has been neatly constructed and written, has been efficiently produced by John McCormick.

This play is on for a short run, but we have every reason to expect that after this run it will make a welcome return to some other theatre in the not far future.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

Interpretations

By GEORGE ROSS

BIBLE interpretations are prodigious in number. Dr. Mill estimated the variants of the New Testament at 30,000, since greatly increased. "Saladin," in his *God and His Book*, p. 42, claimed that 800,000 various readings of the Bible were admitted. The doctrine that nothing shall be added to, or taken from, Revelation (Rev. xxii, 18-19) seems useless. Some twenty years ago, Dr. Robert Eisler, Professor of Historical Research at Vienna University, shocked the orthodox by his hunchback picture of Jesus, his characterisation of some of Jesus's followers as of the gunman type; his presentation of Jesus on trial as "a rebel, robber, a rebel thirsting for the crown," and the resurrection of Jesus explained by Twin-Brother theory. Leon de Sousa, in his *Now in this Time*, follows Eisler re trial of Jesus, and re his armed followers, and interprets the name of Iscariot for Judas. Judas joined the armed followers of Jesus; these men carried a dagger, called *sica* in Latin; the Romans called these men Sicarii, whence the Jewish Shkariot or Iscariot (p. 158). The rude remark of Jesus, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" (John II, 4) is interpreted as "Woman, what matters it to thee and me" (p. 272).

A schoolboy had his interpretation when he said that Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived; he had hundreds of wives, and he slept with his fathers. At the other end of the wide range there are the wildly allegorical interpretations of Pope Innocent III, when demanding obedience from the Greek Church, that (1) St. Peter leaping into the sea to meet the risen Lord, and (2) Peter for a moment walking on a previous occasion with Christ, betokened the Pope's right of domination over all mankind, since the ancient gloss on the Psalms interprets "many waters" in the sense of the whole world (see Dr. G. G. Coulton's *Medieval Scene*).

In Matthew xix, 24, appears, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. . . ." Some bibliolaters have told me that "the eye of a needle" was a narrow gateway. Here it is of interest to know something about the Eastern version of the Four Gospels, a translation from the native Galilean Aramaic by G. M. Lamsa, a native Assyrian. The Aramaic word, *gamla*, is the same word for camel and for a large rope. The Aramaic word for a certain large piece of money, *kakra*, talent, is like the word used for province. The difference is distinguished by a single dot, according to the letter over which it is placed. The confusion is seen in the parable of the nobleman (Luke xix, 17, 19) who rewarded his servants, not with coins, but with cities. In Aramaic an insane man is called *dewana*. Mark I, 34, reads that Jesus "suffered not the devils to speak." The Aramaic is that "he did not allow the insane to speak." A boy "had a dumb spirit" (Mark ix, 17). Aramaic was that disease had caused dumbness, and not that the Spirit was dumb. Jesus "was casting out a devil and it was dumb" (Luke xi, 14), in Aramaic is: Jesus "was casting out a demon from a dumb man." In Luke iv, 41, "the devils came out of many, crying out and saying." In Aramaic, "demons also came out of many, who cried out saying." Many instances of difficulty occur by words having different meanings. The Aramaic *al* means "to enter into," "attack," "chase." In Matt. viii, 31, we have that the demons entered into the swine. According to the context and style of Aramaic speech, the word *al* here means that the lunatics, not the demons, attacked the swine. Finally, in the Lord's Prayer,

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," the Aramaic version is, "And do not let us enter into temptation, but deliver us from error."

Also of interest are the explanations in Solomon Reinach's "Orpheus." "Jesus is said to be of Nazareth because a prophet foretold that the Messiah should be a Nazarene. Isaiah, who is invoked in this connection, said nothing of the sort: he spoke of a branch or scion, in Hebrew, *natser* (Isaiah 53, 2) [as "tender plant"—"root"]. The error is probably to be traced to Judges xiii, 5 and 7, which speaks of Samson as the *nazir* (saint) of God: it is none the less gross on this account. But the name of the little town of Nazareth does not appear in any text before the Christian era, and seems to have been introduced to meet the exigencies of a prophecy that had been misunderstood.

