

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIII—No. 52

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Price Fourpence

WE have frequently had occasion in this column to draw the attention of our readers to the deplorably low level of Christian theology. We wish, as always in this column and journal, to be perfectly fair, and time was when Christian theology, both Catholic and Protestant, could boast of some illustrious names. Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Pascal, Butler and Newman were great men, of whom any creed can be legitimately proud. However, "other times, other manners"! The intellectual postulates which these great men were able to take for granted in the state of knowledge which, alone, was at their disposal have now been effectively undermined by modern scientific and historical criticism. Were these great masters of deductive logic, who were the classical theologians of Christianity, able "to revisit the glimpses of the moon" to-day, no doubt, there would be a different tale to tell: we might then have the former great doctors of the Church continuing their theological studies from a very different angle!

The Dog-Days of Theology

This thought was forcibly brought home to us by some reviews which have recently appeared in our contemporaries, *The Observer*, *Truth*, and other literary journals, of an important book, a critical history of religion from the Freethought angle, by Professor Homer W. Smith, an American authority on comparative religion. Canon Roger Lloyd, who reviewed this book in our contemporary, *Truth*, his colleague in *The Observer*, and other religious critics, surely descended to an all-time "low" in their notices of what is, from any angle, a mature and learned volume upon the history of western religion, written by a scholar of repute. Indeed, but for the fact that Professor Homer Smith's book carried an introductory notice by the greatest of all contemporary scientists, the illustrious Albert Einstein, we doubt if our theological pundits would have taken any notice of the book at all. As it is, the absolutely puerile nature of their criticism indicates that the dog-days of Christian theology have certainly arrived. As Canon Lloyd and his brethren are, apparently, quite unable to pick any holes in Professor Smith's encyclopaedic erudition, or to dispute the accuracy of his numerous critical citations, all that they can do is to accuse the learned author of not having any preliminary faith in Christianity and, accordingly, of being totally unable to comprehend what religion is all about. Actually, this represents a very old theological trick, which all the best theologians have disdained to employ. It is summarised in the old theological slogan, "Reason is the handmaid of Faith," or, as an ancient Father of the Church expressed it, "Not by argument has God chosen to save his people." In the present instance, Professor Smith is not a Christian, nor even a Theist: ergo, he obviously knows nothing about either Christianity and/or Theism, and his critical and elaborately documented analysis can be dismissed in

advance. It is as simple as that! Perhaps, however, our amateur theologians might reflect on the commonplace adage that "the onlooker sees most of the game."

The Natural History of Religion

Dr. Homer Smith, however, is a scholar and, we would say, a great scholar. In *Man and His Gods* we have some four hundred closely reasoned and heavily documented pages wherein the learned author presents what we may, perhaps, term the natural history of religion in the western world. His researches cover some five thousand years in time, and range from the gods of ancient Egypt

and Mesopotamia to the rationalist critique of religion at the end of the 19th century, where his elaborate survey concludes. Homer Smith presents his vast theme with great originality and with encyclopaedic erudition. This is, perhaps, the most important general history of religion since the late Solomon Reinach wrote his world-famous *Orpheus*; and our American author includes the results of recent researches which were not available to his eminent French predecessor. One would not judge from reading his book that our author had been very much handicapped in his critical researches by his initial lack of faith!

An Ideal Christmas Present

The present season is one specially designed to commemorate the birth of gods and the genesis of religions. There could, accordingly, be no better time in which to recommend and to study a book which deliberately sets out to record and to criticise the successive mythologies which have in turn commanded the allegiance of the religious world in various ages. The high price of Professor Homer Smith's book, and the current financial stringency, alone prevent us from describing *Man and His Gods* as an ideal Christmas present for Freethinkers, and, indeed, for all amongst whom Reason precedes Faith in their approach to, and investigation of, religious creeds.

Egypt, the Cradle of Morals

The writings of Gerald Massey and of other pioneers have familiarised us with the notion that the cradle of religion is to be found in ancient Egypt. Here, however, Professor Smith has broken new ground and has added to our previous knowledge. For our author, in one of his most interesting chapters, indicates the Nile Valley as the cradle, not only of theology but, equally, of morality. This last piece of information will, we imagine, come as something of a surprise—perhaps even as a shock—to those fairly numerous "reverent" Rationalists who combine with Liberal Christians to salute the Hebrew prophets as the initial pioneers of morality and its association with a previously magical religious cult. Our author cites convincing testimony from ancient Egyptian papyri to show that what he calls "the talismanic virtue of righteousness" was known in the religious cults of ancient Egypt long before the Hebrews "discovered" it. Also, long before

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Man and his Gods

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

the legendary Moses led Israel out of Egypt, Monotheism was known to the Egyptian priestly class and was indiscreetly revealed, to his own undoing, by the "heretical" Pharaoh, Akhnahton, whom another American Egyptologist, Professor Brestead, once denominated "the first individual in history."

"A Christian before Christ"

The German mystic, Nietzsche, once described the Greek philosopher Plato as "a Christian before Christ." In a masterly chapter, Professor Smith indicates the tremendous rôle played by Plato (c. 440-360 B.C.) in the evolution of idealistic philosophy and of theological concepts in general. We are given a convincing demonstration that it was Plato and his semi-mythical master, Socrates—who owes his fame chiefly to Plato—who arrested the scientific evolution of Greek philosophy towards materialism by imposing upon human thought the concept of the soul and of individual immortality. It was, insists our author, the early Greek materialists who were the real glory of Greek thought, whilst Plato, for all his literary brilliance, inaugurated its decay. What Plato put forward as a "myth," the rulers of Rome later adopted as a deliberate policy for keeping people in submission by the fraudulent preservation of fictitious beliefs. No wonder that the Christian Church still styles the pagan, Plato, as "The Prince of Philosophers," whilst it saw to it that the writings of his materialist opponents have almost completely perished.

