

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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ONE of the best-known Rationalist books written during the 19th century was that of the American J. W. Draper, *The Conflict of Science and Religion*. Draper's theme, one endorsed by most of his more radical contemporaries, was, broadly, as follows: Religion, an obscurantist and intolerant force, based ultimately on human ignorance and on primitive superstition, had, throughout the record of human annals, acted as a constant drag on human progress. Whereas science, taken in its general sense, as the ever-expanding sum of human knowledge, had progressively, in every sense of that word, expanded human knowledge of, and human mastery over, both human society and the world of external nature. Hence, argued Draper, the basic antagonism of our modern era of rapidly expanding knowledge was "The conflict of science and religion."

The Meaning of Science

To-day, shortly after the middle of the 20th century, it is clear that, whatever view one may take of religion, the meaning attached to science in, at least, popular connotation has changed very greatly since the days of Draper and of his optimistic contemporaries. In "the century of stupendous progress," as the 19th century has been accurately styled, most of the actual results of science visibly tended towards progress, towards the greater and more obvious well-being of mankind: during that self-same era, human destructiveness, indeed, increased, thanks to scientific inventions; but it increased much more slowly than did the ameliorating, reforming and, obviously, progressive results of scientific expansion. To the forward-looking spirits of the last century—and there were many such in that optimistic era—science, and scientific advance in general, could, and did, only mean one thing. That meaning was summarised in and by the word "progress," the motto, one could almost say, of the 19th century, of "the century of stupendous progress."

The Idea of Progress

In his masterly work, *The Idea of Progress*, one of the great books of the 20th century, that eminent Freethinker, the late Prof. J. B. Bury, indicated what he called *The Idea of Progress* as the key of the modern rationalistic civilisation, which began with the Renaissance and which culminated in the 19th century; in Britain, in the self-styled "Victorian age," according to the distinguished author, "The Idea of Progress" was the essential discovery of the modern era, and was peculiar to it. No previous civilisation knew anything about "progress": the Greeks and Romans, for example, though they discovered the word, never accepted it; the typical view of the "classical" civilisation was that life consisted of cycles, in which progress and decay were the opposite sides of the same fundamental process, or, as the most learned of ancient philosophers summarised it, "all the arts and sciences have been lost and found a great number of

times." Ancient philosophy, in general, accepted this dictum of Aristotle, whereas, to the Christian Middle Ages, this life was merely a "vale of tears" or, at best, a state of preparation for the next, the *real* life in "Our Heavenly Fatherland," as Thomas Aquinas called it, voicing the unanimous opinion of "The Age of Faith." Even our modern civilisation began with a Renaissance, a "rebirth" of the old! Such an idea of "rebirth" has nothing in common with, is, in fact, the very antithesis of, *The Idea of Progress*. That "Idea," however, like all human ideas, had a factual foundation: it was based upon the concrete foundation of the unexampled scientific progress of the

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Science and Religion

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

17th, 18th and 19th centuries, an achievement of expanding knowledge and of technical discovery without any parallel in recorded human annals. That astonishing people, the ancient Greeks, displayed probably even greater pure intellectual power than did the scientific and philosophical protagonists of the modern age of progress: in sheer mental courage and originality, the ancient Greeks have never had an equal. However, as Leonardo Da Vinci pointed out, with the insight of genius, Greek thought suffered from one fundamental defect: it never possessed the technical ability to verify by exact research its brilliant intuitions. Hence, it could never escape from the illusion of "Fate," of inevitable limitation and retrogression. "Fate," writes a modern critical thinker, "is the limitation of technical means; the voice of blood and sickness and death; of all that limits man and prevents him from becoming arrogant." One can relevantly add that it is, precisely, the technical ability of modern culture that has freed it from the illusion of "Fate" and that has made both *The Idea of Progress* and the rationalistic character of modern culture possible.

Science Changes its Meaning

Science, as we noted above, became virtually identified with "progress" during "the century of stupendous progress," the 19th century, and it is used by Draper in this precise sense in the title of his best-known book. To-day, however, science has changed its meaning in popular thought; it no longer stands automatically for human betterment; indeed, it has often come to stand for the contemporary antithesis to any human advancement; in fact, it has become the modern equivalent of the ancient Greek "Fate" which "limits man" and prevents him from becoming "arrogant." If science meant, instinctively, "progress" in the 19th century, to-day it is becoming, equally instinctively, the atomic bomb, that fine flower of modern science! Indeed, so far has this changed meaning of science proceeded that, nowadays, the chief danger to our civilisation does not, as so often in the past, spring from a prostituted religion, but from a prostituted science. If an increasing number of people are coming to think a new wave of destruction may inaugurate a new "Dark Age" over the ruins of our culture, the scientists, with

their misused energy, rather than the clergy with their mythical theology, are more likely to be the motivating cause behind this future debacle. In view of this widespread belief, a belief, also factually based on current developments, it is no longer possible to equate science automatically with progress, or to assume that a scientific civilisation is automatically a rationalist one, as was too optimistically assumed by the contemporaries of Darwin and Draper.