Jesus was born at Bethlehem because Micah (v. 2) had foretold that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem. He was taken into Egypt because the Lord had said "I have called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea xi, 1). All these coincidences which seemed formerly not only to attest the veracity of the Gospel narrative, but the Divine character of the facts it set forth, now furnish irrefragable proof of their instability" (pp. 231-2).

Dr. G. G. Coulton said, "No book lends itself more easily than the Bible to a partisan interpretation. . . . Where licence of interpretation was not enough, there came the licence of frank forgery" (*Romanism and Truth*, vol. 1, p. 20). He gives samples of the Papal orders "amending" Divine relation and Divine inspiration: "Popes have led the way with historical falsehoods. The first papally-authorized edition of the Bible, published by Sixtus V, in 1590, under anathema to all who should use any other, was found to be so grossly incorrect that the Blessed Robert Bellarmine needed all his learning and all his diplomacy to save his Church from public derision. Two years later, Clement VIII published, under similar anathema, a new revision which differed in more than 3,000 places from the Sixtine Bible. Again, Alfonso de Castro, one of the great anti-Lutheran writers of the sixteenth century, arguing that Popes may err in matters of faith, writes thus . . . 'For, since it is well known that many of them have been so illiterate as to be utterly ignorant of grammar [i.e., of ordinary Latin], how should they be able to interpret Holy Scripture?'" (vol. II, pp. 228-9). Dr. Coulton mentions that "the Petrine text in Matthew xvi was not applied to Peter's person by the majority of the earlier Fathers. The Rock, as the majority understood it, was not the man, but his confession of the Messiahship of Christ" (vol. I, p. 20). The present Papal interpretation of the Petrine text—regarded by scholars as an interpolation—is well known.

A significant difference in interpretations occurs in Genesis I and II, where the Hebrew, *nephesh hayyah*, is translated "living creature" or "moving creature" concerning all non-human life, but the same Hebrew phrase is given as "living soul" in the case of man. This constitutes "the soul forgery." Nobody seems to know about it.

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Acid Drops

It is not only in the Bible that we find religious imbecilities. Faithful to God's Word, the journals devoted to various sects appear to vie with each other in even worse stupidities—as, for example, a sheet called *The Gospel Searchlight* quotes a Dr. Chauncey L. Barber as saying, "Sixty per cent. of all babies born to cigarette-smoking mothers die before they are two years old." Not, be it noticed, cigarette-smoking fathers!

The idea behind this twaddle is that women should not smoke—and no doubt Dr. Barber and the idiots who believe him would like to extend their prohibition to the theatre or cinema, or to card playing, or to cycling, or to all the other agreeable occupations which the religious-ridden minds of so many Christians seem to think lead to the Devil. But what unmitigated liars these Christian sects can produce!

We are always being told as "news," and great news at that, that the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress* are the world's best sellers. It is true that the Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages and dialects, and Bunyan's classic into 147—but the real question is—who these days ever reads them? No book in the world has been so boosted as the Bible and no book is so little read. The idea that an Australian aborigine or an African pigmy in the jungle will read with delight Elijah's aerial flight in a chariot or that of Jesus with a Devil is really fantastic. And what would they do with Habbakuk or Obadiah?

The other evening the Secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society broadcast a talk on translating the Bible in Bengali and in Hindi and, we are sure, appeared to think if only these new versions become known, all India will foresake Krishna for Christ immediately. He did not stop to explain the Bible's colossal failure in England after centuries of not only the most intense propaganda, but also of dozens of "accurate" translations. Why do people no longer read the Bible here? Has it been found out?

In any case, we are curious to know which Bible was translated into Bengali and Hindi? Was it our Authorised Version or the Revised Version which differs from it in hundreds of places? Was it Mgr. Knox's new translation of the Vulgate, or that known as the Douay? Was it Young's or Moffatt's or an American version? But surely, the idea that the Bible can now be palmed off on to "native" races as God's own Precious word after it has been more or less rejected by intelligent people in the Western world is just laughable.

And laughable also is some of the teaching during religious lessons at school. At one of these, in Stour Provost, Dorset, a boy told his teacher, the Rev. W. Uphill, that a sorcerer was a man who drives a flying saucer! But is this any funnier than Jesus stopping a storm or an ass speaking in pure Hebrew to Balaam?