The later chapters of *Man and His Gods*, whilst full of interest, are, no doubt, more familiar to Freethinking students. Our author is a mythicist, who resolves "the Jesus of History" into a series of myths on the lines made familiar by Couchoud and J. M. Robertson; to the latter of these great scholars, in particular, Homer Smith pays a glowing tribute. As is usual in works written by the mythicist school, Christian theology is represented as the work of Gnostics, but the author appears to accept the Pauline authorship of the Epistles.

Dr. Crawford and the Goligher Circle

By H. CUTNER

READERS will remember that I gave as my opinion that the late Dr. Crawford, who had what he called "psychic work" with Katherine Goligher, and wrote two books about it, found out that he had been tricked, and committed suicide. I was challenged by the Editor of *Psychic News* and he has returned to the charge. This time he has produced the letter Crawford wrote to *Light* and printed in that journal in the number for September 11, 1920. The relevant passages are:—

I am writing you for the last time. My brain has completely broken down through overwork. Until a few weeks ago it was perfectly clear and in good working order, but as soon as the holidays commenced something seemed to snap. . . . The psychic work has nothing to do with it. . . . My psychic work was all done before the collapse, and is the most perfect work I have done in my life. Everything connected with it is absolutely correct and will bear every scrutiny. I am quite aware that my mental breakdown will be put down by the enemies of Spiritualism to my having worked too long on the subject. . . . My psychic work was done when my brain was working perfectly. I derived great benefit from it, and it could not be responsible for what has occurred. . . . With regard to my present condition, I feel there is absolutely no hope. . . . But what I wish to affirm now with all my strength is that the whole thing is due to natural causes and that the psychic work is in no way responsible.

It is a pity that Mr. Archer resurrected this pathetic letter.

Was the Victory of Christianity Inevitable?

In dealing with the meteoric career of Julian "The Apostate," the last pagan Emperor of Rome (361-3 A.D.), Professor Smith seems to answer this question in the negative. He holds to the thesis, propounded in more detail by the present writer some years ago, that the Emperor Julian was not, as is usually alleged by Christian historians, engaged in a hopeless task when he sought to reverse the work of his uncle Constantine and to destroy Christianity. The present writer contended, and is glad to note that Professor Smith agrees, that, but for his untimely death in battle at the age of thirty-three, Julian would have actually succeeded, and his soubriquet, "The Apostate," survives as a testimony to the fear which his nearly successful attempt excited in the Christian ranks. After all, if Christianity was not Divine, why must it have been successful? (cf. F. A. Ridley, *Julian the Apostate and the Rise of Christianity*. Professor Smith cites this book in his bibliography.)

"Go to it"

We must reluctantly pass over Professor Smith's fascinating chapter on witchcraft and its bloody suppression by the Church, as, also, his objective and critical account of the rise of modern Rationalism. We will merely add that Dr. Smith is no hero-worshipper. He can be rational even when dealing with Rationalists! For example, he shows how traces of religious assumptions sometimes clung even to famous critical intellects. This is all to the good, since a Rationalism which is not continuously self-critical becomes merely a new and more hypocritical orthodoxy. This is, all told, a notable, perhaps a great book. Professor Homer Smith may well have written what later ages may hold to have been one of the great classics of the 20th century. *Man and His Gods* should be in every public library and on every serious bookshelf. We urge our readers to "go to it!"

[*Man and His Gods*, by Homer W. Smith. Jonathan Cape Ltd. 30s.]

If I had any doubts about the cause of Crawford's suicide before I have none now.

It seems to me obvious that the way Katherine Goligher bamboozled poor Crawford must have caused Crawford's scientific colleagues to roar with laughter and contributed to the mental breakdown he so tragically describes. He still had sense enough to see that his "psychic work" would be blamed and, like the lady in Hamlet, he "did not protest too much, methinks." Of course, his brain was "working perfectly" when he was with the ineluctable Katherine—otherwise he could not have described what he saw, or thought he saw, in his books. The one thing he was determined to justify was what he called his "psychic work"—anything, anything but it was responsible for his unfortunate breakdown.

We have similar cases (without the breakdown) in the way Florrie Cook bamboozled Sir William Crookes, and the way S. J. Davey bamboozled Alfred Russel Wallace. Though the charming Florrie was caught out in deliberate fraud, and though Davey insisted that his "spirit" slate-writing was nothing but conjuring, both these eminent men of science refused to believe that they could possibly have been bamboozled. But they were—and so was poor Crawford. And I insist that it was the certainty of this that caused his mental breakdown—and his subsequent suicide.

Wilde and the Church

By MALCOLM STUBBS

OSCAR WILDE died a Roman Catholic. To Lord Alfred Douglas, himself received into the Church eleven years later, his friend's conversion was not unnaturally "wonderful." Mr. Bernard Shaw saw it in a different light. Wilde, he says, "even on his death-bed found no pity for himself, playing for the laugh with his last breath and getting it with as sure a stroke as in his palmiest days." *De Profundis* shows Wilde in relation to his Catholicism and gives support to Mr. Shaw's view. During his imprisonment Wilde needed an idea, as Arthur Ransome puts it in his *Oscar Wilde*, that would make his bread and water existence one with that of lilies and wine. He found it in the imagery of Catholicism; going to his Greek New Testament with the same fervour that he went to Pater's *Renaissance*. Having hit upon an idea he became caught up in it, not so much as the poseur as the Divine Victim ordained to the part for the sake of art.

