

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIII—No. 13

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Price Fourpence

CONSPICUOUS amongst the exhibitions of culture to be found at present in London is a most remarkable exhibition of Mexican art, both past and present, at the Tate Gallery, Westminster. This exhibition, partly loaned by the Mexican Government, and partly by private collectors, has been already on view in Paris and in Stockholm, the capitals, respectively, of, perhaps, the two most civilised lands in Europe. It will be on view in London until April 26. One can, we think, legitimately comment that, if the London Press gave as much publicity to a superb exhibition of human culture such as this as they do to the senseless and sycophantic circus-mongering ballyhoo about the forthcoming Coronation, such a procedure would augur favourably for the current state of the national intelligence!

Those of us, and the present writer is one, who read our Prescott with rapt attention in our early youth will strike a responsive echo to the glories of the great New World civilisation which was obliterated, overnight as it were, by the iron-clad Spanish conquerors from beyond the sea. And though the progress of subsequent research by more modern Americanists, has modified some aspects of the glowing picture of the extinct civilisation of the Aztecs and their precursors, as drawn by the great historian, enough remains in the twin fields of archaeology and art, both richly represented in the Tate Exhibition, to indicate the existence amongst the aboriginal races of America before the Spanish conquest, of a high state of material culture and of the existence of an ancient civilisation, the earliest extant remains of which are contemporary with the earliest monuments of European art and culture.

From the two immortal works of Prescott, perhaps not the most scientifically exact but still easily the most brilliant and comprehensive narratives of the Spanish Conquest, we have become familiar with the idea of two "Indian" empires, in particular, as dominating and representing the New World civilisations before Columbus. Following, it seems, a secret trade-route already known to the Italian mercantile adventurers of the Middle Ages, he found his way to the West Indies. Everyone, "every schoolboy" in Macaulay's customary phrase, has heard of the Aztecs of Mexico and of the Incas of Peru. However, whilst the empires of the ill-fated Montezuma and of his Peruvian contemporaries represented the two leading States on the American continent at the beginning of the 16th century, this state of things had not always been so and was, in fact, comparatively recent. Neither the Aztecs nor the Incas had enjoyed this proud position of pre-eminence for more than about half-a-century, and the entire history of both the Aztecs and the Incas did not go back much over two centuries before the Spanish Conquest.

Beyond Aztec and Inca alike stretched in shadowy succession a whole series of empires and civilisations,

richly represented by a profusion of artistic and archaeological remains. Actually, most of the great monuments of native American culture which, at their best, rival the Pyramids in their immensity and in their grandiose magnificence, and sometimes, as in mathematical and astronomical accuracy, surpassed the science of pre-modern Europe, were far older than either the Aztecs or the Incas. In Central America the recently excavated cities of the Mayas in Yucatan, long buried beneath the primeval jungle, date back prior to the Christian era, long before the Aztecs came down from the Far North. Similarly, the colossal fortresses of the Peruvian

Andes, those inexplicable creations of races without either iron or large beasts of burden, date back far beyond "the socialist empire of the Incas," which has so often aroused the interest of modern sociologists and socialists.

Actually, and here the now century-old Prescott is not an altogether reliable guide in the light of modern discovery, both the Aztecs of Montezuma and the still more romantic Incas of Peru, represented empires in full decay at the time of the Spanish Conquest. It is unlikely that either would have survived the current (16th) century had not the white gods from the West, with their horses, guns and steel armour—not to mention the blessing of the Catholic Church!—descended like a bolt from the blue upon the unhappy natives, to put a summary end to a culture of immemorial antiquity. For the forerunners of the Aztecs, the Maya and Aztec priest-kings of Central America, had built mighty cities and had scientifically mapped out the skies, whilst the ancestors of Cortez and Pizarro were illiterate barbarians scratching penuriously in their northern forests.

Actually, the romantic liberal writers of the early 19th century, such as Marmontel and Chateaubriand, in the tradition of whom Prescott followed, painted a largely imaginary and much overcoloured picture of "the noble Indian." It has been aptly remarked that "the noble savage" of Rousseau and of his Romantic followers was, in reality, merely "a French philosopher who had taken off his clothes." Similarly, the "noble redskins" of the New World, as painted by Chateaubriand and Fenimore Cooper, bore a very remote resemblance to reality. The culture of the Aztecs, in particular, is, no doubt, correctly summarised by the official catalogue of the Tate Exhibition as "a death culture." Our authority adds that "the art of the Aztecs is a passionate art in the service of religion, a religion which worshipped destructive powers, death, and bloodthirsty and cruel gods."

One can relevantly add that, as so often in religious history, the Aztecs of Mexico made their gods in their own image, a fierce warrior tribe, who bore much the same relationship to their more civilised predecessors, the Mayas and Toltecs, as the similarly barbaric Goths and Vandals had borne to the civilised Greeks and Romans whom they

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The White Gods of Mexico

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

conquered. One can also add that, except for their superior military technique based on horses, iron and the newly-discovered gunpowder, the Spanish Conquerors were not much more humane than the man-hunting Aztecs whom they overthrew. Though, actually, it would be more accurate to say that the Spaniards were "the rejoicing third" in an "Indian" civil war than that they conquered Mexico single-handed.

As many horrifying pictures in the present Exhibition indicate in gruesome detail, the ruthless war between Christian Spaniards and Pagan Aztecs was waged, on both sides, with equal savagery; for the Conquest represented Nature in the raw; there was no "Geneva Convention" in force when Cortez marched in and out of Mexico! The captured Spaniards were flayed alive or had their hearts ripped out to the (heartless!) gods of the Aztec Theocracy; whilst torture, the gallows, and the stake awaited the captive Aztec. In sheer savagery, both sides were about equal.