According to a Mr. Hetherington a ghost is a regular visitor to his rooms and, with other apparitions, tickles his feet at night. But according to the owner of the house, a Mrs. Bennett, to say there are ghosts in her house "is pure hooley." At a rent tribunal recently, she declared that she does get "the jitters" sometimes. She saw "a figure in white" one day but it turned out to be Mrs. Hetherington; and it appeared that the other tenants had been frightened

away by the Hetheringtons' stories to get them out of the house. If the truth were known, most, if not all, ghost stories begin something in this way.

In one of his latest broadcasts Mr. Wilfred Pickles visited the Marble Arch and reproduced some of the speeches from the queer and other sects which let off steam there. He gave special prominence to the Salvation Army, the speaker for which boasted how a few weeks' mission brought about 1,500 people to Christ. It was noticeable, however, that Mr. Pickles did not give his hearers the antidote—that is, not a word from the Secularist platform. Listeners might have found out that at the Marble Arch there is always a vigorous campaign against religion—against all religions, including Mr. Pickles' Roman Catholicism as well. But that would have been too much even for him.

News from Lewes

YOU'LL be relieved to hear that, in Lewes, "Pope Paul V" was burnt to the last firework stuffed inside him again this year. It's a tradition of the town and it's carried out with an elan which would amaze a foreign visitor to this otherwise undemonstrative country.

On November 5 in Lewes, barrels of burning pitch are hurled into the Ouse, streets are ablaze with torchlight processions (rival ones, and flames falling everywhere), and squibs explode down anyone's back. It's a prodigious outburst for an English town, and it's all in the cause of Down With Popery.

The anti-papists are divided into guilds, some of which are merging their activities so that to-day the men in the traditional Zulu dresses, with towers of head feathers, march side by side with cowboys and oriental potentates. The Cliffe Bonfire Society, the oldest and proudest, however, preserve independence. They fear that if all the guilds are centralised, Civic Authority may find it easier to get control and turn the bloody occasion into a polite carnival.

The Cliffe Bonfire folk, who name their members "boys" and "girls" irrespective of age and splendour in Viking costumes, are determined to preserve the spirit behind the pageant. Their guild contains a Captain of Effigies, a Captain of Tar Barrels and a Captain of Banners; and all valiantly resist suppression.

Every year, when the time draws near, the local papers are full of pious letters begging the citizens to refrain from pope burning. And in the past there were mighty fights when many were injured. They are listed in an historical outline published by the Vikings. For instance, in 1839 there was extensive rioting owing to attempts by the Authorities to get the pitchers of bonfires to substitute a mere Guy Fawkes for the effigy of the pope; and in 1847, the London police were drafted to Lewes to stop the proceedings. So far, the Vikings have won.

Incidentally, connoisseurs will admire the charm of the printed history; for, when the "boys" and "girls" have no special comment to make on a year, they content themselves with proud statements: "We walk alone," "Still alone, no surrender to Rome," or "Down With Canon Law."

So, on one night every year, Lewes blazes with coloured fire, and one can imagine the priest peeping fearfully from behind the curtains of the presbytery.

It's a fine ceremony. Let us hope that one day it will be finer, that the thousands of faces flickering in torchlight will shout not only for the burning of popes but also for the cremation of god.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

E. SMEDLEY.—Thank you for cutting and good wishes. We heartily reciprocate.

K. LIDAKS.—Will you please limit the amount of your correspondence. The number of letters that we can publish is, unfortunately, limited.

We gratefully acknowledge donation of £1 to *The Freethinker* from Mrs. K. Swift, Dublin.

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. In U.S.A., \$3.50.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

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.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

INDOOR

Accrington Discussion Class (King's Hall Cinema, Whalley Rd.).—Sunday, November 23, 6-30 p.m.: J. CLAYTON, "Freethought—a Retrospect."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: A. H. WHARRAD, "Danger, Christians at Work."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 25, 7 p.m.: W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., "The Future of Our Museums."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: P. V. MORRIS (Gen. Sec., N.S.S.), "Youth's Need of Freethought."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street). — Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: A Lecture, "Yugoslavia To-day."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "The Democratic Principle."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Egyptian Origins of Christianity."

