

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIV—No. 27

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

IT was no less a person that the great Aristotle, the most encyclopædic brain amongst the ancients, who went on record with the observation that the first of human civilisations was that of ancient Egypt. Aristotle added the profound observation, one of permanent social significance, that the priestly class in ancient Egypt was able to create this earliest of civilisations precisely because it was the first *leisured* class in recorded history.

Egypt, the Cradle of Religion

The earliest civilisations in recorded history were created under the auspices of religion. This fact is incontestable, not only in Egypt, but, equally, in all other parts of the ancient world. It is a truism amongst sociologists that civilisation originated in the great river-valleys of the old and the new worlds. In Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in the recently excavated Indus Valley, in (what is now) the Punjab, in the Hoang-Ho region, in the old world, whilst, in the new, similar phenomena can be assumed; as far as the western world is concerned, Egypt represents probably the oldest and, certainly the most continuous of these early civilisations. For the western world, at least, it was the cradle of civilisation and, since all early civilisations arose under religious auspices, it may perhaps be termed the cradle of religion.

The First Theologians

Not only was Egypt the earliest seat of religion, it was, also, the most devout. Like modern India, ancient Egypt literally swarmed with gods! Both the forces of fertility, symbolised in and by the life-giving waters of the Nile, and the numerous fauna of the Nile delta, ranging from cats to crocodiles, were the objects of religious devotion and in time, of theological speculation. In fact, the priests of Egypt, being, in Aristotle's words, "the first *leisured* class in History," were also the first to speculate on the How and Why of existence. They were, in fact, the first theologians; the founders, the inventors of Theology. In a sense, one could even call them the first scientists, not only in the sense that they built the scientifically constructed Pyramids, the oldest extant public monuments. But, also in the sense that Theology may be described as, in a way, the earliest form of science. Before one can *know* one has to *guess*! Theology is just that, *guesswork*.

The Pharaohs

Egypt, like all the earliest civilisations, arose from a fusion of a number of originally independent settlements into a centralised State. The Kingdom of United Egypt, of "The Upper and the Lower Lands," as the Egyptians themselves termed it, arose either by conquest or fusion, about 3,000 years prior to the Christian era. It has, though frequently conquered by Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and, most recently, English, preserved its political and social identity for about 5,000 years. Quite

a long time has elapsed, between Menes, the first, perhaps, legendary King of Egypt, and her present ruler, General Neguib. From about 3000 B.C., down to a few years before the Christian era, when Cleopatra departed this life in the fashion so dramatically portrayed by Shakespeare, an uninterrupted succession of Pharaohs ruled over Egypt, for even her foreign conquerors took this title.

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

The First Gods

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

The Gods of "The Great House"

Pharaoh, a name familiar to us from the Biblical narratives, was the immemorial title of the Kings of "The Upper and Lower Lands." The title, "Pharaoh," a title, and *not* a personal name, is derived by Egyptologists from the words *Per-Ea*, in English, *The Great House*. The earliest Kings of Egypt were, accordingly, the dwellers in *The Great House*. What was this *Great House* in which the Pharaoh resided, and from which he took his title? It can hardly have been his palace, or even the Pyramid, his consecrated burial ground. Kings surely *give* their names to their royal residences; they do not usually take their titles *from* them. If the Pharaoh was, in the first place, named *after* his *Great House*, this surely indicates that, at first, the "House" in which the first Kings of Egypt lived was more important than the Kings *themselves*? In a civilisation dominated by religion and ruled by the priestly representatives of the gods, what other building except the Temple qualified for this exalted position? The Pharaohs were *priest-Kings*, the first priest-Kings in history. One may even go further and say that they were the first *human* gods, at least in more than a purely local sense. The Pharaohs themselves, rather than any of the numerous Egyptian divinities, were the first *effective* gods of mankind.