After leaving prison Wilde did see a priest with a view to being received into the Church but nothing came of this visit. If the last two years of his life in France were not exemplary in all respects, they do reveal a deeper interest in the Catholic Faith. In his last work, *The Ballad of Reading Goal*, the somewhat aesthetic Christ of the Prison Letter has matured into the Lord Christ of the Penitent Thief. Wilde's last act was to be received into the Roman Church a few hours before his death.

That event would have taken place much sooner, the Abbot Sir David Hunter Blair says, but for the influence of Professor Mahaffy and the Duke of Sutherland. To the Abbot the "ultra-Protestantism" of the Duke with Professor Mahaffy's passion for the things of Greece influenced Wilde at the expense of Catholicism. The potential convert did go with Mahaffy—his tutor in Greek at Trinity College, Dublin—on a visit to Greece, though Wilde's zeal for "Greece and Paganism" did not prevent him visiting Rome on his return—and enjoying the religious experience. Italy, he wrote home, was "enchanting." The moment of religious fervour passed; Wilde remained a member of the English Church.

At that time the National Church had rather more to offer her aesthetic sons than she had had for some time. Keble's Assize Sermon on National Apostasy; the *Tracts for the Times* had been heeded by the Lords Spiritual of the Anglican Church and their house was now more in Newman's secession in 1845 marked the end of a movement confined to the common rooms of Oxford; to the end of the century it was no less fashionable for the aesthete to affect Anglo-Catholicism than it was to cultivate a taste for wearing peacock blue trousers. As a movement of revolt against the bishops' Protestantism Anglo-Catholicism typified the aesthete's defiance of Utilitarianism and Puritanism.

The influence of the Oxford Movement on Wilde is shown in his writings; Canon Chasuble—"a celibate"—is obviously a Tractarian finding the authority for his beliefs in the Primitive Church. Gilbert, in the dialogue *The Decay of Lying* is concerned because scepticism finds such an affable home in the English Church—a Church in which he says, "St. Thomas is regarded as the ideal Apostle." Nevertheless, Wilde's Anglo-Catholicism is less evident than his latent desire for Continental Catholicism. It was a case of making do with what was at hand, for until the end of the century the position of the Roman Church in England was slight. And it was the Anglo-Catholicism of the later Tractarians which did much to acclimatise a

hostile Victorian public to Catholic forms and uses and which also stimulated the aesthete's sighs for Rome.

It was Rome that inspired some of Wilde's earliest poems—poems that might easily have been written by a Roman Catholic. The mode passed. After leaving Oxford the milieu of Catholicism fades into the background until the débâcle of 1895. A lecture tour of America; a colourful friendship with Douglas, and so on against a background of brilliant repartee and wit created the impression that here was one who battled Philistinism consistently and succeeded in living the aesthete's life of art. When suffering came in the shape of two years' hard labour his existence still had to be lived aesthetically. A meaning had to be given to his sufferings, and whilst the Christian accepted his as a means of discipline, Wilde had to be the chief figure in the Passion—despised and rejected of men and gaining rebirth through his experience. He overplayed the part and instead of angels, only a largely maledictory letter to Douglas heralded his return to the world.

In *De Profundis* Wilde accepts the Faith as aesthetically pleasing; indeed he recognises "the playing of the tragedy without the shedding of blood" as the supreme office of the Church. And he extends the action of the Mass to his own experience, identifying himself with the victim—in his case sacrificed for the sake of art. But the Mass is only valid because Wilde's own experience proves it so: as an "artistic" idea it had to be lived up to in the same way as he had claimed he had to live up to his Blue China at Magdalen. Moral categories were irrelevant; he could just as well be aesthetically happy with a "Confraternity of Faithless" providing it had its ritual, its priesthood, its saints and martyrs. Like D. H. Lawrence, he believed the only evil was to deny life.

One might almost say that Wilde's Catholicism was a stage property affair, supplying him (especially during his stay in prison) with a backcloth against which he could play the leading part. The idea then had to be played extravagantly—in the puce velvet knickerbockers of his American tour. And when, having exhausted the fascination of the part, necessity later forced him to take it up again, he was able to do so with all his customary brilliance.

The Luxemburg Congress

The Committee of Honour for the Luxemburg Congress is now as follows:—

- President: Bertrand Russell, O.M., etc.
 Vice Presidents: Prof. Prosper Alfaric, Senator Auguste Buisseret.
Australia: Judge A. W. Foster, Prof. Gordon Childe, J. V. Duhig, W. A. Osborne.
Canada: Marshall Gauvin.
China: S. I. Hsuing.
Gt. Britain: Lord Boyd Orr, Lord Chorley, Sir Ernest Kennaway, Sir Sheldon Dudley, Prof. Barbara Wootton, Prof. A. J. Ayer.
Mexico: General C. Rodriguez Rivera.
New Zealand: Prof. R. Firth, F. A. de la Mare.
Norway: Prof. A. Heintz, D. K. Horn.
Sweden: Ture Nerman (M.P.).
India: Sir R. P. Paranjpye.