Sugar Plums

Our contemporary, *The Rationalist Annual* for 1953, preserves the high standard that its predecessors have taught us to expect. The present issue covers a wide range of subjects including such widely disparate subjects as "The Scientific Study of Criminals" by Lord Chorley, reminiscences of Thomas Hardy by Mr. Royston Pike, and a critique of Alfred Russell Wallace by the eminent anthropologist, Sir Arthur Keith, whilst Mr. Victor E. Neuberg again directs our attention to that bizarre poetic genius, James Thomson. An intriguing feature, perhaps new to the journal in which it appears, is provided by Mr. Avro Manhattan, better known as the historian of the Catholic Church, who plunges boldly into interplanetary space and discusses *The Bewildering Mystery of Mars*, altogether an attractive number. *The Rationalist Annual* costs 2s. 6d., and can be obtained from the R.P.A., 4-6, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.4.

Next Sunday, November 23, the speaker at the weekly meeting at *The Laurie Arms* on behalf of the West London Branch, N.S.S., is Mr. J. Martin Alexander. Mr. Alexander has taken for his subject one not often discussed in Freethought circles nowadays, *The Egyptian Origins of Christianity*. This represents a fruitful line of inquiry which has been left uncultivated since Gerald Massey wrote his monumental works on the Egyptian roots of Christianity, "Out of Egypt Have I Called My Son." For example, the Doctrine of the Trinity certainly derives from Egypt, and its chief Christian exponent, St. Athanasius, was an Egyptian. Mr. Alexander is a specialist on this fascinating theme, and we are sure that he will provide much unusual information for his audience.

Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, Public Relations Officer of the R.P.A., asks us to request any of our readers who have listened in to the "question mark" series on the "Light" programme of the B.B.C. to send him any reasoned comments that may have occurred to them. The series in question claimed to be half from non-Christians and half from Christians. Mr. Bonner's address is 4-6, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

Correspondence

CYMRIC SPELLING

SIR,—The amusing protest to my letter by our pedantic friend, Mr. Prynne, calls for a reply.

In regard to the spelling of the word "Stevenson," I always spell it in the way that the author of "Treasure Island" spelt his name, which, as Bernard Shaw would have said, sounds more musical.

In regard to the name Trevechick, I spell it in the correct Cymric way. Tre means "home" and "Fethic" (for there is no K in the Cymric language) is the name of a treacherous Cymric chieftain who went over to the invading barbaric Saxons many centuries ago, when Cornwall was a Cymric county in West Wales. The name "TreFethic" really means "Home of TreFethic."

In regard to his statement that he is a "Cornishman," this is simply a manifestation that he has not yet shed his tribal instincts, and "Tribalism" I regard as a mental form of atavism, from which I myself suffered for many years, until I read "The Rights of Man." Then I cast it off, and to-day "the World is my Country" and not Cornwall, Middlesex, or any other county. I am not disrespectful to present day Trevechicks, and it is not the name, but what the man does, that counts, for

We do not pick our ancestors,

We can't be what we choose,

Bernard Shaw was strong T.T.

Whilst Shakespeare loved his booze.

—Yours, etc.,

46, Gelligaer Street, Cardiff.

PAUL VARNEY.

P.S.—Prynne is also an ancient Cymric word, and means "buying." It is pronounced with the accent on Pryn, thus Pryn/ne.

WHAT DOES SCIENCE MEAN?

SIR,—The latent element of sense in Freda Peckman's letter is completely nullified by her ridiculous charge against science as "assuming infallible and universal knowledge."

This foolish statement merely broadcasts the fact that she evidently has not even an elementary knowledge of the scientific outlook.—Yours, etc.,

M. C. BROTHERTON.

Faith or Fudge?

In time of tribulation

The parson has his say,

Consoling and explaining

As is the parson's way.

Come horror, fire, flood, famine.

Death, ruin, dire reverse,

God sent it in His wisdom;

Thank God it wasn't worse!

P. V. M.

Play and Passion

By J. EFFEL

WHEN Alec M'Conkey burst in on me the other day, he was all dressed up Yankee fashion. He removed his ten-gallon hat, slacked his lurid necktie, which was backed by a shirt of alleged tartan, sank into an easy chair, fixed a cheroot in his face and lit up. I knew there was a good yarn coming, so I put the decanter handy as the usual preliminary.