Nor was it merely an exhibition of mutual barbaric sadism. Both Christians and pagans were religious

fanatics who faithfully followed their respective theological teachings. Without the steady dripping of blood upon the altars of the gods no rain would fall on the thirsty lands of Anahuac (Mexico). Whilst upon the Christian side had not the Pope granted America to "The Most Catholic" Kings of Spain, and were not the Aztecs both pagans and traitors who deserved nothing but enslavement and, if they resisted, death?

Such was the Mexico of Cortez and of Montezuma. But this is all ancient history. To-day, from the fusion of Spaniard and Aztec in an original American culture, a new and brilliant civilisation has arisen. The Mexican Social Revolution, one of the brightest chapters in the gloomy history of our times, has created a secular culture and a genuine social democracy out of what was, even as recently as a generation ago, one of the most illiterate and superstitious lands on earth. Contemporary Mexico is, perhaps, the most progressive country in the world. This magnificent exhibition cannot fail to enlighten the British people with regard to a little-known but most remarkable chapter in contemporary social and cultural evolution.

Yugoslavia and the Catholics

By P. C. KING

CATHOLICS in this country are fond of professing that they do not interfere in politics except in such matters as touch them directly, such as school education. They are now demonstrating the patent insincerity of their claim, by their behaviour towards the visit of Tito, the head of the Yugoslav State. Whatever the differences of the Vatican with Yugoslavia it is nothing but the most intolerable political interference for them to agitate against this diplomatic event and to imply criticism at the actions of Her Majesty's Government in inviting him. It is outrageous, in fact, as it is untrue, that the people of this country resent his visit. The Communist Party in Great Britain, at least, has conducted itself more circumspectly than the Catholic Church in Great Britain has done!

It is interesting in this connection to read what Mr. Dedijer, Tito's "Boswell" has to say in his book *Tito Speaks*, about the behaviour of Cardinal Stepinac and the Catholic Action (Ustashi) Party in Yugoslavia during the war.

There arose three organised bodies of partisans in Yugoslavia during the war, namely, the Chetniks, the Ustashi and the Titoists. The first named, under the leadership of Mihailovic, seem to have started as a genuine party of the resistance, being a nationalist right wing movement politically. Gradually, however, under the twin fear of the foreign invader, on the one hand, and the communist threat on the other, they chose what they seemingly considered the lesser evil and ganged up with the foreign enemy, thus becoming a party of national treason. Mihailovic was eventually captured, tried and executed as a traitor.

The Ustashi, under their leader, Ante Pavelic, (who, more fortunate than Mihailovic, found asylum in Italy), were from the outset in collaboration with the quisling premier Nadic and the Italian invaders. These, the Catholic Action Party of Croatia, seem to have taken it as their special task to persecute their fellow nationals of orthodox Christian or of Mohammedan persuasion and as their mission to bring them, whether by persuasion or force, into the Roman fold. They set out to do this, acting with the utmost brutality and cruelty, according to Dedijer. Whole villages in Western Bosnia and Croatia, where a sector of the orthodox and most of the Mohammedan elements of

the population resided, were massacred by the Ustashi. Men, women and children were driven out of their villages and thrown into ravines or had their throats cut, scenes reminiscent of the massacre of Armenians by the Turks in the first world war. Their churches and mosques were destroyed, defiled or closed; their children were abducted from their parents to be baptised as Catholics; adults were offered the alternative of Catholic baptism or death.

Backed by this gang of terrorists, Pavelic and his lieutenant Kvaternik were recognised by the quisling government and the foreign conquerors as the chiefs of the separate State of Croatia. (It was intended later to consolidate this State as an Italian protectorate with an Italian prince as King of Croatia.)

Stepinac, the premier Catholic bishop of Croatia, played a lamentable and despicable role in this desperate state of his torn and riven country. On 12th April, 1941, while the Germans and Italians were still engaged in the military subjugation of the land, Stepinac openly called up the quisling vice-premier, Kvaternik, and congratulated him on the formation of the new Croat State! At an ecclesiastical conference a little later he urged on the Catholic priesthood and laity to collaborate with the Pavelic usurpers. He accepted the appointment from him of Archbishop to the Ustashi armies while hundreds of priests followed his example by accepting chaplaincies or offices with these Catholic Action forces.

In the village of Glina 700 orthodox communicants were slaughtered in their own church by Ustashi. Nor did Pavelic and his hordes persecute the non-Catholic workers any the less violently than they did the unfortunate peasants not of Catholic persuasion. Intellectual leaders such as Prica, Kershovani, and Ajiya were executed by the orders of this quisling, who sat in on the councils of the German military staff under General von Loehr. For a hundred kilometres the end of the war found not a house standing intact in the districts where the Ustashi had been.

What, probably, more than the trial and imprisonment of Stepinac, roused the unquenchable ire of the Vatican, were Tito's agrarian reforms. Possession of land is now limited to 60 acres for any one tenant; under this proviso churches and monasteries were allowed to retain 60 acres

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Stalinism—A New Religion?

By DAVID ALEXANDER

THE death of Stalin has been a most interesting occurrence from many points of view. At first, the British and American newspapers published excited but subdued commentaries on his health, measuring an extraordinarily interested hopefulness regarding his death. When Russian sources reported this event, they felt considerable relief.