C. B. B.

This Believing World

The Third Programme brought to the microphone the other day two distinguished translators of the Gospels in what must have seemed to everybody who heard them a completely futile discussion. One of them, Dr. E. V. Rieu, blandly informed everybody that his translation made him into a more thorough believer than he was before, which is quite true. Dr. Rieu has joined the ranks of the most naive Fundamentalists. The other translator is the Rev. J. B. Phillips who laughingly upheld his omission of the famous Genealogies by pointing out that the names therein are quite unknown to the majority of Christians.

This tampering with God's Revealed Word did not in any way upset him, but it did Dr. Rieu who was by no means satisfied with the explanation. Of course, the real reason is that the famous Genealogies thoroughly contradict one another, and no apologist has been able to satisfy anybody with any intelligence why they should differ. On the one hand, the more enlightened Christian holds the Genealogies as "late interpolations" into the Holy Text; while the more believing Christians claim that, instead of Jesus having two fathers as the Divine Word insists, one of the Genealogies is that of Mary—a conclusion vigorously contested by other believers. What a delightful game it all is!

A Spiritualist medium, writing the other day to a newspaper on the vexed question of clothes in Summerland, said that she saw only nudes there "on the lowest sphere." On the "higher" plane they all wore clothes—though we were not told what they wore. Were they nighties such as angels always wear or the more comfortable trousers for men, "slacks" or jeans for women, or crinoline dresses, or what? We submit, for the various nudist camps, the idea that they will only flourish on the "lowest spheres" when they pass on. It is bound to be a comforting thought.

Another correspondent ridicules the idea that taking away Sunday entertainments will forthwith make everybody more religious. He cites Toronto where there are no Sunday entertainments—and most people there, instead of praying and singing hymns all day, actually spend their time in card-playing or doing odd jobs. Still, this does prevent them from laughing at a music hall comedian wearing a false nose or a dirty dicky on God's Holiest Day. They must be taught that, if there is one thing the Lord abhors on a Sunday, it is healthy laughter. That is an unforgivable crime.

Now is the time of the year when our men of God all over the world can let themselves go and give us what can be only properly called "mass hysteria" on Jesus Christ. Most of them somehow manage to get into our newspapers and so have no difficulty in getting the Sacred Message over. A typical example is the Rev. F. Martin who, in the *Sunday Graphic*, writing on President Eisenhower's speech on the Atom Bomb, reminds us that "At Christmas we shall celebrate the birth of an idea by which a handful of men converted a heathen world." We are not sure how believers will like the birth of God's Precious Son described as "the birth of an idea," but it is quite amusing to find that the "heathen" world was "converted" by a "handful" of men. History can hardly be worse distorted than this.

It took the Church centuries after the handful of men—if they ever lived, which we doubt—had died to force their childish creeds (often at the point of the sword) down the

throats of some people; and, of course, millions of "heathens" were never "converted." The mass of the people in Asia, though Christianity is an Oriental creed, never accepted it; and the people who saw it arise—the Jews—treated it with contempt. And history can show no bigger supporters of war than the Christian Church. But, of course, Mr. Martin will "get away" with his idiotic statement these days.

And what about our cinemas? They are constantly showing films glorifying Roman Catholic priests—we have yet to see them doing the same for a Protestant parson—and, following *Quo Vadis* which gave an utterly false picture, we now have two films portraying Jesus Christ and His "Crucifixion" wringing the hearts of all true believers. Few, if any, will question the story, for even our reverent Rationalists believe in the Crucifixion which is about as big a myth as can be found in mythology. Still, it keeps Christianity well in the forefront of everything, and what more can Christians want than that? No wonder Freethought has constantly to struggle against this mass of lies and can only very slowly make any headway.

Theatre

The Confidential Clerk. T. S. Eliot's latest play at the Lyric Theatre starts slowly and progresses sluggishly, due to a number of side-tracts for character development. The author gets down to action in the last act, when he has said all he wants to tell us about the people and starts to think about the play.

In Act I we learn that Sir Claude Mulhammer (Paul Rogers) engages his son as confidential clerk, but does not allow him to disclose that he is the father, for the son (Denholm Elliott) unknown to Sir Claude's lady has been kept a secret and has been brought up by an aunt. Sir Claude also has a daughter who lives with them as an adopted child (Margaret Leighton) and she unwittingly discloses to Denholm Elliott that Sir Claude is her father. This is a blow to him, for the two have become interested in each other, and as he cannot tell her he has the same father she does not understand his attitude and finds solace in someone else. But unfortunately for them Sir Claude has not sown his wild oats too carefully, and ultimately it is discovered that he is not the boy's father.

All these people do full justice to their parts, and in addition Isabel Jeans (as Sir Claude's wife) is better than her usual self, while Peter Jones gives a smart piece of character acting as the fellow to whom Margaret Leighton turns for solace.

T. S. Eliot's poetry is like soft and subtle music to the ear, but so elusive that at moments it can escape one. Through it he expounds freely on love tangles and paternity tangles, on bastards and illegitimacy, in a manner that keeps us held. Although slow the play is not dull, so it seems that he has succeeded in his object, which is to entertain.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

International Freethought

It is well known that the editor of *The Freethinker* is, unlike the Pope, not infallible but, again unlike the Holy Father, is nearly always right! We are, accordingly, pleased to note that the article on "The Problems of International Freethought," which we published on returning from the European continent, has been translated and published by French and German Freethought papers, and has been commended in a letter from the U.S.A. We are not insular, even if we live in an island!

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

HARRY DERRETT.—Thank you for your interesting letter and card. We heartily reciprocate your good wishes.

EVELYN BELCHAMBERS.—Thank you very much for your valuable biographical article, which we hope to use in an early issue.