"It was this Youth for Christ racket that set us going," he commenced. "Yes, the last you heard of me was from County Cork, where we were on location, shooting scenes for 'Blarney Girl.' Elmer B. Syles was directing, and we finished our assignment ahead of schedule. That actually put Elmer at a loose end, but as he has plenty of dough he fixed me up to take him on a tour of Ulster, before he returned to Hollywood. That brought us to the Youth for Christ meeting. I thought we were going to a football fixture—'some kind of a ball game,' as Elmer put it. Well, there were over fifty thousand suckers at the gathering, as you must have seen by the papers, massed bands, girls' choirs, loud speakers, enthusiasm and ballyhoo. My American buddy was staggered at the enormous success of the show. As we were making for an easier position I was caught in a beam of intense light from a high electric lamp newly switched on. I was blinded for a second or two, then I had another flash, this time to my soul! 'Saint Paul on the Damascus Road' I said to the little American, who must have thought I had gone crackers. He suffered me to lead him from the great 'Convention,' and eventually to Sweeney's saloon. I gave Joe the tip, and we were accommodated in his own little office where we could speak freely without company.

"'Elmer, wake up,' I said vehemently, 'We're in the money, or soon will be. Youth for Christ, but Christ is for more than youth. Oh, glorious Paul, I have had the vision. Why look for stories, why search for something new, when the old, old story still pulls them in? Yes, Elmer B. Syles, you think I'm nuts, but just listen. . . .'

"It was only when we got to Ballygoeasy the following day that Elmer saw the glorious prospect in all its full glory. Ned Fogarty, the local bookmaker, was very helpful, and the American was not slow in taking the suggestion to contribute liberally to Father Snuffagin's charities. Well, my big idea was to stage a Passion Play in the outskirts of Ballygoeasy, and to make a film of it. You see, at Ober-Ammergau they only run the performance once in ten years, we'd run it ten times a day if we could. Now, don't get me wrong, we had no idea of waiting for the patronage of the big guys in the distributing of the film. America is not only New York and Chicago, and Elmer knows his territory. He soon figured out where he could show his picture and rake in the dough. Meantime, our first concern was to cast it, and get it going. The villagers cooperated freely, we took on a few old-timers who had been on the 'Blarney' set; we were fortunate in the local who was to play Our Lord, an eccentric giant who had a touch of religious mania; he had a splendid appearance, and a lovely speaking voice. All seemed to be going well, when Mary Magdalen, who was very temperamental, hit Saint Peter with a porter bottle, and walked off the set. Then the Mother of God, who in real life was married to Pontius Pilate (he has the fist and chip shop in the Square), was friendly with Judas Iscariot. It wasn't difficult to replace the Magdalen, for Jezebels are three a penny in Ballygoeasy, and even virgin mothers are not unknown. So we surmounted those difficulties, but it was a terrible blow when we were left without a Saviour to crucify. Our Jesus

had started complaining about the weight of his cross, and the severity of the stripes he had to bear; someone had put into his head the idea of a 'stand in' and he began to make demands which could not be granted. Still, we went ahead, and were in sight of a triumphant finish when the blow fell. We do not shoot on Sunday, and on Monday morning Our Lord did not appear. We soon knew the reason. He had gone to his home in Drogheda on Saturday evening; he had torn up a young tree by the roots, carried it into the chapel, screaming that it was a far better thing than he had ever done before. Unfortunately, he had a mental history, and he was now back in an asylum. The whole project would have to be abandoned; poor Elmer was in tears, for to find a new Saviour at this stage seemed utterly hopeless. We moped about all day, in the cool of the evening going for a stroll. Then the miracle happened. Dropping off a lorry, a big man of the tramp class came towards us. 'Could one of you dacent gentlemen spare me the price of a pint?' he asked in scrounging tones. I was on the point of giving him a shilling, when little Elmer startled me by clutching the vagrant by his vivid red beard, and behaving like a demented creature. 'The price of a pint, you goldarned galoot, I'll give you the price of gallons if you'll be my Christ.'