Reason, Science and Religion

In point of fact, it is now becoming increasingly obvious that both science and religion are human creations, and both represent evolutionary phases in human development. Religion and science both *start* with facts, with the real external universe. Religion seeks, on a primitive level, to explain *facts* by obvious *myths*, as in, for example,

Genesis' opening chapters. Science, at a more advanced stage of evolution, investigates nature, sometimes objectively, and sometimes in accordance with human self-interest and prejudices. The scientist, as such, is no more infallible than the theologian: the nature of scientific discovery depends on the current wishes of society. Science, like religion, is what man makes it: whether science is beneficial or destructive at a given time depends on the then current state of mankind. To contrapose science to religion is merely to exchange one fallible guide for another; to-day, the theologian who manufactures myths, for the physicist who manufactures bombs! The antithesis to religion is not science, as Draper supposed, but mankind's critical reason, which is a greater thing than either science or religion, and which alone can decide whether, and when, either science or religion makes for progress or for retrogression.

Robert Burns: 1759-1796

Scotland's National Bard

By J. HUMPHREY

FOR his concern in "that wicked rebellion" of 1745 (in part, a war of religion), Mr. William Burness, the poet's father, became ruined. The son of a farmer, who, like his ancestors, had rented lands from the noble Keiths of Marischal, he shared their fate by having his property seized. Adherents of the Stuart cause, after their defeat at the battle of Culloden, 1746, suffered much privation. "Crimes," such as wearing the kilt or conversing in Gaelic, were punishable by death. The clans who fought against the English—for what they sincerely believed to be the cause of their king and country—were outlawed. Many fled to the hills or to the islands for safety, changing their names to avoid detection. Making his way south, Mr. Burness changed his name to Burns, and, after many wanderings and sojournings, finally settled in Ayrshire, where he found work as a gardener.

This was the position of affairs when, on January 25, 1759, in the parish of Alloway, near Ayr, in a humble dwelling erected by his father, Robert Burns was born. Within a few days of his birth, this "mud edifice" was damaged by storm to such an extent that mother and child had to be carried through the storm, to the house of a neighbour, where they remained until the necessary repairs had been made. It was in this "clay tabernacle" that the young poet spent the first six or seven years of his life. "In my infant and boyish days, I owed much to an old woman who resided in the family (Betty Davidson, a relation by the mother's side), remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraps, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of heresy."—*Autobiography*.

In the year 1765, Robert's father and four of his neighbours engaged a young teacher, John Murdoch, to teach the little school at Alloway. Having been grounded in English at home, Robert made rapid progress in reading and writing and was generally at the head of the class, when ranged with boys far his senior. In the following year, with the assistance of his generous master, the father ventured on a small farm. This farm, Mount Oliphant, being a considerable distance from school, prevented the boy from attending regularly, so that he had to continue his training at home. His father taught him in the evenings, while he assisted on the farm during the day. This

was all the schooling he had, except when at the age of fourteen, he went to board and lodge with his old teacher, who had then moved to Ayr, for the purpose of revising English grammar. At the end of one week he was advised to learn French; at the end of the second week of study of French he began to read *Adventures of Telemachus*, in Fenelon's own words. His sudden recall to help on the farm, deprived his teacher of a very apt pupil, at the end of three weeks. "This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave—brought me to my sixteenth year, a little before that period I first committed the sin of rhyme. . . . Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half-mad; and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, etc., used to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and discussion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me which has not ceased to this hour."—*Autobiography*.

In the year 1786 he startled the world with his book, "Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect," by Robert Burns, which proclaimed him a true son of the Muses. In his short career, he poured forth song after song of emotional tenderness expressed in the most felicitous language which explains the "Immortal Memory." Carlyle wrote an essay on Burns in which he discusses the secret of this abiding popularity. He finds the explanation first in the sincerity of his poetry; then in the naturalness of his muse and the familiarity of his themes. "No poet of any age or nation," says Carlyle, "is more graphic than Burns; the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance; three lines from his hand and we have a likeness. A single phrase depicts a whole subject, a whole scene. Our Scottish forefathers in the battlefield struggled forward 'redwat-shod,' in this one word, a full vision of horror and carnage, perhaps too frightfully accurate for Art." The poets Scott, Wordsworth, Campbell, Coleridge, Montgomery, Lowell, etc., all recognised him as one of the masters of their band. Hazlitt said of him: "Burns had an eye to see, a heart to feel. His pictures of good fellowship, of social life, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature and they cannot go beyond it." Principal Shairp, then Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford stated: "At the basis of all his power lay absolute truthfulness—intense reality—truthfulness to the objects which he saw, truthfulness to himself as the seer of them. . . . Here was a man, a son of toil, looking out on the world . . . on society high or low, on nature homely or

beautiful . . . touching life at a hundred points, seeing to the core all the sterling worth, nor less the pretence and hollowness of the men he met, the humour, the drollery, the pathos and the sorrow of human existence and expressing what he saw not in the stock phrase of books, but in his own vernacular, the language of his fireside, with a directness, a force, the phrases of his peasant's dialect into literature and made them forever classical."

Very few copies of the first edition of his poems are still in existence, although more than 600 were printed; this has made them very valuable. In the year 1898, a Kilmarnock Burns was sold for 545 guineas. In 1938, at Sotheby's, one brought £800 at the sale. In 1941 in New York, about £1,200 was paid for a Kilmarnock edition, again in 1951, one became the property of the National Library at a cost of £965. The clergy were mainly responsible for their scarcity; they destroyed every copy they could lay their hands on. Because of the Poet's attitude towards the church, the clergy spread false rumours regarding "his convivial excesses and errors of moral conduct, his ribaldry and blasphemy," etc., all to the Poet's prejudice. Proving the truth of Heine's statement, "He who fights with priests may make up his mind to have his poor good name torn and befouled by the most infamous slanders."