Most English newspapers, in a show of religious timidity, refrained from saying what a criminal they thought had passed away. Exceptional were the *Daily Sketch* which pointed out rather futilely that, well, now there was one Communist less. The *Daily Mirror* in this case more honest, recorded a headline "Crocodile Tears." Others tried to present an "impartial" view. It is, indeed, as Gleb Kerensky implied in a letter to the *News Chronicle*, difficult to be "impartial" about one of the greatest criminals in history. The same sort of reactions came from world rulers. Eisenhower's condolences were cold; Nehru's were obviously flattering; Adenauer's were brutally honest.

What interests us, however, is the distinctly religious aura surrounding Stalin. A slight knowledge of the Stalinist system will provide numerous proofs of this attribute. On Stalin's birthday hymns of praise to him were sung; he was credited with omniscience in such varied fields as agriculture and sociology; an atmosphere of grovelling humility pervaded any meeting he addressed. "Applause," "the audience rises to its feet," "prolonged cheering," "applause until Stalin's voice could no longer be heard," "the frequent punctuations of Stalin's speeches. "The genius architect," "Coryphaeus," "the inspired leader," "were epithets frequently showered on him.

In other contexts, however, instead of being a myth-god, Stalin assumes the role of a benevolent father. This is suggested by such phrases as "Rodnoi Odets" (Our own dear father), "great teacher," "little Father," "Uncle Joe" and many others. What is the significance of these attitudes to Stalin?

Psycho-analysts concerned with religious motivation have found an extremely close parallel between God, and the idea of an omnipotent father. To examine this subject fully would take much space, but suffice it to say that we can draw many similarities. In both cases we see an infantile belief in omnipotence and omniscience; a benevolent attitude to obedient children, coupled with a serpentine hypersensitivity to rebellious ones. The double attitude of love and hate at the same time is well exemplified. When adolescents in our society throw off religion they are defying the authority of their family-fathers and community-fathers. Unfortunately many of them have too weak mental constitutions to accept the responsibility of their own judgments and ethics, so they express their hostility to their own fathers by adopting a father inimical to their own, and depending on him. The attitude of young Stalinists in this country reflects their hostility against their own closely pursuing society, an infantile attitude to a far-off distant Stalin, and a veneration of him as a God.

Before the war, Stalinism and Stalin worship were serious outlets for adolescents. During the pro-Russian phase of hostilities, he was erstwhile transformed into a good God—a benevolent father figure. The fact that he was, personally speaking, a mystery man, that he was always photographed with a benevolent enigmatic smile, that few people knew him, helped to surround him with this aura. He was advertised as "Uncle Joe." This was a particularly clever device, in that he became a brother, as

well as a father. By being a brother, he was united with other brothers against the common father enemy—Hitler. At the same time, both the Stalinist and our own society allowed the aggression of their members free play; the repression of this aggression hitherto by the father-figures had caused so much resentment by the people against such father-figures. Our desires were substantially satisfied by being completely uninhibited against the common enemy, allowing us to be much more friendly to Stalin.

Another religious attitude towards Stalin is similar to the worship of Jesus Christ in some circles. Stalin is often visualised by adolescents as the ideal man, the Prince-Charming, so to speak. This may surprise many readers, but this is a personal finding. The evidence for it is, by nature, difficult to produce, but one pointer is the fact that the strength, masculinity and "solidity" of this person is constantly stressed. Practically every picture published of him shows him in military uniform—which has acquired the nature of a fetish. In a certain sense, his portraits have the same value to young female Stalinists, as the multiple images of Christ have in the villages of Spain, say. We see, of course, a similar attitude developing towards the Duke of Edinburgh in this country. The vision of Stalin as a possible mate is a much more limited attitude than the others I have mentioned, and has minimal importance; it is, nevertheless, a part of the complex of attitudes which have been felt towards Stalin, at one time or another.

In 1949 the Berlin airlift showed a real fissure between East and West. People in the West began to suffer hardships due to a system which they regarded as personified by Stalin. After a short time, they began to wish him dead. Most, however, were too guilty about this desire to express it publicly. When Stalin's death finally did occur, and their subconscious desires were fulfilled, they still felt it would be very bad taste to rejoice publicly. Remembering the time when he had been our ally, they felt guilty about betraying a brother repainting in their mind's eye a picture of benevolent father Stalin, they had remorse about the feeling that in desiring to kill, they had *in fact* killed Stalin.

Thus we saw in the obituaries a mixture of nostalgia, impartiality and guilt. Many of them gave him a much more friendly epitaph than they would have, if these emotions had not been aroused. When Hitler's apparent death was accounted for, many people had the same sort of remorse. No doubt if he had at one time been Britain's ally fighting against the Russians, his death at this stage would have generated the same feelings. Many people seem to me to think it indecent to mention the crimes of one of the most ruthless dictators in history after he is dead.

To end, I would like to make two remarks in parentheses. Firstly, there was a small but coherent group of people in England who never at any time had any political or emotional interest in Stalin. These form the exceptions to the general statements which I have made.

Secondly, I would point out that I offer here a personal analysis of what I consider to be the motives and emotional reactions of people. I have presented some obvious evidence, but space and the technicalities of the subject prevent me doing justice to such important evidence. I will, however, try to answer any points which readers might raise, as there is much more that could be said on this subject.