That's how we got our new Saviour, Tim O'Mara, the tinker, who had just hitch-hiked from Mullingar. He had not been seen in Ballygoeasy for years, but many had vivid memories of him. It was said that once it took six peelers to arrest him, and he was reputed to have knocked out the great Jim Boyle in a straight fight; all the same, he was as gentle as a baby if only he was kept off the drink. Tim was a man of fine intelligence, and I got him to see reason. I drew rosy pictures of the good times that lay ahead, when he need never be sober. We gave him no money, I kept close always, and everyone was warned not to treat him. All went well, he carried his heavy cross as if it was the weight of a ping-pong bat, and he let the mob knock him about as they liked. Elmer was delighted. Came the ultimate crucifixion scene. Now, I must tell you that the script of Elmer B. Syles differed slightly from Holy Writ. One interpolation was of a malicious Jew who always mocked Jesus in a most provocative manner. This part was played by a misshapen little man, a native of Poland, who had taken refuge in Ballygoeasy after the first war. He went from door to door selling little odds and ends, and was quite popular. But he and Tim had been business rivals in the past, and the Jew, being undersized, and having language difficulties, came off badly against the giant tinker. Think of wee Abie Weiner's joy when he was in a position to get his own back on the big Irish bully. He could curse him, mock him, strike him, call him pig, and even spit upon him. And not only could he get away with it, he was actually being paid for it. Abie felt it was worth while being a Jew after all. I had to admit that this Christ-baiting scene would be spectacular, but I was always apprehensive that big Tim would crack under the strain.

Our crowd scenes were splendid, and Elmer took full advantage of our native material. But we hadn't the resources of big production, with the result that our camera was changing about frequently, shooting a scene here, and a bit somewhere else. Although this meant longer hours, it gave numerous breaks for a smoke and chat. For the last lap on his long trail came the Master carrying his cross. Tim acted gloriously, registering

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Making Religion Pay

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

THOSE meetings being held each week at the London Coliseum continued to intrigue me after I had done what I could to expose how the first Sunday's crowds had been attracted by blatantly misleading advertising. When I read the advertisements for the following week's meetings I noted that the wording no longer conveyed the idea that a cinematograph film dealing with modern astronomy was to be shown, but the anonymous nature of the announcements remained.

I couldn't understand this, but felt that, at any rate, the more straightforward advertising would not attract such large crowds as the original misleading kind had done. In this I proved to be correct, as the number of meetings each Sunday has been reduced from three to two, and no further reports have appeared in the Press of large crowds being unable to gain admittance, as was the case on the first Sunday. Still, to take the Coliseum at all week after week is some undertaking, and, as Secretary of the National Secular Society, I am not above getting a tip from the organisers of religious gatherings if I can. So I thought I'd go again to one of these meetings, poor as I had found the mental and spiritual fare provided on the previous occasion; and I chose a week when the subject was the titillating one: "The Secret of Happy Marriage."

Arriving just before the advertised time for the programme to begin, I obtained a comfortable stall seat with no difficulty. This part of the house was fairly well filled, but I could not see whether the same applied to the balconies. I was handed a programme, and noted that there would be the same lengthy preliminaries, an organ prelude, hymn singing, choir items, tenor solos by Ben Glanzer, prayer, announcements and the offering, before Mr. G. E. Vandeman's address. I was interested to see that the announcements would be made by Mr. T. J. Bradley, as I had received a letter from him after I had protested to the management of the Coliseum against the misleading of the public by the advertising of the first meeting. In this letter he had denied that advertisements of "magnificent screen pictures filmed through giant telescopes" was a misleading description of magic-lantern slides, but had then let the cat out of the bag by adding: "I have no doubt in my mind, of course, that the average person might primarily think of screen and film with an ordinary cinema show in mind, for that is the thing they are most used to." He should now know that the N.S.S. will not allow such tactics to go unchallenged, for my reply to his letter stated: "Far from discontinuing the exposure of the questionable methods used to attract audiences to your Coliseum series of meetings, I am doing my best to draw as much public attention to them as possible."