*Strange blend of love and joy and tears,
Son of the soil, whose shortened years,
Sufficed to win for you a place
In many hearts of every race;
We tune the lyre to sing your lay
On this returning natal day.
Your genius wooed sweet nature's charm,
Your satire roused the kirk's alarm,
Your freedom's Charter, stoutly framed
The Brotherhood of Man proclaimed.
Of Scotland's sons renowned the most,
TO OUR IMMORTAL BARD—A TOAST!*

Israel—A Theocracy?

By "AKIBA"

A FEW weeks ago, a *Jewish Chronicle* reporter interviewed the well-known political writer and author, Isaac Deutscher, who had just returned from a five-week stay in Israel. What was remarkable about Isaac Deutscher's observations was their correspondence with the real facts about Israel. Unlike most tourists, journalists and political impressionists, Isaac Deutscher went to seek out the facts, and not embellish the romantic fairy tales that are current in various sophisticated circles.

Impressed by the achievements of the State of Israel—he was nevertheless not unmindful of their background, their strictly limited character, and above all their conditional character. Moreover, he "could not reconcile himself to, however much one understood its reasons, . . . the intense nationalism of the Israelis, which he particularly observed during the Qibya incident, when most of the people had been prepared to justify any methods used by Israelis."

It is this Zionist nationalism which Deutscher rightly points out, limits and circumscribes the economic, political and cultural advancement of the State of Israel. The religious factors in the State of Israel are of relatively minor consequence, since Zionism in itself is secular in origin, and the political parties from Right to Left which hold fast to it, are in their majority either indifferent or hostile to religion. It is Zionism, and not Rabbinic Judaism (itself fast dying out) which places the big question-mark over the future development and even continued existence of the State of Israel. And to the extent that Zionism blinds that substantial section of Jewry in Israel to the real situation in

the Middle East with its indigenous nationalist movements rearing up all round her—it is performing a singular dis-service to the Jewish people.

"I think it is just another Jewish tragedy that the Jews who have not participated in or benefited from the great historical movements for the nation-State during its heyday should be driven to seek safety in this fine, small nation-State, when even the giant nation-State seems incapable any longer of providing safety for its inhabitants"—this is how Deutscher sums up Zionism as a full solution to the Jewish problem.

In the same interview, he drew attention to the inherent danger of Israel faced as it is by a wall of hostility from the Arab world. Israel is regarded as a European intruder, as an outpost of British or American imperialism by the Arab world. If the Arab world is to attain full independence how can Israel in her present condition survive? It is this question which Zionists have failed to bring into proper focus. Either Israel makes her peace with the Arab world and breaks her European links, or she will succumb to an Arab invasion. There is no other alternative. So far, Israel has lined herself up with the Western world against the just claims of the Arab world. It is this attitude, this policy which casts a dark shadow not simply over the fate of the State of Israel, but the fate of its Jewish inhabitants.

Isaac Deutscher made some very interesting remarks about the Kibbutzim (the collective farms) in the course of his interview. Despite their original socialistic and egalitarian aims, these collective farms, surrounded by the web of a capitalist economy, are slowly being absorbed into the dominant forms of economic activity. To-day the Kibbutz system (for agriculture and small light industry) could only expand by employing hired labour—which can only mean the end of this great utopian experiment in cultivating the land by voluntary co-operative methods.

To these observations perhaps a few can be added here. Israel is a modern, European State in a semi-feudal, semi-capitalist Middle East. Its modern, European character is a striking contrast to the religious character of some 20 per cent. of its inhabitants. The new Sabra (Israeli-born Jew) generation is wholly indifferent to religion. It is not even consciously Zionist in the same way as the generation which brought it there was Zionist. There has even been the development of an anti-Judaic, anti-European group amongst these Sabras, who call themselves Canaanites. They insist that they have nothing in common with the Jews outside Israel, and no responsibilities to them. Whether this tendency is symptomatic only the future can tell. The new Israel generation may well turn out to be very different from the preconceived ideas either of their religious or Zionist well-wishers.

Reciprocal Dishonesty

They found a brain-case; I supplied a jaw:
What is the use of thought without a tongue?
In fame I thought to rival Bernard Shaw—
Such foolish things we do when we are young.
Besides, I could not stand that Soapy Sam,
Who sneered at Thomas Henry and his cause;
The Bishop peddled stories of old Adam,
I manufactured evidence—and jaws.
They found me out, you say, but what of that?
Was my jaw worse than Adam's missing rib?
I had my tit to answer Bishop's tat,
He had a legend, I, a solid fib.

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This Believing World

Everybody knows that the Christian Puritan opposition to that fine old English sport, bear-baiting, was not at all out of any humane feeling for the bears, but because it gave onlookers pleasure. One feels much the same listening (as we did the other day to the radio) to the Rev. D. Soper protesting against the way the Press reports murder trials in a discussion with Mr. W. L. Andrews, of the *Yorkshire Post*. Dr. Soper felt that readers in the main "liked" to read the sordid details and, from a Christian-Methodist-Puritan standpoint, this was horrible. At all costs they must be prevented from reading something they liked. How these Christians love a censor!

Roman Catholics have their famous Index and certainly if ever they did get into power in this country it would be put into use at once—as it is in Eire, and as it would be in Ulster if ever Eire's priests got into power there. All totalitarian states must forbid reading the other side, for there is nothing so dangerous to "authority" as the printed word. Would Dr. Soper be much more "liberal" if his Methodism came to power than Roman Catholics? We doubt it.