"God and the State"

Voltaire, as we all know, went on record with the famous observation: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Voltaire was himself a Deist, who believed that human society could not function without a supreme policeman, who would enforce the moral code by divine sanctions. The Russian anarchist, Michael Bakunin improved upon Voltaire by remarking that "If God existed, it would be necessary to abolish him." Bakunin's remark is, perhaps, not so well known as is Voltaire's celebrated phrase, but it is, we suggest, more likely to be applauded by Atheists. In his famous pamphlet, *God and the State*, Bakunin made an interesting speculation about the origin of gods. The State, declared our anarchist philosopher, *preceded* the Church; the King on earth came *before* the god in heaven. More, the order of priority was: the Kings, who came first, later *became* the gods; gods were *derived* from Kings; not, as is more usually supposed, *vice versa*. We are dealing with the dim past, with the dawn of History, but what we know of the oldest civilisation, Egypt, appears to lend considerable

support to Bakunin's theory, after all, gods are the *creation* of men, the Church is the *reflection* of the State.

The Divine Monarch

Monarchy and divinity, Throne and altar, have always been closely allied; not only politically, but actually. The King is a divine person. It is a far cry from the first human gods, the Pharaohs, to Her Majesty, *Dei gratia* ("by the grace of God"), the present monarch of Great Britain. However, those who saw the coronation rite on Television last year will not need us to assure them that even in this age of pseudo-democracy, the coronation of a reigning monarch is still primarily a god-making ceremony. The

Pharaohs of ancient Egypt would have been thoroughly at home in Westminster Abbey on June 2, 1953!

"Out of Egypt"

Gerald Massey was fond of insisting that the key text in our New Testament is: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son"; that Christianity was of Egyptian origin. In the present writer's opinion, such an exclusive statement needs qualification. The Christian creed is composite, and one cannot ascribe it entirely to one source. There cannot, however, be any doubt that the genealogy of the gods *began* on the Nile, and the Christian Trinity, like other gods, is fully entitled to take out naturalisation papers in Egypt!

The Christian Hell

By GEORGE ROSS

(Concluded from page 203)

JESUS appears, in Matt. XXV, 41, as saying: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Acceptance of such words has been endorsed by the teaching of the early Christian Fathers. The greatest of Christian Doctors, St. Augustine of Hippo, gave "Examples from Nature proving that bodies may remain unconsumed and alive in fire," and states that the wisdom of God has differentiated the souls of the damned that they may suffer exquisitely for ever. That other holy Saint, the "Angelic Doctor" Aquinas, says: "In order that nothing may be wanting to the felicity of the blessed spirits in heaven, a perfect view is granted to them of the tortures of the damned." These damned "shall be," according to Holy Writ, "tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day or night" (Revelation, XIV, 10, 11). This brings us to the greatly reduced and accommodating claim that "Gehenna," translated "hell," was no more than a rubbish-heap outside Jerusalem and that, therefore, hell "certainly" means nothing else than retribution. In the Addenda in my Oxford Bible I find in the Glossary section the following:—"HELL—the original sense is 'the hidden or unseen place.' It serves as the translation of two words, viz. 1, Sheol (Heb.) or Hades (Greek), the abode of departed spirits, as in the Apostles' Creed. 2, Geenna (Greek form of Heb. Ge-hinnom), the valley of Hinnom, the dark gorge on the west side of Jerusalem, where was the furnace (Topheth) in which idolaters offered human sacrifices, and 'made their children to pass through the fire to Moloch,' and in which persons convicted of aggravated wilful murder were burnt to death; hence it was synonymous with a place of torment—'hell fire' (Matt. V. 22)." That is "certainly" plain enough; and compare, similarly, with Mr. A. D. Howell Smith in his "Thou Art Peter," p. 127:—"Valley of Hinnom . . . where . . . the bodies of executed criminals were flung to be cremated or left to the fretting worms . . . 'Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched' (Isaiah LXVI, 24) . . . But in the apocryphal Book of Judah (late pre-Christian) the Isainic imagery is used to describe the after-death tortures of anti-Semitic nations (Jud. XVI, 17)." Again, "The idea of the eternity of hell's torments was certainly known in the Palestine of Jesus . . . Jesus speaks of Gehenna, the unquenchable fire (Mark IX, 43, 44). (p. 151) . . . "Since the 'Book of Judith' (XVI, 17) makes 'fire and worms' symbolise endless torture, it is possible that Jesus did the same" (p. 152).