This Believing World

According to the "Chicago-Herald-American," the United States is having an extraordinary religious revival all over the country. This year, for example, owing to the perpetual demand, more churches are being built than ever in American history, while the American Bible Society has allotted more than one million pounds in its budget for printing and distributing Bibles. All soldiers in Korea are being supplied with Bibles—which, incidentally, often saves a man's life when hit, its thickness preventing the bullet going through. A cigarette case often does the same, while the Devil's playthings, a pack of cards, is an almost infallible safeguard.

Will Stalin now be deified? The Emperor Augustus Cæsar became a God even in his lifetime, and now, a "Red Rasputin" in America called Nikolas Jaruszevicius is going about trying to show that the Bible and Marx's *Capital* are perfectly compatible, and he is also acting as an advance guard to propagate the deification of Stalin. We should have thought that the U.S.A. was about the last place in which such a movement would flourish—but when we think of Mrs. Eddy and Joseph Smith, we are not so sure.

Do Miracles happen these days? Of course they do. The Rev. A. C. Valdez, whose gift of healing comes straight from Christ Jesus, published the other day a huge display advertisement in the *South Wales Argus* quoting the Rev. J. M. Bell as a witness to the way in which "the blind received their sight in every service." Mr. Bell adds that he saw "more Miracles performed in this meeting than at any other time in my life." Thus the idea that Miracles ceased when Christ ascended unto Heaven as related in Holy Writ is exploded. As Mr. Valdez points out in his advertisement—"God has given to this man (himself) the Gift of Healing" and who are we to criticise God Almighty?

But how is it all done? The method used by Mr. Valdez is simple. For instance, a paralytic from the waist downwards manages to wheel his chair before the Divine Healer who solemnly curses the infliction. The exact formula is, "Affliction I curse thee. Stand up now you are getting better," and the man immediately stands. "Spectators gasp, and tears roll down the face of a well-dressed grey-haired business man kneeling in prayer," we are informed. The only surprise we must register is that the well-dressed grey-haired business man kneeling in prayer was not also a well-known Atheist. But words fail us here. . . .

The election of an Agnostic Mayor to Chesterfield is causing very deep concern to the Archdeacon of Chesterfield, the Ven. T. Dilworth Harrison, who is very upset that religion had not been properly presented to the Mayor-elect, Councillor E. Swale. What he probably meant was that had he the chance of properly presenting religion to anybody, the lucky chap would almost fall over himself in his anxiety to accept Christ. Well, here is a chance for the Archdeacon. There are quite a number of members of the N.S.S. or the R.P.A. who would gladly give the reverend gentleman a chance of converting them. Will he take this chance? Not on your life.

Incidentally, we were pleased to see that one Freethinker, at least, Mr. Tom Mosley, of Nottingham, had the temerity to cross swords with the Archdeacon in a vigorous letter

published in the *Nottingham Journal*. It will not be relished either by the Free Church ministers or the Archdeacon—nor will it be answered. And we congratulate Councillor Swale on his courage. It requires rare courage to face angry and disgruntled Christians.

The "Daily Mirror" published the other day—to use a *Daily Mirror* word—a lot of poppycock from a reader who once was "a materialist, without any belief in God, man, or myself." He got a Bible on the recommendation of some writer in the paper and immediately, "God has been very good to me." He is now an even more thorough believer than the writer who sent him to the Bible. And, of course, his name and address are withheld. We refer to this hopeless rubbish because while it is almost, or even quite, impossible for a Freethinker to get a letter in a national journal, it is the easiest thing in the world for a believer. Especially a Bible believer. And a liar.

Theatre

"The Merchant of Venice." By William Shakespeare.
The King's Theatre.

It is hard to compare this with the recent, rather lavish production at the Old Vic, in which certain liberties were taken with costume. However, the sincerity of this production by Donald Wolfit is an outstanding feature.

Mr. Wolfit's performance of Shylock stands out for its clarity of interpretation; so much so that even Rosalind Iden as Portia does not shine at full strength. These two parts are the strongest in the play, and with the exception of Bassanio and his friends, most of the parts have not much character. It seems that Shakespeare wrote the play with his mind set on Shylock, and through it we get a portrait of how he saw the Jew.

I do not think that Shakespeare was anti-Jewish, for I have never come away from this play without feelings of sorrow for the Jew at his hard treatment by the Venetian Court. He wonders where his enemies find the evil thoughts they attribute to him, and he explains that his feelings and perceptions are the same as theirs.

However diverse the interpretations may be, whether by Paul Rogers (Old Vic) or Donald Wolfit, the sympathetic side of Shylock always reaches me.

I would recommend this production for having stayed closer to Shakespeare than the recent one at the Old Vic, but in any case it is interesting to compare the two. It is one of a series and is to be repeated on certain dates in May and June.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

Yugoslavia and the Catholics—

(Concluded from page 98)

of their former extensive properties. For the religious orthodox, Mohammedan, Catholic, but especially the last-named—owned vast areas of Yugoslavia's soil. It was probably this violation of "the sacred rights of property" that angered the Church far more than the prosecution of its prelates; martyrdom, after all, has its credit side for organised religion.

It behoves every British rationalist, therefore, in the name of freethought and reason, to extend a lively welcome to this distinguished visitor and atheist, and to show their disgust at this attempt at political sabotage by Catholics.

[We shall shortly be reviewing Mr. Avro Manhattan's new book, *Terror Over Yugoslavia*, which deals fully with the whole question.—Editor.]

THE FREETHINKER

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

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To Correspondents

Will Mr. F. S. Houghton kindly send us his address?