In any case, we must hand it to the Roman Church again. The other Sunday they managed to persuade our TV authorities to televise High Mass from Leeds, in spite of indignant protests from our ultra-Protestant societies. The couple of millions of Catholics in this country can chortle with joy—for if there is one thing which would never happen in a Catholic country like Spain or Eire, it would be televising a Protestant service if Protestants were in such a small minority. But there it is. Roman Catholics have wormed themselves in everywhere into key positions. And Protestants are helpless.

Of course, the TV representation of Mass was a large success, the B.B.C. receiving very few complaints, and Dr. Heenan, who presided over the service, was in the highest of spirits. After all, millions of people viewed-in, and many of them were non-Catholics who were, no doubt, duly impressed. Millions of people, as a rule, do not see a wafer changed into a God so beautifully as at a Catholic service. There ought to be a rush for conversion—but will there be?

As many a traveller knows, a Bible can generally be found on the bed table in his room at his hotel, and it is claimed that there are now 25 million Bibles thus distributed. In fact, hoteliers are constantly asking to be supplied. But the real point is—are these Bibles read? Can one go up to the average traveller and ask him what is the divine message God gave the world through Haggai or Nahum? Does he know what St. John means in Revelation? Is it not a fact that some of the travellers' stories told in the smoke room—in spite of reading Obadiah or Zephaniah—would horrify even Dr. D. Soper?

A correspondent to a daily newspaper appears greatly puzzled. He finds Christians mouthing "Thou shalt not kill," celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace in every possible way—and yet slaughtering, without any compunction whatever, enormous numbers of cattle and birds for their joyous festivals. Yes, but does he not see that the birth of the Prince of Peace and the Angels singing Hosannas is pure Christianity, while eating turkeys and roast beef is pure paganism? He should wait for the Paradise he wants till he gets to Heaven, where there will be no turkeys or roast beef or Christmas pudding, but plenty of parables from the Babe (grown up) and even

more moral teaching from Peter. That will indeed be Heaven!

A boy of 16 got six years in prison recently for some particularly bad robberies and brutal assaults—which earned him the title of "the worst boy in Britain." He managed to steal over £2,500 in about nine months and, no doubt, has a good deal of it safely tucked for use when he comes out. We should like to call the attention of *Picture Post* to this youthful criminal, for he was the only child of a good family, and regularly attended Sunday school. Is he a precious example of what religion can do for our juvenile delinquents? No doubt whatever he will regularly receive the ministrations of the jail chaplain, and join lustily in all the hymn singing which so often distinguishes such criminals.

Theatre

More Intimacy at Eight is the new revue at the New Lindsey Theatre, staged by Michael Charnley with musical direction by Ronald Cass. It is no less successful than the first one last year.

This type of entertainment opens the way to frank and outspoken criticism about a number of topics, and has the advantage that at one and the same time it can show us up to ourselves and make us laugh. Two of the funniest are a skit on the Russians claims to all great inventions, and an "operetta" on an event at a Barber's in Tottenham Court Road area sung by Ronnie Stevens to Rossini's airs. There is also a skit on T. S. Eliot's work in which his present play ("The Confidential Clerk") comes under criticism.

The versatile and capable cast of eight have the style and ability to make this top entertainment.

The Big Knife, by Clifford Odets, is showing at the Duke of York's with Sam Wanamaker in the rôle of an American film star who is unable to cope with the problems that confront him on points of contracts and marriage.

Clifford Odets has done much better work than this rather untidy and rambling effort which is somewhat obscure in its full implications, and Mr. Wanamaker's performance does not avoid a distinct monotony which fails to draw the full sympathy that should go to this character. The result is that we are not distressed when he commits suicide in his bath after we had been given to expect a happy ending.

The play has certain dramatic strength that might be better appreciated in America, but we are not familiar with this type of character in England.

Mr. Wanamaker's direction is brilliant, Richard Lake's setting is (I imagine) pure Hollywood and fits the play, and there are good performances notably from Heather Stannard, Renee Asherson and Meier Tzelniker.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

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To Correspondents

MRS. TRASK. — Thank you for cuttings. We receive so many of these that we cannot acknowledge them individually.

DOUGLAS V. MORGAN. — If you think that you can "refute" Materialism, by all means let us have an article from you on the subject. "We seek for Truth," and your challenge is certain to be taken up. Please keep your article reasonably short, as our space is limited.

CHARLES A. SWEETMAN.—Thomas Hardy's ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey, but his heart was interred in his local churchyard at Dorchester. We do not know whether he left any directions about burial in consecrated ground, though the local clergy did not like him. His epic drama, *The Dynasts*, was published in 1904-8. We fully concur with your estimate of his genius.

The responsible officers of the movement are giving their attention to finding a suitable qualified firm of accountants to fill the vacancy caused by Mr. Theobald's death.

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.

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.

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute). — Sunday, January 24, 6-45 p.m.: A. H. WHARRAD, "Superstition and Legend in England."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 26, 7 p.m.: J. B. COATES, "The Future of Rationalism."