Mr. Bradley's announcements were largely concerned with getting members of the audience to fill their names and addresses on a slip included with the programme and to hand this to an usher. Various offers were made to induce them to do this. They could have a free printed copy of the address "Secret of Happy Marriage," or copies of any of the previous five addresses, or their names could be included in the "Greater London Prayer Circle," or "twenty-four free lessons on the great teachings and prophecies of the Bible" for home reading, could be had, all in exchange for this slip bearing a name and address. I said to my neighbour in the next seat, an elderly man who had joined in the hymns and the prayers, "I happen to know that the organisers of these meetings are the Seventh

Day Adventists. Can you tell me why that fact has never been mentioned in the advertising, on the printed programmes or by the people on the platform?" "I'm afraid I can't," he said, and added, "It's rather strange." I hope my questions sowed a seed from which further thought has sprung. Since the organisation behind the meetings persists in remaining anonymous, it cannot complain if the few who become aware of its name arrive at an explanation that has occurred to me.

Here it is. Seventh Day Adventists are required to give one-tenth of their incomes to their Church. Obviously, most people will fight shy of such a body at first. Still, the gaining of a convert represents to the Church the acquisition of a life annuity from the member, and insurance companies have worked out the capital values of life annuities for all conceivable cases. So, if the Seventh Day Adventists can secure a convert for less than the capital value of the life annuity he or she brings, the transaction is profitable from the business point of view. It seems to me, therefore, that what the organisers of the Coliseum meetings are doing, from the strictly business aspect, is seeking to get annuities at a lower rate than their cost in the money market.

What seems to be the plan is this. First get hold of big crowds. Sensational and not over-scrupulous advertising will do the trick. Keep in the background anything likely to deter the crowds from turning up. Once you get the crowds, most of whom have been rendered uncritical by an average education and are accustomed to regular doses of supernaturalism administered by teachers, the press, the cinema and the B.B.C., you should be able to find among them a proportion worth your special attention. Get their addresses by coupon offers. Later work on them and make them think that to stand well with Jesus when he comes in the not-distant future may justify dropping smoking, drinking, dancing and going to the cinema in order to make the necessary insurance premium available?

Life insurance companies know the capital values of life annuities, and would regard it as good business to be able to acquire such annuities at a lower rate than their cost in the regular market. The Seventh Day Adventists' Church is reputed to be a wealthy body. Is this because it has been successful in this kind of profitable trading? Does the present lavish expenditure over the meetings at the Coliseum represent a shrewd investment of capital that can be regarded from the business point of view as the purchase of life annuities at a low rate? If so, it is clear that no very great number of converts is required to make the meetings and the advertising productive of financial profit. Freethought has nothing to fear from such campaigns, since all that is involved is the transfer of simple and superstitious folk from other sects to the Seventh Day Adventists; what is deplorable is that society is intellectually and morally unable to appreciate the stupidity and futility of such activities in an age when problems of the gravest nature receive scant attention. That is what Freethinkers and Secularists have to change.

TWO GEESE

I know a parson who takes his goose out in a pram to get more food for it. I am amazed at the resourcefulness of the clergy.—The Venerable Archdeacon Moore of Norwich, *The Observer*, November 9, 1952.

The Indian Rationalist Brussel's Report

RATIONALIST thought in India has a very old history. Hundreds of years before the beginning of the Christian Era, "Kapila," the founder of the "Sankhya" School of Indian Philosophy, said that the idea of God is invalid as there is no proof of its existence. And Sankhya was recognised by the Hindus as one of the six great schools of philosophy. Charvak, one of the many atheistic philosophers, declared that the religious rituals are mere deceptions practised by the priestcraft. He dismissed the concept of life-after-death and advised people to work for the improvement of life-in-this-world and not wait for a life hereafter. All through the history of Indian thought Rationalist approach to life and its problems ran concurrently with the religious and mystic view of life. Speculation of philosophy was freer and heretical views more tolerated in India compared to European countries. Later, this spirit of free inquiry declined along with the decline of social and political evolution. The Rationalist Movement in Modern India owes its inspiration more to European than to Ancient Indian Rationalism.

In the early years of British rule in India, we had religious revival with a curious mixture of Rationalist thought. Pioneers of Modern Indian Renaissance like Rammohan Roy were products of European Renaissance and Ancient Indian Rationalism. The nationalist movement also stimulated revolt against constituted authority and tradition in the domain of thought. But the existence of an alien ruler monopolised the attention of the rebellious spirit.