W. H. WOOD.—Thank you for your poem and article, both of which we hope to use shortly.

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.

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 should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: FRANK ROTHWELL.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER and MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields, a Lecture.

North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Thursday, 1-15 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 27, 2-30 p.m.: D. S. WIGNALL, "A Visit to People's Poland."

11 years; like the Moslems, at puberty, as among many aboriginal tribes, and even later, as among a number of black Africans; but by no means all.

This is, of course, ritual circumcision. But, in addition, very many have submitted to it, not for religious reasons at all, but for purely medical, that is, physiological and hygienic, reasons.

I was in New York on one occasion when it was, oh, so oppressively hot! In order to find some place where it might be cooler I thought of going to the banks of the North river, as they call the Hudson at that particular part of its course.

I certainly did find it more pleasant there. So did hundreds and hundreds of boys, youths and men, who, having discarded every stitch of their clothing, dived into the water, shouting with glee.

In my pocket I had a guide which had just informed me that no fewer than one-third of the population of New York were Jews; so the appearance of so many who had most obviously been circumcised should have been no surprise to me.

Yet many of those happy parties which approached so close to me did not have what are termed "Hebraic features." I asked one lad: "Surely, *you* are not all Jews?"

"Naw," he replied, and sensing the reason for my question, went on, "the doc. circumcises us as soon as we're born. I know—from my kid brothers."

Not long after that I purchased one of those very frank sex magazines which you see everywhere on the bookstalls. In the correspondence section a young husband complained that his marriage had not been too successful hitherto; from the "physical aspect"; if I may put it that way.

The advice he was given was to go to a surgeon and ask to be circumcised, which could quite easily and immediately be done in his surgery, did not take more than a quarter of an hour, if so long; did not involve any absence from work, had many advantages and no disadvantages. There would be no pain, as an efficient local anaesthetic was always used.

This set me wondering whether here we had not one of the main reasons for the prevalence of this almost universal "minor operation"; or that it is to promote greater "sexual efficiency," and delight.

The reason for it set forth in the Old Testament will not, of course, hold water with anyone who thinks a bit about the subject. Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac, his only son; and at almost the crucial point the generous Lord let him off; or, to put it in a more Hebraic way, allowed him 99.9 per cent. *discount*, which meant that only a small part of a part had to part company, instead of the whole carcass going up in smoke!

But there is another version in the Old Testament; I refer to the story of the wife of Moses, in a fit of exuberance, taking up a stone knife, with which she successfully performed the ceremony on their young son. The query that arises with me is: why, he, the son of the very leader of a tribe that regularly circumcised on the eighth day, had not already undergone that rite long ago.

The Jews, by the way, are said by some anthropologists to have copied the practice from the Egyptians. Well, the Egyptians did undoubtedly circumcise; but only their priests and their aristocrats; not every man Jack among them, as the Jews most rigorously did, and do to the present day.

Then, again, the ancient Egyptians, like the more modern Germans, had a penchant for keeping records; and some learned scholars have stated that they have found *no record* at all of any stay of the Israelites among them! So where are we?

How did an Ancient Rite Originate?

By LEONARD MARTIN

WHO was the very first human male to be truly circumcised? Obviously there *must* have been one. But it was many thousands of years ago that no one now knows who he was; just as no one knows who invented the wheel.

The origin of the wheel is said to have been that some primeval savage, one with an acute brain, absent-mindedly stepped on the circular log of a tree lying on the ground, stepped, picked himself up and then muttered to himself: "Very interesting! Now, instead of dragging that heavy log along the ground—phew! don't I remember the last time my wife made me do it!—I placed it on that slippery, rolling trunk, it would mean so much less effort for me!"

And thus was the wheel born; for a wheel originally was nothing more than a disc sawn or hewn off a circular tree trunk. To-day many of the wheels of even our twentieth-century children's soap boxes are nothing more.

But how about the so-called "Jewish rite." If you consult a popular cyclopædia you will find that anthropologists give many different, and often contradictory, answers; but there seems to be no agreement as to any one cause for its very frequent adoption.

Frequent? Why, there must be hundreds of millions of living people who have undergone it, either on the eighth day, like the Jews, at various youthful ages up to about

Just now I mentioned that I saw that circumcision was fairly prevalent also among the non-Semitic part of New York's huge population, and I had long before that discovered much the same thing among some intimate friends of my schoolboy days and youthful years.

One of my acquaintances at school was cursed with the complaint doctors call "phimosis," which means that one's foreskin, instead of retracting in the way it normally should after puberty has been reached, refuses to do so, owing to some slight congenital defect—another argument, by the way, against the perfection of "God's Creation"—and in addition to causing troublesome irritation, especially in summer, may give the sufferer on occasion much pain as well.

He decided that the only relief to be obtained was the drastic one of circumcision. In the city in which we lived there were thousands of Moslems. Their circumcisers charged very little indeed, and some were reputed to be most expert. So, not wishing to let his parents know, as they might on religious or other grounds oppose the operation, he went secretly to one of these elderly circumcisers in a back street, paid only two half-crowns, and told us at school a week or two later that he was highly pleased with the result. Several thereupon followed his example, also *sub rosa*.

Did you know that a section even of the Anglican Church favours circumcision for, at all events, some of its younger adherents? I suppose you didn't! Neither did I. But read this extract, which is taken from the *Cape Times*, published in Cape Town, South Africa, dated May 6, 1950:—

"Anglicans are forbidden to attend these schools (which, allow me to explain here, are initiation schools held for native African youths about the time of puberty, when they are circumcised and undergo a practical training in sex), but are circumcised in hospital, and are afterwards secluded in a hostel where they are given spiritual instruction, apropos of the church assisting the transition from tribal life, after the manner of the early Christian Church when it took over pagan festivals."