Glasgow Rationalist Press Association (Central Halls, 25, Bath Street).—Sunday, January 17, 3 p.m.: J. S. CLARKE, "Robert Burns."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Friday, January 29, 7-15 p.m.: D. LEWIS, "Art in Advertising."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate). — Sunday, January 24, 6-30 p.m.: J. R. BROWN (London), Propaganda and the Open Mind."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Cross Street Chapel). — Saturday, January 23, 3 p.m.: T. G. ROBSON, "Human Behaviour."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, January 24, 2-30 p.m.: GORDON SCHAFFER, "Germany: Focal Point of Peace or War."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1). —Sunday, January 24, 11 a.m.: ROYSTON PIKE, "Strange Sects of To-day."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Lauric Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road).—Sunday, January 24, 7-15 p.m.: Dr. EDWARD A. WILSON, "Collateral Marriage."

West Ham Branch (Community Centre, Wanstead). — Thursday, January 28, 8 p.m.: Open Meeting.

know much of Victor B. Neuberg, who died in 1940. It will not be out of place, therefore, to refer to a letter by a distinguished lady novelist some weeks ago in our eminent contemporary *The New Statesman and Nation*. One of that journal's contributors, Miss Kathleen Raine (a considerable poet herself), writing of the work of the deceased Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, mentioned that "some editor of more than usual discrimination" had picked out the work of the young Dylan Thomas in the *Sunday Referee*. Arising out of this remark, the *N.S. and N.* for November 21 contained a letter from Pamela Hansford Johnson, stating that the discriminating editor was Victor B. Neuberg, who not only picked Dylan Thomas as a "winner" but was directly instrumental in bringing about the publication of a first selection of his verses. We seem to remember that Miss Hansford Johnson was herself one of Victor Neuberg's "Poet's Corner" poets.

More Light on Jesus—1

By H. CUTNER

IT would be safe to say that, except for special students and converts, very little is known in this country of Islam, the religion founded by Muhammad (or Mahomet). We are a Christian country, and the only true religion is Christianity. All the others are false. Every child is thus taught in school, and if Islam is referred to at all by Christian lecturers, it is done in such a depreciatory tone that their audiences are forced to believe that it is merely an aberration of the human intellect which Christianity never is. It is only when people imbibe a little Freethought that they begin to see *all* religions are aberrations, including Islam and Christianity.

But this does not mean that these two religions have not very eminent men as wholehearted supporters. Of course they have; only, we in England are hardly allowed to know it. As an instance, take the work I want to deal with in a few articles, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, by A. K. N. Ahmad. Mr. Ahmad is a very distinguished all-believing Muslim, an English Barrister-at-Law of the Middle Temple, as well as Senior Advocate of the Federal Court at Pakistan, and of the High Court of Judicature at Lahore. His book is a huge one of over 430 pages packed with learning and authorities. (It is published by the Woking Muslim Mission, Woking, at 15 rupees.) And it tries to substantiate a more or less new view of Jesus Christ.

It must have taken Mr. Ahmad many years of hard reading and study to produce such a work, the central thesis of which is simply that Jesus did *not* die on the Cross, but managed to escape alive, and after many adventures, came to India, died, and was buried at Srinagar where his tomb can be seen at this day.

To substantiate this, Mr. Ahmad gives the titles of over 500 works he has consulted or used, many of them known to most students of the origins of Christianity—a formidable list indeed.

Now, why has he gone to all this trouble? The answer is simple. He wants to vindicate the Qur'an (Koran) where it states in no unequivocal terms that Jesus was not crucified. If it says so in the Qur'an, it must be so; for this Holy Book is God's final Revelation to Man. Before the human race was so generously endowed, there were, it is true, a number of tentative revelations, like those to the Jews and Christians, wherein was shown how God sent such Messengers as Moses and Jesus. Islam admits these two Messengers as coming from God, or Allah, as he is called. Nay, Islam goes further. The Bible is all true exactly as written—except that Jesus was neither God nor God's Son. He was a Mere Man; but everything else is true so long as it is in accord with the Qur'an.

NOTES AND NEWS

A few weeks ago in these "Notes" we referred to three talented contributors to our journal, each for both prose and verse. These were Mr. J. B. O'Hare, who we congratulated, the late Victor Neuberg, and our veteran, Bayard Simmons. Readers new to our pages may not

There can be no doubt that the Qur'an is in many respects an extraordinary work; but one can say the same thing of so many other Bibles. They are literary works which have come down to us through the centuries and which have been surrounded with "mystery" or with "mysteries" to such a degree that it is very difficult to approach them as one would any other literary work. They have become "fetishes," Jews and Christians going into ecstasies over their "Precious" fetish, and Muhammadans going into raptures over their "Holy" fetish. It must be a shock to all three classes of believers to find Freethinkers have no more veneration for the Bible or for the Qur'an than for Grimm's Fairy Tales. These Bibles are mostly fairy recitals intermixed with more or less sound moral teachings and puerile nonsense. I have no wish to hurt Mr. Ahmad's feelings, but it is necessary at the outset to make him understand that I have no veneration whatever for the Qur'an.

Who wrote it? No one really knows. It is claimed that Muhammad himself wrote it at different times but it was entirely dictated by Allah—which really does not present Allah as much of an author. Perhaps he was more used to creating stars. Muslims are, however, very proud of its literary qualities, and therefore there is no need to go any further into that. But if one goes carefully through the Qur'an it will be found to contain a hopeless mixture of all kinds of quotations from Biblical and Apocryphal sources.