The Christian Churches officially accept the Christian Hell, and the "Encyclopædia Britannica" and the "Catholic Encyclopædia" have both described hell as a place, not a state. The sun has, appropriately, been claimed to be hell, and the Rev. Tobias Swinden, of Cuxton, Kent, 18th century, claimed the spots on the sun to be gatherings of damned souls. A cynic might judge this earth to be hell enough, just as Voltaire suggested that this earth might be the madhouse of the Universe. Hell was in the earth and the sun at even was red because it looked down upon hell. The learned Jesuit Father Hardouin (1646-1729) placed hell in the earth's interior and attributed the rotation of the earth to the efforts of the damned everlastingly trying to climb the inner crust of the earth which is the wall of hell.

Dr. Pusey, in 1863, on behalf of High Church and Low Church, drew up a declaration expressing belief in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and absolute belief in eternal punishment. This pious declaration obtained the signatures of 11,000 Anglican clergymen.

One might well ask, "What is TRUTH?" or "What is Honesty?" The position is stultified by such books as "Mission Pictures" by Michel le Nobel (1577-1642), "Hell Opened to Christians" by Jesuit Father Pinamonti (1688); and, particularly, "Books for Children" by the Yorkshire priest, Father Furniss (born 1809) for which see Mrs. Bonner's "Christian Hell" (pp. 99-134). Horrors are sanctified in the divinely revealed solution of the problem of moral evil—the belief in the Christian hell.

What a religion and what a creed! It reminds one of Abraham the Jew in Boccaccio's "Decameron," Day I, Novel II, and his reason for becoming a Christian: a religion which survived despite the diabolical operations of its clergy must surely have a Divine protector.

JOHN RUSKIN

Mr. Ruskin was a professed Christian. He was brought up in the school of low Evangelicalism, the mark of which is over all his earlier work, though he learnt to look back upon it with scorn. At one time he was a friend, and almost a follower, of Mr. Spurgeon; but Ruskin grew, and Spurgeon never did, so these two were bound to fall asunder. The great writer is reported to have rebuked the great preacher's narrow views of salvation, and his cocksureness of intimacy with the counsels of Omniscience. No doubt the preacher thought himself by far the greater man of the two. He had a far wider audience, but his "poor friend" had genius. Mr. Spurgeon's sermons are trash, while Mr. Ruskin has added to the glory of English literature. . . . Mr. Ruskin's own view of the Bible was far removed from that of Mr. Spurgeon's. He did not believe that every word of it fell from Almighty lips. He did not believe that it was supernaturally inspired. What he believed was that it contained the best thoughts on life and death that men had been able to gather in this world.—G. W. FOOTE.

Instead of an Article

By BAYARD SIMMONS

WAS it not Lautence Sterne, the author of *Tristram Shandy*, who said, when asked how he achieved his works, "I set down one sentence and trust to Providence for the next"? If it was not, it is a small matter: the principle is the thing. Here am I, an indifferent writer, like so many of my tribe, gravelled for a subject with which to fill a column or so of *The Freethinker's* valuable space. Yet I am prepared to lay odds that it will be filled. Whether it will lead to the edification of anyone, whether even it will find its way past the Editor into print, is, as the French say, another pair of sleeves.

The principle is the thing. An amusing story is told in legal circles of a certain advocate who used these very words. His manner of addressing a jury was florid in the extreme. One day, so the story runs, he was expatiating on the doubts which he said had begun to assail the plaintiff as to his wisdom in bringing the action. "The plaintiff," thundered this Serjeant Buzfuz, "can see the handwriting on the wall, *Eloi, eloi, lama, sabachthani.*" Here the learned judge pulled him up. "Really, Mr. So-and-So," said the judge, "this is very far-fetched, and in any case the handwriting on the wall was *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin.*" Not a bit abashed, our counsel continued his address. "Of course, gentlemen, I accept His Lordship's correction; the handwriting on the wall was as His Lordship has told you, but I contend, gentlemen, that the principle is the same, and the principle is the thing."

Well, here is a page of foolscap filled already. About 240 words, I guess. I am getting on: Providence has not yet deserted me.