There you have it! Note the last sentence in particular!

This gives us another hint why circumcision is so often adopted. These Anglican native youths allow themselves unwillingly to be circumcised, I suppose, because if they did not, they would be derided by their many circumcised fellows and branded as mere infants. It is well known that among many aboriginals a male is not considered a "man," or a full adult, unless he is duly circumcised; he is called "an infant," or as we would say to-day, a "sissie." Very few of us would like to be called that!

So this is the second possible clue to its general adoption.

A third one, and not so plausible, is this: that one in great authority may have been born with a congenital abnormality which made circumcision quite unnecessary. Mohammed is said to have been amongst the number which, it is true, is quite a small proportion of us males, no doubt; although one of my youthful friends was like that. Suppose a young king was in a similar—well, I won't call it "plight," for it has many natural advantages—let me say, "condition"; the news would soon get about, and courtiers would imitate him; from them the practice would spread to high society, and so it would percolate down, or radiate to the hoi polloi. It is not so far fetched as it may at first seem!

This therefore reminds me that in a book I read, over roundly and frenziedly condemning alleged Jewish "plotting" and Zionism, a quotation is given from a prominent Zionist newspaper, reporting with an apparent boast that a young member of a certain Royal family had been successfully operated upon by the leading *mohel*

(Jewish circumciser) of a famous city! I wonder if others therefore followed suit.

Thus the third clue to the origin of the rite is: Snobbery, or the mere copying of those in authority *because they are in authority*.

Myself, I favour the idea that it has a great deal to do with the ancient fertility rites, and was adopted by those who are the direct opposites to and opponents of "Puritanism," and all it stands for, to put it succinctly.

And there I must of necessity leave it.

Review

THE UPROOTED, by Oscar Hamlin (Watts and Co., 15s.) Professor Hamlin has written a book that is a pioneer in its class: he has written of the problems of American immigration, but from the point of view of the immigrant. So far as I am aware, he is the first author to tackle the question from this angle. Professor Hamlin, being himself the child of immigrants, and a teacher of history at Harvard University, is well qualified to undertake the task.

He draws the historical development of his subject in sombre colours. There was nothing in the way of organisation to welcome the immigrant, nothing in the way of education or study of his needs. They were allowed in and then left to their own devices, on the vague assumption that there were room and work for all. The author points out that nearly all immigrants were of peasant stock, whether from Ireland or Ukraine. They were uprooted—uprooted from the traditional life of the village community, where each grew up conscious of his place and membership in a close and confined society. They arrived in America, where they had to engage in employment of a very different nature, at the waterside front or in the factories of the great cities. Even where they secured employment on the land they found it even more strange, the "wide open spaces," the new *latifundia* of large-scale farming, spelt an even greater loneliness for them than work in the cities, where at least they met their own kind.

They suffered all the worst horrors of exploitation, slum dwelling, long hours and unhealthy conditions which the *laissez-faire* phase of the English industrial revolution has made familiar to us.

They sought to recreate the cultural features of their former lives; in particular, to build their churches. Yet even here the same disunity and disparity showed itself. Catholicism under the domination of Irish priests and bishops seemed a different thing to the Catholicism they had known in Poland or Italy. A band of 350,000 Uniate Greeks found so little sympathy and understanding among their Catholic co-communicants, that they turned to their Orthodox fellow Christians, and thus were lost to the Vatican fold. Lutherans and other Protestant sects found even greater disparities.

The immigrant mass really felt assimilated, according to this son of one, in spite of the fact that this influx is to-day so essential a part of the Americas. Only his children, brought up there, could have such feelings, and thereby were the less able to comprehend their parents. With the restrictive policy adopted after the first World War, immigration dropped off sharply, even the limited quotas allowed by legislation not being filled. While this helped consolidation and assimilation, it brought its disadvantages, too. The author refuses to be drawn into an assessment of the gains and losses of the changed policy.

America, the land of opportunity, the land of the free! The immigrant went west seeking safety and security; "but danger and insecurity are other words for freedom and opportunity." Those who are interested in the problems of the masses in America, will profit by a study of Professor Hamlin's book.

P. C. KING.

Londoner

The world is wider than the stretch
From Charing Cross to Pimlico,
And there are sights I could have seen
And greater glories than I know—
So they have said who pitied me
And went to see the things to see.

Desert wastes are wide indeed
And wider are the fretting seas,
But wider is the narrow way
From Temple Bar to Minorities.
Two thousand years can barely range
From Cheapside to the Stock Exchange.

I saw the gleam of Roman swords
As I came up from Billingsgate,
And in the shadow of the Tower
I saw the steady legions wait,
And heard the bucinator's roar
From galleys grounded on the shore.

And when I stand on London Bridge
At dusk and watch the river wane,
I see the gallants rowed across
To view Dick Burbage as the Dane,
For one miraculous moment hear
The first words spoken of King Lear.

I can never pass by Clement Danes
But what, I see Sam Johnson walk,
Tapping the posts along the way
And stunning Goldsmith with his talk.
As they go arm-in-arm to meet
Sir Joshua in Gerrard Street.

By Moorgate where the City ends,
Where London Wall confined the streets,
I always hear a nightingale
And look around to see John Keats.
Here must he ever be at home
Despite the dust in distant Rome.