Both Christianity and Judaism were, no doubt, fixed as we know them, in the sixth or seventh century, and both the Canonical and Apocryphal works were fairly well distributed. For most believers, both classes were perhaps equally holy, and even at this day Roman Catholicism admits books into their Bible rejected by Jews and Pro-

testants. When I say "rejected," I do not mean altogether. The rejected books are not *quite* as holy as the others.

Whether Muhammad did or did not write the Qur'an is a matter of small moment to Freethinkers, but that he was helped not a little by outsiders must be true. One of these was a Persian Jew called Abdallah Ebn Salem who appears to have known something of what was then known of the Kabbalah and the Talmud, and it is to him we perhaps get all the stories of Jewish Bible heroes we find in the Qur'an. Another helper was a Nestorian monk called in Arabic, Bahria, and the "Christian" part of the Qur'an was due to him. It is said that this monk, when the Qur'an was completed, was put to death by Muhammad—with what truth I cannot now say.

Just as I have found the ravings of Jeremiah or Ezekial or Nahum quite unreadable, so I have found most of the Qur'an unreadable—a mass of Oriental nonsense; but this does not mean that it is the same for those brought up to believe it is Allah's Precious Word. And for such a fine scholar as Mr. Ahmad, it is veritably the *Holy Qur'an*, every word of which is Divine. That is why it was necessary to prove once for all that the Qur'an was right when it said that Jesus was *not* crucified.

Jews, Christians, and reverent Rationalists, will not like Mr. Ahmad's formidable array of proofs; but for me, so many of them are nothing but assumptions—astonishing that such an eminent lawyer could have imagined them anything else. He accepts without any question whatever myths of the silliest kind, and on them builds further myths. He appears unable to understand that the supernatural has been, not very politely, shown the door by modern science. And it is perhaps now too late for him to learn that he is 2,000 years behind the times. (To be continued)

Celestial Levitations

By H. DAY

I HAVE to acknowledge the courtesy of the Rev. G. M. Paris's reply to my latest letter, but am obliged to point out that such reply is in no sense an answer to the points I raised or an answer to the questions I postulated. The Rev. gentleman flatters himself unduly when he claims that I approved—however indirectly—the central point of his letter, viz., that there was no contradiction between the various gospel stories on the matter of the where and when of Christ's Ascension. What I actually wrote was that there could hardly be a contradiction on these points when all the accounts either carefully omitted making or carefully evaded making any positive pronouncement about the how or the when or the where of this dubious and highly improbable event.

I am not at all averse to admitting quite frankly that I am not up to date with the facts of the matter, but there I am just in the same position as Mr. Paris, who knows no more than I do about these things. Neither he nor I were around at the relevant time when these things were happening, or being recorded as having happened. The circumstance that he professes to believe the yarns doesn't make them true.

Even before Mr. Paris had pointed out the absence of the brothers—or so-called brothers—at the Crucifixion as recorded, I had noticed it. I had noticed too that besides the brothers of Jesus, his dad was also conspicuous by his absence. Seeing that we are expressly told that the family of Jesus and most of the neighbours considered him not altogether *compos mentis* the male members of the family probably thought it discreet to forget for the time being that blood is thicker than water. The matter of the virginity of Mary, whether perpetual or otherwise, is to me of little interest. If Jesus ever lived he must have had a

mother—and also a father. If Mary was the mother of Jesus, then she had ceased to be a virgin—as we use the term, before he was born, whether she had other children or not. If Joseph wasn't the father of Jesus, then, *cherchez l'homme?*

Mr. Paris can hardly expect me—a non-Catholic—to accept his gratuitous advice to read Catholic Commentaries or to purchase the publications of the Catholic Truth Society. I happen to have read quite a number of C.T.S. publications, but, without exception, these have left me fully convinced that Catholic Truth is just *not true*.

Mr. Paris, with what seems to me either childish naïveté, or astute circumspection, purports to answer my questions about the Ascension and the Assumption by referring me to the gospels for information about the Ascension and by calmly leaving the Assumption out of consideration, "for the moment," as he writes, but avoiding any return to it. But, Mr. Paris, it is precisely because I find the New Testament account incomplete and quite unconvincing, that I ask you for the details which the New Testament does not supply. Even if Luke did write the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles and even supposing these were written during the later years of the First Century, or the early years of the Second Century of the so-called Christian Era, this is no guarantee that Luke was an eye-witness of the incidents recorded, or that he was a truthful and reliable historian. Whilst I would not argue the claim that archeological discovery has confirmed certain of the matters narrated in Scripture, I have never yet heard or read that any archeological discovery has given the slightest confirmation to the claims relating to the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, or the Ascension of Jesus.

It is not sufficient for Mr. Paris to state that Matthew,

as one of the Apostles, was also the sole author of the First Gospel and that he *must* have been present and an eye-witness of any particular incident. This is merely a piece of wishful thinking. The question therefore still stands, when, where and how did the levitation involved in the Ascension of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary take place, *who* were the witnesses and *where* is their testimony?

It is not at all relevant to the point at issue to claim that certain individuals paid in martyrdom for their views, ideals or beliefs. Many men have done this at many different periods in history, for many reasons. Mr. Paris would do well to avoid reference to martyrs and martyrdom. My reading of the history of martyrdom leaves no room for doubt that religious martyrs were *always* martyred by rival religious factions and that the Romish Church and its hierarchy have been among the most proficient in their compulsory proselytisation.