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3-50); 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.

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (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: L. EBURY.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A. S. LEET (Leicester). "Hypocrisy of Religion."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: HAROLD DAY, "God's Truth."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS, "All-Embracing Freethought."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: JOHN McNAIR (I.L.P.), "The Ethics of Socialism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ROYFSON PIKE, "George Eliot, the Woman Behind the Legend."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Street, Edgware Road, W.2).—Sunday, 7-15: GORDON SCHAFFER (Reynolds News), a Lecture.

NOTES AND NEWS

On Tuesday, April 28, a public meeting is to be held in the Court Room, Caxton Hall, Westminster, at 7 p.m. (doors open at 6-30). The subject to be discussed is "Broadcasting and Religion," and the meeting is convened by the R.P.A., N.S.S. and other Rationalist organisations. The chairman will be Mr. Joseph Reeves, M.P., chairman of the Board of Directors of the R.P.A. The platform will consist of Lord Chorley of Kendal, Fenner Brockway, M.P., R. H. S. Crossman, M.P., Peter Freeman, M.P., Mr. Phillips Price, M.P., and the Rev. R. W. Sorensen, M.P. The R.P.A. will be represented on the platform by Mr. Charles Bradlaugh Bonner, and the N.S.S. by Mr. F. A. Ridley. We hope that all our readers in and near London will make a note of this date and will try to support in person this protest against the partisan and undemocratic attitude of the B.B.C. in relation to religious propaganda.

In the issue of our contemporary, *The Times*, of March 16 last, there was published a letter by Mr. Leslie I. Minchin, entitled "Encounters of Belief." Mr. Minchin

"The Freethinker" Fund

Previously acknowledged, £62 4s. 6d.: A. Hancock, 1s. (16th donation); H. A. Lupton, £1; A. Brooks, 2s. 6d. Total, £63 8s.

inquired therein what had become of the new B.B.C. feature, "Encounters of Belief," which was abruptly discontinued on Tuesday, March 3, at the very last moment, after having been announced in all B.B.C. programmes. The writer relevantly inquired what was the nature of the backstairs influence at "Broadcasting House" which was responsible for this sudden black-out. An answer to this pertinent question will be awaited with interest.

To add to the intriguing nature of the switch-off, the subject due to be discussed on March 3 was the Marxist "Interpretation of History," surely an important and topical subject? Can it be that the B.B.C. cannot find anyone acquainted with Marxism? Or is it just another example of its deep-seated reluctance to discuss anything fundamental, anything that involves vital contemporary issues? To add to the mystery, the feature, "Encounters of Belief," has now again been resumed, but, so far at least, the discussion on Marxism advertised for March 3 has been conspicuous only by its absence. We concur with *The Times* correspondent in asking for a public explanation. Is it not high time that the pundits of "Broadcasting House" actually demonstrated some of the democracy they are always talking about?

Since writing the above, we note another letter in *The Times* also entitled "Encounters of Belief." The writer was the Rev. F. H. E. Harfitt, secretary of the "Christian Evidence Society." Mr. Harfitt complains that the Christian case had not been put as well as it might have been in the "Encounters." To tell the truth, we thought so too! But even the cleverest "apologist" cannot be better than his case.

A good audience listened last Sunday to Mr. F. A. Hornibrook lecturing at the West London Branch N.S.S. on "My Fifty Years of Freethought." Largely autobiographical, his talk had no dull moments. F.A.H. has lived fully, travelled widely, met interesting people and kept his eyes and ears open. His memories of experiences in Ireland, New Zealand, Egypt and this country, and of meetings with Chapman Cohen, Jack London, H. G. Wells and others, encouraged others present, notably Messrs. W. Kent, L. Ebury, W. Carlton and Bonar Thompson, to make contributions to the discussion in reminiscent vein, to the profit and pleasure of all present.

Report of Meeting, McLellan Galleries

ON March 8, the McLellan Galleries Hall, Glasgow, was well filled to hear Mr. F. A. Ridley speak on "The Social Origins of Christianity."

The subject was sure to draw a large audience, and it did—there were very few empty seats.

Questions and discussion which followed, gave the speaker a further opportunity of emphasizing a viewpoint to which he had obviously given long and serious study.

Though Mr. Ridley's visits to Glasgow have, in the past, been infrequent, the impression he made on this occasion will certainly make his future visits popular.

The chair was ably filled by our Secretary, Mr. James Barrowman. A retiring collection was made for the N.S.S. General Fund. Sale of literature was excellent.

More Credulity

By H. CUTNER

SOME items in a recent number of our Spiritualistic contemporary, *Psychic News*, caught my eye the other day—they are typical examples of the kind of thing I love tilting at. The first concerns a "debate" between a Spiritualist and a non-Spiritualist who lost on the vote from the audience. And no wonder. This gentleman, a Mr. J. D. Shebbeare, confessed that "he had never attended a seance, nor a Spiritualist service, nor had he read a book on the subject." And with an ignoramus of this sort, a "debate" took place! It seems incredible. One of his "arguments" was that "Spiritualism was contrary to happy living," and another was that it "was akin to suicide." Against this kind of twaddle, the Spiritualist, Mr. D. Dutton, had little difficulty in putting a case, and Mr. Shebbeare was unable to answer. Mr. Dutton gave, as one of his proofs of a "spirit" returning from Summerland what he called the "historic case" of the R101 airship, which I had little difficulty in exposing in these columns as a complete fraud. The fact that Harry Price, who sat with the medium Mrs. Garrett, confessed in one of his books that the "spirit" of the dead commander did *not* come through is sufficient to dispose of the "historic" case once for all. Harry Price was there and Mr. Dutton was not.