And when I go up Highgate way
To take the air upon the height,
I hear the scratching of a pen
Where Marvell sits him down to write.
And sometimes on another ridge
I see the dreaming Coleridge.

The world is broader than the miles
From Regent Street to Camden Town,
And there are ways I should have gone
In this or that famed foreign town—
So they have said who went to look
At places in their travel book.

Foreign towns are fair, no doubt,
And full of many a wondrous sight,
But I will walk by Hazlitt's house
And stroll into the London night,
And have a word with Samuel Pepys
Where Nellie sold and Davy sleeps.

—JOHN O'HARE.

Correspondence

ESPERANTO FOR THE BLIND

SIR,—I have had read to me the references which have appeared in recent issues of *The Freethinker* to the Tower of Babel and the Esperanto international language.

I am particularly interested, as I am secretary of the British Association of Blind Esperantists, and I suggest that it is a remarkable achievement that the blind people of the various countries have been able to interchange ideas, information and goods by using Esperanto-Braille correspondence; furthermore, that the many members of the International League of Blind Esperantists are enabled to attend the Universal Congresses which are held in a different country each year.

These congresses are usually attended by 2,000 or more people from 30 different countries. There are no batteries of microphones, such as occur at other world congresses, together with interpreters. There are no arguments as to whether the official language shall be English, French or German, etc. The one and only official language used and spoken is Esperanto, in an atmosphere of complete understanding and warm friendship.—Yours, etc.,

PETER WALLACE,

Organising Secretary, British Association of Blind Esperantists.

TOWER OF BABEL.

SIR,—Your article in the last issue of *The Freethinker* brings out the real issue in this problem, which becomes more and more important. English or Esperanto?

English is my mother tongue. Esperanto I have also learned and used until I am equally fluent in it, and as I write this letter my wife and I have a young lady visitor from Yugoslavia in our home who speaks Croat, Russian, French, German, English and Esperanto, but our common language in the home together is Esperanto. It is our choice for several reasons, the most important being that however well a national of another country learns English (short of spending a lifetime at it), then an English-speaking person always has the advantage.

With Esperanto everyone has to learn it in addition to their own language, and so all are equal. Also, the use of national languages at international conferences does not tend to obliterate national characteristics, but Esperanto does. At an Esperanto-speaking congress (there is one huge congress at least, held every year), nationalities do not exist as such, only people who freely mix during and after meetings.

This is a very important factor, and in our opinion Esperanto could do more to make the world one than English.—Yours, etc.,

J. BROWNLEE,

Assoc. M.Inst. Gas Engs., D.B.E.A.

COST OF MONARCHY

SIR,—I cannot agree with Mr. Nicholson's statement (November 13) to the effect that no one would benefit if the expense of maintaining the Royal Family were ended. I gather that the cost of the Monarchy in 1950 exceeded £1,000,000 (*Sunday Express*, September 10, 1950). A million pounds every year is a useful sum, and it is not all. A Royal yacht has just been built at a cost of £1,800,000, and which will cost about £145,000 annually to maintain. A liner has just been refitted at a cost of half a million pounds to take these privileged persons on a world tour, the cost of which the British public will probably never know.

I think it is undeniable that a million pounds every year could provide us with perhaps a new university that would turn out annually thousands of highly-trained and educated young men and women. That is real wealth—and we stupidly avoid this to squander money on persons who produce nothing and an institution that wastefully consumes much. We need colleges, schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and other important things on which could be spent the millions wasted on a useless institution.

But Mr. Nicholson need have no fear—yet. The subject of Monarchy will never be freely or publicly debated, because that would mark the beginning of the end of the Monarchy. Bagehot, a defender of Monarchy, truly said that while human reason is weak, Royalty will be strong, because Republics appeal to the understanding.—Yours, etc.,

WM. KEANE.

ETERNITY ALTERED

SIR,—I saw a man with a notice board, saying: "How will you spend eternity?" He also had a notice: "Questions invited."

So, I questioned, and also pointed out to him that, since eternity is without limit, it could not be spent! To my amazement and amusement, he said: "You're quite right, gov'nor. I'll get it altered." We then further discussed matter, but got "no change." I liked the old chap. Hope this may interest your readers.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. E. BERRY.

Come to **FREEDOM BOOKSHOP, 27, Red Lion Street, W.C. 1**, for "Freedom," the Anarchist weekly, Anarchist books and pamphlets, and good selection of second-hand books. Post orders given immediate attention. Send for book lists and specimen copy "Freedom."

CATHOLIC FILM PROPAGANDA

SIR,—On page 8 of the Scottish Catholic Film Institute's magazine, "Screen Review," Vol. 1, No. 2, November, 1953, we read:—

"The motion picture attracts and fascinates particularly the young, the adolescents and the child. Thus at the very age when the moral sense is being formed and when the notions of justice and rectitude are being developed, the motion picture, with its direct propaganda, assumes a position of commanding importance."—Pius XI., *Vigilanti Cura*.

Yes, I have noticed that many Hollywood products are riddled with subtle R.C. propaganda.—Yours, etc.,

P. BROWN.

COMPARATIVE RELIGION

SIR,—When I was a young midshipman, just beginning to have grave doubts about the truths of Christianity, I set about making a very thorough study of religion with the idea of finding one that didn't look quite so improbable.

Very soon I began to realise that many of the stories, commandments, precepts, and New Testament miracles, crucifixions, resurrections, etc., appeared—sometimes almost word for word—in the Holy Scriptures of the older religions.