That story of the handwriting on the wall reminds me of the mock-Newdigate poems that used to float around among the divinity students of Oxford. There was one long masterpiece on the Book of the Prophet Daniel, all about Nebuchadnezzar and his successor Belshazzar. If I could quote the lot my space-filling problem would be solved. Also there would be no room in this issue for anybody else's lucubrations. Two stanzas must suffice. Of the first gentleman it records:—

Nebuchadnezzar, when turned out to grass
With docile oxen and the wild ass,
Said, as he munched the unaccustomed food,
It may be wholesome but it is not good.

The second stanza is the one brought to memory by the story of Buzfuz. We are told that:—

While all sat silent by the sight appalled
Someone suggested Daniel should be called;
The prophet came and just remarked in passin',
Oh, it's: Mene, mene, tekel, and upharsin.

Association of Ideas, which, of course, was the Providence that Sterne relied on, and on which, it is apparent, others may rely, is the cause of the bringing up to the surface of the mind of forgotten memories. Few of us quite realise how much we do know. We are each of us a whole barrelful of knowledge and ideas, gleaned over many years. But so few turn on the spigot, or pull out the bung, which will release the stream, or chain, of memories and ideas which will turn us into a writer or an orator. This simile of a barrel being, as it were, "unbunded" I owe to a prominent English politician. About a half century ago, being urged by my comrades, and my own desire, to hold forth at the street corner on a soap-box, and hesitating as to how it should be done, there came to me the liberating thought of the, now, Right Honourable Gentleman, "Fill yourself up like a barrel and pull out the bung." Not an elegant simile, perhaps, but one that worked, and one that I confidently pass on to the would-be secularist orator,

shivering on the brink and fearing to launch away. My colleague, Mr. G. H. Taylor, will, I hope, forgive this intrusion on his admirable series on prominent N.S.S. speakers.

I have got a long way from Sterne, but will return now to the point that my associations of ideas have suggested to me as a possible subject for an article. Not that I shall treat it here, or at any rate, exhaustively: I have left myself small space for that. Besides which, encouraged by the progress I have already made in filling nearly three sheets of foolscap, I have already put that limiting caption at the head of these remarks. But it is an interesting subject for speculation and possible investigation, why many Divinity Students and even Clerks in Holy Orders are such flippant blasphemers. That they are so, cannot be gainsaid. There are more obscene jokes about the Virgin Birth among undergraduates in the divinity classes at our universities than anywhere else. A cherished possession of a young divinity student at King's College, London, just before the First World War, was a collection of the more scarlet jokes from the *Pink Un* and such-like sources. This was known to his fellow students as Biliken's Bible, and was much in demand. This state of affairs is well known to educationalists, and is of no very serious consequence. Like other puerilities of adolescence, in due course it will pass away in most cases. In other cases, like that of the clerics Swift and Herrick and Sterne, the smutty outlook on life remains, to the great joy, it must be confessed, of many of their readers. But why, we repeat, should professed religionists be such blasphemous, if amusing, rogues?

Readers of Voltaire, of course, know that that witty Frenchman could be, and was—well, "broad." But even he has a mock-serious tilt at our Doctor Swift. Does not Voltaire write in one of his short stories (*Micromegas*, if I remember aright) that, unlike the Dean, he, Voltaire, "out of my great respect for the ladies," would not mention in what part of the giant's anatomy the midgets planted their tall measuring tree. Sly dog!

My fund of ideas and memories is now, I regret to say, running low, but the port is in sight. The lino-machine has, under the nimble fingers of the compositor, cast enough lines to fill something over a column. But I must not quit until I have given my opinion on the interesting question raised. And my answer will be that the reason for such outbreaks of clerical blasphemy and obscenity is to be found in the fact that the budding or fully-fledged priest in so many cases simply does not believe in the doctrine and dogmas he is taught, and which in turn he has to teach others.

The simple, earnest believer does not blaspheme; it would never occur to him to do so. Ribaldry in the modern theological seminary is due to the violence that is being done to the reason, and therefore to the conscience of the trainee. It is the voice of outraged nature. Smut is an outbreak of boils, due to the toxic quality of the food imbibed in these priestly forcing houses. The outbreak is in itself a testimony to the inherent reasonableness and honesty of man, and a protest against the régime of unreason that the victim is undergoing. In the words of the psycho-analysts, what is being witnessed is the phenomenon on "over-compensation." Bible is responsible for—Biliken's Bible. And with that solemn thought I lay down my pen, rejoicing that the Providence of the good Laurence Sterne has proved a friend to more than that sniggering cleric.