Another item concerns the book the famous healer, Mr. Harry Edwards, has written on his "spiritual healing." It was reviewed by the *Daily Mirror* which asked him why we never get the names of the doctors who are always astounded at his miracles of healing the incurables? Mr. Edwards cleverly replied, "You complain that I never give the names of doctors. This I cannot do for the reason that if I published the names of co-operating doctors they are liable to disciplinary action by the British Medical Association." I call this answer "clever." There is no need to give us the names of the doctors (if any) who co-operate with Mr. Edwards. What we want are the names of the doctors who certify that a person is suffering from incur-

able cancer, or is completely and incurably blind, or has had incurable arthritis, and who all find, after being touched or rubbed by the healer and his assistants, that they are quite cured. The blind can see, the cancer has disappeared, and the arthritis is a thing of the past. Week in and week out I have read of such cures, all or nearly all certified by doctors as being incurable. Who are these doctors? Why don't we get their names? I remember on one occasion one name did slip out, however, a lady doctor, and a reporter of a national journal did his best to contact her on the telephone and at her house. As far as the miraculous cure was concerned, she refused to say a word. And that was that.

When Mr. Edwards clears out a hospital ward of hopeless surgical cases in an hour or so, it will be time to take his "spiritual" healing seriously.

Then there is a full page advertisement of Mr. Hannen Swaffer who is going to tell the readers of the *People* "exclusively" why he believes in Spiritualism. In the 'twenties, Mr. Swaffer was always boasting that he never just talked on Spiritualism—all he wanted was a debate. At the time, Chapman Cohen was at his best, and the Spiritualists did their utmost to bring the two together in debate. Mr. Cohen's name was, however, quite enough for Mr. Swaffer. He suddenly discovered he was far too busy to meet anybody. And that should have made it "exit Hannen Swaffer." I am quite sure he will not refer to this little incident in his forthcoming articles.

Finally, a Mr. J. W. Herries wrote to *Everybody's* on levitation, and his letter is given in *Psychic News*. In it, he describes the famous story of D. D. Home "levitating" himself out of a window, and says it was "witnessed" by Lord Crawford and two of his friends. This is sheer nonsense. Lord Crawford expressly declares that he did *not* witness the levitation. I challenge Mr. Herries to quote the exact words used by the noble lord. I have them by me—has Mr. Herries?

Trying To Be Good

By ADRIAN TA'BOIS

"GOOD" is purely relative, as is also "Bad." What is good in one country might be bad in another. Various countries can have various ideas of what "good" means. So can different human beings. No two people think exactly alike, so naturally every person's opinion varies (although sometimes only slightly) about what the word "Good" means. However, so far as Britain is concerned, there is a general broad agreement about the meaning of good.

I think it is a fact that if I said, "That man is a very good man," a Christian, a Jew, an Agnostic, and an Atheist would all have very similar ideas about what I meant. The main arguments do not usually start with "What is the value of good" but on the question "How can I be good?" In other words, people who agree that "being good" is very desirable, differ as to the means of achieving that goodness. For we know that the code of ethics which he (the Jew), she (the Agnostic), you (the Christian), or I (the Atheist) want to try and follow is almost the same for all of us. So that once people know that they *want* to be good, they have to decide whether they will get farther through: (a) their own enthusiasm, or (b) the enthusiasm of an organisation which believes it

can help them. (I am avoiding the cheap journalistic carping of some Atheists whose main aim in life is to sling more and larger pieces of mud at the Church than the Church can sling back, because I want my reasoning to be objective).

If a neutral inquirer decides to adopt the former course, then he must "try to be good" on his own. But it is highly likely that he will be aware of institutions which believe they can help him, the chief of which are the Churches.

If he feels that these rules of goodness—ethics—can be lived up to more successfully by adopting the latter course, then he can join a Church. In this case he will be able to hear that "Christianity is the greatest force we have to promote good," and that "the ethical teachings of Christ which are fostered by the Church" will make him more ready to do good and to be good.

If, however, our neutral inquirer is really neutral and really inquiring, he will want to know how it is that these claims from Christians *inside* Churches are not to be observed *outside* the Churches.

In view of the facts that (a) one is not allowed to ask intelligent questions inside Church, and (b) non-Christians

just "couldn't care less" about Christianity, our inquirer must ask other Christians (outside Church) why they are not "better" than their heathen friends. For if one takes a cross-section of people in the train, or at a party, etc., it is not possible to pick out those who are Christian—even after we have made prolonged observations of every-one present.

Of course there are good Christians. Of course there are bad Atheists. But this is not the point. Taken as a whole, it is not possible to identify Christians because of their superior moral and ethical qualities. If, after 1,952 years, Christianity cannot get better results than this, then it hasn't helped people to "be good." If, on the other hand—as some people claim—"Christianity hasn't failed," because it has never been tried on a really large scale," then what have millions of Christians in hundreds of countries been doing all this time? Surely many of them have tried? And even if this argument was correct, why should Christianity work on a large scale when, under identical conditions, it won't work on a small scale?

I think it is clear from all this that (regardless of idealistic theorising on Christ and the Bible), Christianity cannot raise the moral standard of the people; for even if it does sound good in theory, it just doesn't succeed in practice.