It was this discovery, that the Christian Bible was little more than a rehash compiled from these other religions' store of legend and fable right back to Babylonian times, that first started me on the road to an enlightened agnosticism, and eventually to atheism.

"He little of religion knows who only knows his own" became one of my mottoes. Half a dozen articles of mine under this caption appeared in *The Freethinker* some time ago, the gist of many months of study.

The Secular Society is once more advocating the teaching of Comparative Religion in all schools, but the snag here is that most of the books on these Eastern religions have been written by Christians—some of them priests—who very naturally discuss them as if they were, of course, nothing but fables. To every worshipper the gods of the other religions appear ridiculous.

Scrupulous care is taken to omit the many obvious similarities that might put dangerous ideas into the heads of the more intelligent students. It would never do to let them know that other gods had been born of virgins, had been sacrificed, died and risen again on December 25, etc.,

One fears that comparative religion taught from such books would only tend to show up Christianity in a more favourable light!

One could hardly expect the average student (or teacher) to study such meaty books as Robertson's "Pagan Christs" or Fraser's "Golden Bough."

In any case, a teacher who ventured to reveal these truths to his class would soon be out of a job! Truth is only desirable until it begins to disintegrate one's pet illusions.—Yours, etc.,

M. C. BROTHERTON,
Commander R.N.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

SIR,—An Irish Republican Freethinking friend informs me that some years ago at a concert on the island of Jersey he refused to stand and sing "God Save the King" when a gentleman present picked up a flagon and struck him a terrible blow on the head.

A melee followed and my friend, with his head heavily bandaged, appeared in court the next day, and was fined one pound for creating a disturbance.

Ever since then he stands and sings, but instead of using the words "God Save the Queen," he uses the words of the Siamese national anthem, which has the same tune as ours, and expresses the same patriotic idea.

These are the words, and he always sings them lustily:—

Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha na sa mi.
Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha wa ta na siam,
Ha na sa mi.

Yours, etc.,
PAUL VARNEY.

AN UNBELIEVER REPLIES

SIR,—The Faith ("St. Paul's" Apologetics Circle, St. Dominic's Priory, Rabat, Malta) in their December issue are very annoyed (see page 112) about two remarks in an article (written by me) which appeared in *The Freethinker* dated September 25, 1953.

For one thing, I said that according to people who *do* believe in God, "with Him all things are possible," so that He would have known all about evil beforehand, and would therefore have meant it to happen.

"The Faith" replied that admittedly He knew, but that He did not *want* evil to happen. He *permitted* it (they said): they said that evil shall in the end, redound to greater good. Notice—they admit that He let it happen, so it's still His doing; and if, as they say, evil redounds to greater good, then according to them, the more evil the better! And if "with Him all things are possible," it would have been possible for Him to be quite contented without making the world. So by all accounts, *anything* evil is His fault. The Christians might say: "You're glad you're alive, aren't you?" What an excuse that would be—that's His fault!

"The Faith" said that God moves all creatures according to their very nature; so He moves them, does he? Well, if He did not move them, they would not do whatever they do; so evil is His fault. (And what's this about "free-will," if He moves us?)

Another remark of mine to which "The Faith" took exception was what I said about Luke xv. 7. "More rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth than ninety-nine just persons." They referred to me as an "addle-brained materialist" because I said that according to Luke xv. 7 it would be all right if we were all criminals: it is an incentive to crime. And they also mentioned that one about the return of the prodigal son (Luke xv., 31 and 32). They said that was the answer. But it is *not* the answer! The question is, why shouldn't everybody be like that? Why not everybody do wrong on purpose to be liked better?—Yours, etc.,
A. HANCOCK.

Review

THE PLAIN VIEW, Winter Number. Subscription for one year 4s. 6d. post free, from 4a, Inverness Place, Queensway, London, W.2.

Mr. H. J. Blackham can always be depended upon for an eminently sane discussion of modern problems, and his "Commentary" which opens this Winter Number gives the "Humanist" point of view on what should be our relations with Russia and China. On such a subject as Roman Catholicism and literature, Mr. Hector Hawton is in his element. He thinks Newman and Pascal "unbalanced", the world of Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Mauriac, and Bernanos, "phantasmagoric", while theologians like Fr. D'Arcy and Maritain have "sanity and poise and depth of culture." But it is impossible in a short review to do anything like justice to such an excellent article which should be read by all Freethinkers who wonder at the power the old Church still wields, not only among the illiterate, but also among the intellectuals. The Church has "the real secret of the enchantment that stills intellectual doubt, that makes the world seem well-just, that carries those under its magic to the point-of-no-return. You cannot *argue* with that sort of appeal." Thus Mr. Hawton—and one feels that he is right.

Miss Virginia Flemming deals thoughtfully with "Religious Education and Character Development," and Mr. R. F. Tredgold's "Incentives and Patterns of Behaviour in Industry" should prove particularly useful for those who believe that psychology has a useful part to play in industry.

Mr. John Katz's article, "Practical Intelligence and Religious Imagination" discusses art in primitive society, as well as its belief in magic and the question of fertility in religion. Mr. Katz is intensely interesting, full of classical and modern allusions, and his final paragraph may compel his readers to *think*—"Zeus punished Prometheus by sending an eagle to feed on his liver. The religions of salvation and the metaphysical systems supporting them supply most of the ideologies for the Third Order civilisations. These ideologies are eagles feeding on the liver of an aspiring man."

For the rest, there are some interesting reviews which could act as articles as well. This Winter Number is an excellent one from every point of view.

H. CUTNER.