If the value of the testimony which cannot be allocated and which is nowhere recorded, is the Existence of the Roman Catholic Church, then this may count for something with Mr. Paris, but happily I live in a land and at a time when I can safely say that what has value to him has none to me. I would agree that the Roman Catholic Hierarchy — not the Catholic Church — is strong, probably largely by reason of the ignorance of the bulk of its adherents of its history. The Catholic Church, of course, is an abstraction, it has neither soul to be saved nor hindquarters to be kicked, nor has it opinions. Certainly the Catholic Church never suffered for justice and for truth.

I would remind Mr. Paris that garments which somehow become white as snow are presumably still garments and it is relevant still to ask where they come from. Mr. Paris has skilfully avoided giving the answer. Finally, I still await the detailed account as to where are the 1,000,000,000 (one thousand million) Catholics or Christians which Mr. Paris mentioned in his earlier letter.

McCarthyism

By LEON SPAIN

(Concluded from page 22)

The political and intellectual intolerance which is pervading America to-day is not an isolated phenomenon in American history. However, intolerance in American history has not reached the proportions which the present hysteria has assumed. The proponents of the present movement for uniformity of thought have media and means not available to the bigots and despots of the past. American history, which can pride itself with such grand names as Jefferson, Franklin, Lincoln, Ingersoll, Emerson, Garrison, Phillips, who have more than made their contribution to the annals of human betterment, has also a record studded with intolerance and bigotry. Among the political and religious bigotries in past American history are: the Salem witch-hunts, the narrow qualifications for office-holding and residence in the earliest American colonies, the Alien and Sedition Laws, the hardships and struggles of the pre-civil war Abolitionists in their campaigns for Negro emancipation, the mobbing and burning of Mormon settlements, the Asiatic exclusion laws of post-World War I, the ill-treatment and persecution of Pacifists and others who opposed participation in World War I, the re-location of Japanese-Americans from their Pacific Coast homes by an order of the authorities shortly after the commencement of World War II, and the numerous written and unwritten laws of segregation endured by the American Negro. Other instances could be recounted, but those given should suffice.

The taboo upon controversial issues, by the absolutists in politics and religion and education, is a brain-deadening

influence of the most pernicious sort, for there is now a deep-seated reluctance amongst the well-informed to express a difference of opinion with the "intellectually respectable," lest a penalty upon their opinion will be incurred. What has been attributed to Totalitarians, in enforcing and creating thought patterns, can well-nigh be applied, in many respects, to those who are not consonant with their own. Worse than the arrogant bullying by the self-appointed intellectual censors and their cohorts is the traditional apathy of the indifferent multitude and the timidity of the better-informed. Inquisitorial penalties such as burning at the stake may have gone forever, but the deprivation of a livelihood is a prospect not relished by even the most resolute in our twentieth century civilisation. Few are hardy enough — and understandably so — to go against conventional tides of the time.

The free market of ideas cannot be limited or destroyed, by any body or organisation, if intellectual progress is to make headway, otherwise an age of intellectual and cultural decadence may well set in upon the American scene, under what may be properly termed "McCarthyism." And "McCarthyism" is a far cry from the humanist, intellectual spadework performed by such eminent Americans as Jefferson, Franklin, Lincoln, Twain, Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Ingersoll, Garrison and others, who have made more than a modest contribution to the intellectual and cultural heritage of the ages.

A New German-Swiss Freethought Monthly

"MONISTISCHE MITTEILUNGEN," the duplicated monthly organ of the German Society of Monists, stopped its publication in December, 1953. In January, 1954, the Swiss Freethinkers started publishing a monthly under the name "Befreiung." In its second year this periodical is becoming also the organ of the German Society of Monists. The addresses for subscriptions (8 Swiss Franks or 9.36 German Marks yearly) are: Freigeistige Vereinigung der Schweiz, Postfach, Bern 15, and Kurt Haslsteiner, 32, Kernerstr., Stuttgart. The editing board comprises Mr. Walter Schiess, of Berne, Professor Dr. Gerhard von Frankenberg of Hanover, and Dr. Ernst Hänsler of Binningen-Basel. The fact that "Befreiung" is being published by Freethinkers of two different countries (even if both of them speak mainly German) is very encouraging in the western Europe of to-day in which political Catholicism seems to some observers the most active and the most successful internationally integrating force. The copy for January, 1954, contains interesting philosophical articles (on Plato, whether war is a necessity of nature, on immortality, on José Ortega y Gasset), but many readers, particularly those outside Germany and Switzerland would appreciate definitely if more information on events interesting for Freethinkers were included.

A. W.

INVITATION TO N. S. S. MEMBERS IN OR NEAR LONDON

Good fellowship, brief speeches, music and refreshments are the attractions of a SOCIAL EVENING at the CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1, organised jointly by the four leading Freethought organisations. FRIDAY, JANUARY 22 — — 7 p.m.

Tickets 1s.6d. (on sale at the door)

Andre Gide

By RICHARD KEAN

THE writings of André Gide undoubtedly deserve to be classed with the great literature of all time. In form and content, in sincerity and subtlety, they are second to none. However, their unique message of liberation gives them an extraordinary value. They are not only writings of great beauty; they are a means of self-discovery; they point the way to the good life.

Gide was born in Paris on November 22, 1869. His wonderful journals, admirably translated by Justin O'Brien, together with *If it die . . .* in the classical translation of Dorothy Bussy, provide a more-or-less comprehensive autobiography. Gide died on February 19, 1951.