One last thought. Supposing we decide to concentrate on one of the following:—

- (1) Ethics.
- (2) Religion and Ethics.
- (3) Religion without any ethical teaching.

I think (1) is a good choice. But (2) would be agreed to only by Christians. Yet (3) would be ruled out by many people, including most Christians! Why? What has gone wrong with their reasoning? If religion is useful only when Ethics are included, why not have the Ethics on their own? For we have already seen earlier that, in actual practice, Ethics plus religion won't make us better people.

Our Seniles and Incurables

By (Mrs.) K. C. ALLPRESS

(Concluded from page 91)

FOR God's tapestry, as it seems to us now, is not so wonderfully good and perfect that it will not allow of the alteration of a few small threads by man's control of life and death. True, we can neither see nor estimate the entire pattern—if there is one: but surely it is more sensible to try and remedy ills that we undoubtedly can see than to sit and do nothing on the faint assumption that these particular ones are all necessary and desirable in themselves for a Divine Cosmology? After all, it is Man, the fallen, who has got himself into this mess. Why should he not try to get himself out of it? In fact he does. He alters the universal pattern every time he kills in battle (far less humanely and intelligently than in eliminating the unfit); he alters it in the law courts when the death sentence is passed; in fine, whenever man exercises what he regards as his freewill, he is adding to, if not altering, God's tapestry, according to his own ideas. Of course, Christians urge men to seek the will of God and let that be their guide—but how many of us do so, and what guarantee is there that when we think we have done so, we have done an atom more than the thoughtful man in the street who collects as much evidence as possible and then uses his common sense? In other words, we can only equip ourselves as well as we know how and then act in the light of our opinions and ideals. Who is to say

whether these are a God's or Man's? Certainly not a dogma which glorifies and interprets to extreme the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," when the God who is supposed to have inspired it himself indulged in frequent orgies of killing. In fact, the whole Universe is maintained on a system of "kill" in order to "live," and only Man has conceived an ethic which transcends this order. And if Man has risen to such heights, surely he might be allowed some control over the life which he has extended at the discretion of those in his ranks who are best qualified?

This brings me to the final and perhaps greatest objection, namely, the practical problem of how my contention could be made to work without hideous abuses creeping in. Where, you ask, are we to draw the line and how make sure that the greedy and wicked do not find in it an opportunity for murder? First I should set up a council of three doctors in each town and rural district to whom relatives could apply for an examination of their senile cases. The council could meet, say, once a month and in conjunction with the patient's own doctor (if not one of these three already) would investigate the patient's condition and general prospects. If he himself (or she herself) as many do, expressed a wish to be done with this life, the drug that would put him painlessly to sleep could be granted without more ado. If not, it would be necessary to eliminate first those cases in nursing homes and hospitals for whose hopelessness the staff could vouch, and then transfer home patients to the beds thus vacated, so that they might undergo observation for one week with professional care. Again the nursing staff would assist the doctors to arrive at a just and humane decision. For a time there would be a constant stream of "unfit" passing through the wards and this would undeniably cause extra work to a hard-worked profession; but once the surplus population had been reduced, the enormous saving in time, work, money and health would be well worth the effort. Probably many seniles die from inadequate or unskilled attention as it is, in spite of the National Health Scheme's endeavours to look after everybody; and this is a much fairer way of ensuring that only those who are medically fit to die are in fact helped on their way. It is merely carrying the Englishman's newly-awakened desire to bring order out of chaos one logical step further, and the outworn veto of a hypothetical God should not be allowed to stand in his light.

Noah's Flood

By J. R. DUNCANSON

IT is generally agreed that the universal flood of Noah is one of the most difficult Bible stories to defend. But yet it is not so very long ago when it was generally believed to be historically true. When the early geologists discovered deep deposits of boulder clay and silt covering vast areas throughout the world they thought that here was proof of the Biblical deluge. To-day we, of course, know that these deposits were felt by the ice after the departure of the Ice Age.

The flood was so generally believed in as to leave traces in our language: as in the expression, antediluvian. That it is not now taken so seriously is shown by such incidents as the Walt Disney film, "Noah," satirising the whole story, which ran for a considerable period a few years ago. The popular *Harmsworth Encyclopaedia 1st Edition* said of it "that its acceptance involved such a quantity of miracles as to be hardly credible." Even respectable *Punch* had a cartoon ridiculing Noah (October 5, 1949).

Nevertheless there is still a hard core of fundamentalists who stubbornly defend it.

I therefore listened with great interest to Sir Leonard Woolley speaking on the B.B.C. on his researches at Ur, in the "Myth and Legend" series. He gave a cold douche to the fundamentalists right at the start, saying, "The flood was only local; we found no trace either of Noah or his ark." He described the Sumerian account and compared it to the Hebrew one, and showed that the latter was a skilful combination of two versions, sometimes contradicting one another. For instance, Gen. vii. 2, beasts are by sevens, and in Gen. vi. 19, they are by twos. The fact that the Sumerian is centuries older, and the striking similarities, make it certain that the Hebrew has been derived from the Sumerian version. Desperate attempts had been made to prove that the Hebrew account was the original from which the Sumerian was derived. All these attempts had failed.