This Believing World

Following the wake of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Second Adventists, and possibly other Christian sects, the Bishop of Exeter is asking whether the end of the world is not at hand? All believers in true Christianity—that is, the religion of Jesus—*must* believe the end of the world is at hand, though they are not necessarily restricted to believing it is at hand through the misuse of the atom bomb. The Bishop is quite sure that “the invention is a divine judgment on the race of man.” But supposing atom-power is in future directed to peaceful uses—what then? We can give the answer. We shall be told that it was Jesus Christ who really invented atom power for *peaceful* use—which makes him the greatest atom power inventor that ever lived!

Yet, strange to say, the Bishop of Exeter appears to dread the destruction of the world which he says “could be” brought about by “God through the atom bomb.” That is “by the evil act of a rebellious will.” We can take our choice which it is, through God or through “a rebellious will.” But if it is through God why should the Bishop object? “The only hope of escape,” he tells us, “seems to be in disarmament talks.” Does Dr. Mortimer want us to believe that if God has decided that the world has to be destroyed by atom bombs, we can upset God's will by “disarmament talks”? Can muddled thinking go much further even if it is by a live Bishop?

The Protestant cry “Back to the Bible” has always been heartily disliked by the Roman Church which ever did its best to discourage indiscriminate Bible reading; so it is quite amusing to find how Hollywood is finding “Back to the Bible” so profitable a one. The film, “The Robe,” has taken £1,000,000 to date, and has shown how very popular are Bible stories—or myths, whichever term is preferred. Mr. Cecil de Mille is directing a huge crowd in Egypt to give us another version of “The Ten Commandments,” while another director is filming “Joseph and His Brethren” with 17,500 people and 4,000 animals to help him. And there are plenty of other Bible films on the way or nearing completion.

Of one thing we can be certain. Jesus Christ will never be shown as an Arab-looking Jew; and the two Marys, Mary, God Almighty's Mother, and Mary Magdalene, will always be portrayed by glamorous Hollywood stars speaking in a good American accent. While Jewish villains like Judas, or a wicked “High Priest,” will be shown as Jewish as possible, particularly the nose. All the studios are taking the most meticulous care over details and the Jews will no doubt feel as angry about some of these details as were the Roman Catholics over the film of Martin Luther.

The Dean of Melbourne appears rather upset because “people complain that the language of Christian theology is unintelligible.” But isn't it? What meaning can be given to the word “redemption” except a lot of still vaguer words jammed together with Christ Jesus? The Dean claims that “exact science” had to have its own terms which is quite true; and he then makes the same claim for “theology” which “is no exception.” No exception indeed! Is “theology” then an “exact” science? How exact it is can be found in the many thousands of books written to prove that the Roman Church is God's Church, that the English Church is nearer to what God intended, and that the only true Churches are those of the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses the Buchmanites, and many others—all supported by copious theological jargon which God alone knows the meaning of.

Christian theology is completely unintelligible unless one grants a host of premises—and it is these which are the bugbear. All premises and all deductions therefrom have to be patiently “explained” by a priest or parson who often does not know what he is talking about, or gets as hopelessly confused as his hearers. Get a Roman Catholic Priest, an English Bishop, and a Calvinist parson, to discuss “Mass” in theological terms between them and see what happens. You will soon discover what “Christian love” is like.

A Spiritualistic Critic

Reply by COLIN McCALL

IN my recent article *Spiritualist Folly and Fraud* (*The Freethinker*, May 21, 1954) the two opening paragraphs referred to a so-called “Investigation into Spiritualism” organised by *Reynolds News* and *Psychic News* on January 9, 1952, and to a letter I then wrote to the former paper. The latter paper has now devoted a leader to what it calls my “belated criticism” of the meeting, without mentioning that this formed merely the introduction to my review of a book by the late Mr. Joseph F. Rinn.