An early book of Gide's *Fruits of the Earth*, is the one that has probably exerted most influence. Written by a man at grips with serious illness—Gide was stricken down with tuberculosis—the book constitutes a veritable hymn to life. Every line vibrates with a deep love of nature, of life, of sensual pleasure.

Gide later declared: "Some people can only see in this book—will only see in it—a glorification of instinct and desire. This seems to me a little short-sighted. As for me, when I reopen it, what strikes me even more is the apology I find in it of a life stripped to bareness. This is what I have retained, letting go the rest, and it is precisely to this that I remain faithful." Even so, however, the book remains an invigorating experience.

As is fairly well known, Gide was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1947 for his novel, *Strait is the Gate*. I believe that Freethinkers are the best people to appreciate the subtle unmasking of religious egotism carried out by the book.

I consider that Gide wrote no better short novel than his *The Immoralist*. For although it deals with a difficult subject—i.e., latent homosexuality—it is plainly a masterpiece, a great work of art. I suppose that one might consider it a cautionary tale, a warning of the dangers inherent in irresponsible individualism. In fact, the work is a criticism of *The Fruits* and is intimately connected with *Strait is the Gate*. This sort of duality is characteristic of Gide and his writings.

Gide openly admitted to his own homosexual inclinations. He even went so far as to publish *Corydon*—a "defence" of homosexuality. Such an act, foolish as it may seem, was obviously an act logical to a man who prized truth and sincerity above his own comfort.

It would like to sum up by quoting from Mr. George Painter's excellent study of Gide. He writes:

"Gide did not believe in immortality: but in his works he has become, in a very real sense, immortal. His personality and doctrine are preserved for ever; he will never cease to be what he was, to teach what he taught. He will continue to aid his fellow-creatures, the young and those who wish to remain young, the happy and those who wish to be happy, to live in courage and hope, and to achieve liberation and virtue."

CHALLENGE TO RELIGION (a re-issue of four lectures delivered in the Secular Hall, Leicester). By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 1½d.

GOD AND ME (revised edition of "Letters to the Lord"). By Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s.; postage 3d.; paper 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

CHRISTIANITY—WHAT IS IT? By Chapman Cohen. A criticism of Christianity from a not common point of view. Price 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

Correspondence

POLITICS AND FREETHOUGHT

SIR,—*The Freethinker* is to be congratulated on the breadth and scope of the questions discussed in its pages, but are we a little in danger of becoming "all things to all men"? One wonders, for instance, why so much valuable space is allotted to the badly written and pointless political vapourings which appear over the signature of "K. Lidaks," from which the only thing that emerges clearly is K.L.'s hatred of "godless Russia." So what? Surely Freethinkers have much more serious and important problems to discuss. Could we not, for instance, have some discussion on such a vital and immediate question as the attitude of Freethinkers to colonial and racial problems, on which there seems to be some divergence of opinion? This appears to me to be a thing upon which a good deal more "free thinking" should be exercised.—Yours, etc.,

(MRS.) G. MATSON.

P.S.—If K. Lidaks can get hold of some authentic Russian news (there is plenty available), he (or she) will find that so far from growing R. military might, the recent budget of the U.S.S.R. cut its expenditure on arms, so that it is now little more than 20 per cent. of budget expenditure as against 53 per cent. British and 76 per cent. American. Another subject for "free thinking."—G.M.

[*The Freethinker* is not a political paper. However, we cannot prevent our correspondents from periodically expressing political opinions. This is still a free country.—EDITOR.]

THE TOWER OF BABEL

SIR,—Regarding the article by H. T. Derrett on "The Tower of Babel and a Universal Language," I wonder whether the author could give me details of the sources of information regarding some of his statements that are news to me, as secretary of this Association.

"Cook's Travel Agency publishes in Esperanto a brochure. . . ." "The G.P.O., London, . . . employs Esperanto." "The police are encouraged to learn it. . . ." "London taxi drivers have a paper devoted to it . . . many drivers speak it fluently." "It is used by the International Labour Office, approved by the British Association," ". . . recognised by the International Broadcasting Union, . . ." "Officialdom seems always to be in favour of Esperanto." (Gosh, I wish that were true!)

The enclosed statement about Esperanto in this country might be of interest to you, and it, I believe, is nearer to the actualities of the present situation. Mr. Derrett's name does not appear in our registry of members, but that does not mean that he is not an Esperantist. If he is, I should like to hear from him and, meanwhile, congratulate him on his impressive article.

He mentions our book list. The latest was done in 1951 and is now out of stock, while a new one is in preparation and should be printed early in the New Year. However, should any of your readers ask for one, his name will be noted for one to be sent when the lists are printed.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. LESLIE,
Secretary, The British Esperanto Association, Inc.

OBITUARY

The Late Harry L. Theobald,

A.S.A.A., A.C.I.S.

We deeply regret to announce the death on Wednesday, January 6, of Mr. H. Theobald, who was accountant and auditor of the National Secular Society, The Secular Society Ltd., and The Pioneer Press, a position he had occupied in succession to his father, whose connection with the movement went back into the nineteenth century.

About fourteen years ago the late Mr. Theobald had the first of a series of strokes which resulted in a partial paralysis which became slowly worse during the remainder of his life, but he never thought of giving up his work, and continued to travel from Reading to London whenever it was necessary for him to visit Gray's Inn Road. Those who knew him had high admiration for the cheerfulness he displayed and the dogged way in which he performed his duties under difficulties. We extend our sincere sympathy to Mrs. Theobald.