Sir Leonard Woolley described the excavations on the mounds at Ur, these mounds being the result of successive building on the site of previous buildings, and their debris mounting higher and higher and in the course of centuries reaching 40 feet or more. Digging through these mounds are found pottery, beautifully hand painted, cooking and storage wares, utensils, kitchen rubbish, bricks, tiles, all in stratified layers. After digging deeper, suddenly the character of the soil changed. "Instead of the stratified pottery, we were in perfectly clean clay, uniform throughout, having been laid by water. The workmen declared that we had come to the bottom of everything, to silt of the original delta. I was disposed to agree with them, but then I saw we were too high up. I sent the men back to work. They did so reluctantly, considering it a waste of time. The clean clay continued without change until it had attained a thickness of over eight feet. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped, and we were once more in layers of rubbish. I did not know, at first, what to make of it. Then my wife said, 'I suppose it is the flood.'

"So much for the facts. What, then, is to be built up on them? The discovery that there was a real deluge to which the Sumerian and Hebrew stories alike go back does not, of course, prove any single detail of either story. This deluge was not universal, but a local disaster confined to the Tigris and Euphrates, affecting an area some 400 miles long by 100 miles across; but, for the occupants of the valley, that was the whole world. A flood of such magnitude, while it would drown out the mud-hut villages, might spare at least some of the cities perched high on their mounds and protected by walls of brick."

For a fuller account I would refer my readers to Sir Leonard's thrilling book, *Ur of the Chaldees*, now obtainable in the Pelican Series.

Correspondence

EDUCATION

Sir.—In Mr. Lovelock's "Goodness Without Tears," I notice for the first time in my *Freethinker* the use of two foreign words.

Now, it is a very curious fact which I have observed over a great many years that even quite well-known writers, who have had plenty of time in which to educate themselves, when they introduce foreign words—French, German, Spanish, Italian—almost invariably get them wrong. Latin is usually right, being presumably copied direct from a dictionary. If one doesn't know a language no one despises you, so why will they insist on pretending that they do know?

It has always intrigued me how these mistakes get past these author's "readers," who are paid to correct mistakes just such as these, being supposedly men and women of good education.

Mr. Lovelock's two words—par and impar—appear in two places both wrong. The words should be: pair and impair.—Yours, etc.,
M. C. BROTHERTON.

WHAT IS A FREETHINKER?

Sir.—Replying to your correspondent Mr. Jack Gordon, A. Yates is both rude and wrong. There is no verbiage in Mr. Gordon's plain statement. But is understandable that a writer whose mastery of the English language is so imperfect that he writes "clearance of thought" when he means "clear thought" should define the word "Freethinker" wrongly.

Both the Oxford Dictionary and the practice of the classic English authors show A. Yates' narrow definition by itself to be incorrect. The fact that there are logical disadvantages (or personal objections) to the generally-accepted or received meaning of any word does not entitle any Tom, Dick or Harry or A. Yates to deny the usually-accepted meaning. What A. Yates is really saying is: "I don't like the meaning as accepted by the educated. I say it ought to have a more restricted meaning. Therefore the world must conform to me."

But the educated world just won't. This matter is not really one for argument, as A. Yates seems to think. It merely concerns the different meanings which all the educated and one imperfectly educated person attach to one particular word. Mr. Yates is obviously a disciple of Mrs. Malaprop, who also gave her own (different) meaning to words of the English language.—Yours, etc.,
M. B. DRAPER.

THE LOOM OF LANGUAGE

Sir.—I should like to refer your "Esperanto correspondents to Bodmer's "Loom of Language" (Allen & Unwin), particularly to the chapters on Pioneers of Language Planning and Language Planning for a New Order. There are artificial languages of existence much superior to Esperanto. But even these are not perfect. However, much has been learnt from these attempts that the creation of a really good language should be possible.

Interested readers will find the subject fully treated in Bodmer's book (which should be obtainable in libraries and book shops).—Yours, etc.,
B. HOY.

THE BRIGHTON MURDER

Sir.—Mr. C. H. Norman should have ascertained the facts about the Brighton murder case before writing the article "The Brighton Case" (*The Freethinker*, February 15, 1953).

Unless my memory is very faulty, three men (not two) were sentenced to death for the murder of one.

I read an editorial (in the *Daily News and Leader*, I believe) in which the writer concluded, or stated, at the time that Joynson-Hicks reversed his "no reprieve" decision because he had qualms about taking three lives as retribution for one life.

That the King "directed" Joynson-Hicks to issue a reprieve is stated by Mr. Norman is the first I have heard of it and, as far as I know, is inaccurate in one important fact, I would ask him what proof he can offer that the King *did* issue the direction? The King does not "direct" the Home Secretary to issue a reprieve (e.g., Jacob, the 18-year-old pantry boy, hanged in 1922, despite the Home Secretary's visit to Buckingham Palace or the Home Office, after a reprieve had been refused. That the King is an influence (as Sir Stafford Cripps once pointed out) I do not deny. But what proof has Mr. Norman got that the King even influenced Joynson-Hicks? Even if this influence was exercised, does Mr. Norman (or anyone else) expect an inexperienced young woman of 26 years who has been on the throne less than a year to "influence" the Home Secretary to reject the advice of permanent Home Office officials who are the ones who really decide whether a reprieve shall be granted or refused?

A minor point. I have not read a verbatim report of the trial but a newspaper pointed out that three constables (not one) testified to hearing Bentley say: "Chris, let him have it!" Although this may constitute legal proof, I do not suggest it constitutes sufficient proof in such a case as this. One would hardly expect one constable to contradict another constable, or even to remain silent on such a point.

In view of the space shortage in *The Freethinker*, I do not naturally expect the above letter to be published, but I would be interested in any observations Mr. Norman may care to make.

—Yours, etc.,

SIDNEY NEWTON.

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