Had I been simply reviewing the meeting two years afterwards, the adjective would have been justified. As it was, my specific purpose was to contrast what purported to be an “investigation” into spiritualism (i.e., the meeting in question) and what was such (Mr. Rinn's book *Searchlight on Psychical Research*). It was the title of the meeting that I complained of when I wrote to *Reynolds News* and this was made clear in my article of May 21. I further asked in the letter why no member of the N.S.S., R.P.A. or Manchester Humanist Fellowship and no magician was on the Testing Committee.

Psychic News considers it “touching to witness such innocent faith in members of the above organisations and in magicians—who as such have no qualifications” for questioning the recipients of messages from the mediums. A clever detective and a skilful cross-examiner are best fitted to expose fraud if it is perpetrated, continues the leader. Well, there was no detective, and three local magistrates (two ladies and one gentleman) were the nearest approach to a “skilful cross-examiner”! But my critic has missed my point entirely. The two papers announced that there was to be an “Investigation into Spiritualism” and no such thing occurred. The mediums delivered their messages and remained on the platform while the recipients were escorted to an adjacent room to be questioned privately by a committee of five (a vice-President of the Manchester Psychic Research Society, a “Dutch engineer resident in Manchester” and the aforementioned magistrates). *Psychic News* may consider this quintet to possess “qualifications” of “special value”; I do not. But I, like the remainder of the audience of 2,000, was never given the opportunity to judge their abilities. It was simply proclaimed from the platform that they had found no evidence of collusion between the mediums and those who had accepted the messages. It was far from “touching” to witness the “innocent faith” which accepted this as (to quote the *Psychic News* report at the time) having “tested and proved” the messages. “The committee were satisfied” states the same paper now. Yes, but I was not! And even *Psychic News* admits that I produced “concrete criticism” when I pointed out that Mrs. Guy, a well-known spiritualist, obligingly confirmed the truth of a Higginson message that held no significance for the parent to whom it was addressed and that she (Mrs. Guy) was never tested. True, the admission is qualified with an extra adjective “only,” but I consider one concrete criticism to be pretty good in “only” two paragraphs.

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To Correspondents

W. G. POWELL, C. E. RATCLIFFE, J. P. TUCK, J. E. WILLIAMS.—Glad to see that the Lyric Muse is going strong. But, alas, no space at present.

L. EBURY.—Motion 16 was carried and the amendment defeated. See "Notes and News" for other matters.

C. MILLER.—We like your idea of local secularists, where there is no branch, teaming up to start a local press controversy.

J. MACF.—No one on a debating platform is bound to accept his opponent's word for it that he has seen a ghost. Nor can he be expected to explain every such illusion without previous investigation.

VINCENT J.—Jeans practically recanted, while Eddington signally failed to face up to his scientific critics.

SCOT.—Your deism seems to be wearing thin. If God wound up the universe, who wound God up? If God switched it on, who switched God on?

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. Clayton's Lectures: Saturday, July 3, 8 p.m., Central Beach, Blackpool. Sunday, July 4, 8 pm., Central Beach, Blackpool.

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday at 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER, E. MILLS and others.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields: a Lecture. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, a Lecture.

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

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, W. J. O'NEILL, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

Notes and News

We thank those readers who have pointed out two errors of fact and one of omission in our report of the N.S.S. Conference. The re-election of Mr. Ridley as President was not moved by Mrs. Venton (who seconded the motion) but by Mr. Ebury. The motion introduced by Mr. Ridley to counter the idea that Atheism and Communism were inseparable was not carried, but was amended to confirm that N.S.S. membership is open to Secularists of various political outlooks, and that Secularism has no connection with any political party. Lastly we understand that Mr. Ebury as well as Mr. McCall offered to withdraw his nomination for re-election as Vice-President.

The re-elected Executive Committee of the N.S.S. must have been heartened at the first meeting of their period of office to find that a useful batch of twenty new members have applied for membership of the Society. They were duly admitted to the Parent, Birmingham, Bradford, North London, Nottingham and West London Branches.

Review

The Plain View. Edited by H. J. Blackham. Summer Number. Subscription, one year, 4s. 6d. post free. Single number 1s. From Stanton Coit House, 13, Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W.8.

Thoughtful readers will find the 80 pages of articles and reviews in this Summer Number of *The Plain View* intensely interesting—from the challenging statement on the first page—"To-day, civilisation cannot be defended"—to the last sentence—"It is a traditional attitude that the child shall learn, but this is not the case as yet with the elderly person."