With the withdrawal of the British, the Rationalists of India felt the necessity of organising themselves on an All-India basis. There were local groups and individual Rationalists spread all over India. But they had no contact with each other. One society at Madras was more than a thousand miles away from another in Lahore. Moreover, there are more than a dozen different languages or dialects in India.

The Rationalist Press Association Ltd., of London, helped us in our task. The Madras Group of the R.P.A. took the initiative in convening the First All-India Convention of Rationalists. The R.P.A. also helped us with a supply of literature. This Convention held in the city of Madras was a great success. Rationalists from all parts of the country attended the Convention. Several thousands attended and listened to the deliberation. Rationalists belonging to all political parties participated. The leading national dailies and weeklies wrote leading editorials supporting or criticising the Rationalist view expressed in the Convention.

It was significant that the presidential address and the resolutions of this and subsequent Conventions focused attention mainly on social, political and economic theories and practices rather than on mere religious theories. The first booklet brought out by the Indian Rationalist Association is about the Population Problem and Contraception. We have been successful in drawing the notice of the people on this problem. As a result there has been a conference of Demographers and the Government of India is now trying to introduce methods of birth control.

The I.R.A. has just started its own journal with Mr. S. Ramanathan, a veteran Rationalist, as its editor. It has also undertaken the publication of booklets on problems of the day.

There are about a dozen local groups spread all over India. They meet regularly once a week or a fortnight. The parent group in Madras consists of brilliant intellectuals. Unlike the European movement the Rationalist movement in South India has a mass support. Leaders like E. V. Ramaswamy Naiker, S. Ramanathan, or Annadurai attract thousands of people when they address Rationalist meetings.

In Delhi City alone, two local groups are functioning. Every week intellectuals from all walks of life assemble and participate in the discussion. There is an art section of one of the groups where writers, journalists, musicians, painters with progressive outlook come and organise dramatic performances or songs, etc. The organiser of this group, Prof. Tangri, is considered as an able writer of progressive dramas and songs.

The Indian Rationalist Association tries to keep in contact with sister societies in other countries, and we thankfully acknowledge the encouragement we get from them.

India is a vast country peopled mainly by poor peasants with a primitive mode of agriculture and industry. The poor primitive life hardly encourages freethought. Most of the energy and time in such a life is consumed in the struggle for mere animal existence. The financial position of the I.R.A. reflects the poverty of the people. But we are not discouraged. We are sure to grow in strength and win the battle against Ignorance, Credulity and Superstition. We seek co-operation of all the Freethinkers of the world and pledge our co-operation in building a Rational view of life for man.

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nobility, resignation, acceptance of suffering, then as he sank to the ground came the voice of the director:—

"Cut. Splendid, Tim. Now, boys and girls, we'll be back in five minutes." Abie was standing beside me and I handed them both cigarettes. As Tim was lighting his, Abie playfully blew out the match. It was a tactical blunder. In an instant Jesus was on his feet, and had the little Jew by the throat. I quickly intervened, and to my great relief Tim relaxed his hold.

Gone was all the gentleness of demeanour and sweetness of expression. With his great hands outstretched he declaimed, as trickles of blood oozed from his crown of thorns:—

"You're right, Alec, I'll not disgrace meself now, but his durty action was in character, but I'm a Christian, begob, and will remain so till the film's in the can. Another half-hour will see me through. Now, Abie Weiner, me bould Yiddisher, I'm forgiving you, indade, I'm humbly grateful to you for all your durty insults, and you can carry on till 'tis all over, so. I'll bear it all as the Master would, praying for you and the likes of you, 'Father forgive them. . . .' But let me warn you, here and now, ye durty misbegotten schnorrer, that me non-resistance is low, and me ould Adam is strong. You're safe now, Abie lad, while I'm gentle Jesus meek and mild, but just you wait till after the glorious resurrection, and I'll tear your stinkin' carcass limb from limb. . . ."

"Now, then, all on the last set," bawled the megaphone. With a look of extreme suffering, mental and physical, Tim O'Mara took up his cross for the last time.

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