Between these two statements there is intellectual food enough to keep one thinking for some time. To quote the Editor:—

Three of the articles are concerned with aspects of education, the first with the school education of the vast majority of children in this country, the second with the moral education in the home, the third with the political education of a democracy. It is significant that they all point to the same conclusion, namely, that the first step in education is to become articulate about personal affairs.

One of these articles compares J. S. Mill's political philosophy with Aristotle's and very thought-provoking it is. "The element of *élite* in the writings of both our philosophers" writes Dr. Roshwald, "may be regarded as anti-democratic, both by democratic doctrinaires and realists." And it would be interesting to hear an opponent answering him when he says that "experience has proved that the rule of the majority is not in itself a safeguard of the good rule, nor even a security of the continuation of the rule of the majority (one need only recollect the majority-established dictatorships of a Napoleon or a Hitler)."

For readers of this journal, however, Mr. G. H. Taylor's fine exposition of the Neo-Materialism of Prof. R. Wood Sellars, of Michigan University, will prove undoubtedly of the greatest interest. The many discussions in these columns of Materialism will make them want to read this distinguished American's book for (to quote Mr. Taylor) in his philosophy, "materialism, for the first time in its history, is provided with an adequate epistemology." And Mr. Taylor adds, "It may therefore be said all other types, or statements, of materialism have been rendered obsolete, including mechanistic, Dialectical, and emergent materialisms." This challenge to the "obsolete" may be vigorously responded to one day—or at least it may not be allowed to pass unchallenged.

Prof. Sellars has written six major works and has contributed critical essays to symposia, and Mr. Taylor has certainly mastered not only his main arguments but also the highly technical vocabulary used by Sellars to substantiate his thesis. The reader should, with a full dictionary before him, note the following words: Epistemology, Critical realism, ontological emergence, associational empiricism, neo-realist developments, event-theory, a *Gestalt* or operative configuration, atomistic psychology, selective intent, predicative content, spatial, panpsychism, ingression, and so on. One must add also what they and other words mean in context as—"Quantum theory gives a clue to the discreteness of the substructure." Or, "In teleological causality it is the present thought of the future event and not the future event—which by the way does not exist—which operates to control man's actions."

"The theory of integrative levels," says Sellars, "turns its back on any crude mechanism—but also guards against the new and subtle forms of vitalism." Of course one can always find an answer to "crude" mechanism when you begin by calling it "crude."

The new materialism may be thus stated:—

The inorganic pattern of matter is prior to living, minded and purposive organisms, which arise gradually and only as

a result of a complex evolutionary development. With the advent of organic life, new biological laws began to operate. The principles of physics and chemistry necessarily apply, but are not by themselves sufficient to the biological level. Thus mechanism, or the theory that physico-chemical explanation is adequate to all levels, is emphatically rejected.

Sellars, in fact, notes Mr. Taylor, "favours Gestalt." He also "upholds the Correspondence Theory of truth." We are told also that for him, "Reality is existentially spatial" and "any shift in things is a shift in the spatial configuration of the cosmos." If all this is easy, readers can try their hand at, "Metrically in space-time things must be known as four dimensional worms"; or, "Causality is a relation category which grows up in unison with a category of thinghood."

Mr. Taylor's article is packed with dozens of sentences which require "thinking out" at its highest, but it is not made very clear whether all this thinking will be rewarded by any clearer conception of Materialism. After all, Sellars can come down to such a simple phrase as, "With the removal of a supernatural perspective man must stand consciously on his own feet"—a phrase which, in different words, perhaps, has done duty by Freethinkers long before the eminent neo-materialist was born.

He also tells us that "the new materialism flowers into humanism"; just as one can say with equal justice that "Christianity flowers into humanism." For my own part, I can only say after carefully reading what Mr. Taylor says, I can see no reason whatever for throwing overboard my "mechanistic" Materialism. Sellars himself throws overboard the "traditional God-ideas" and so do I. He has no use for Vitalism, and it seems to me that whatever is left must be "mechanistic."

H. CUTNER.

For Community Singing

THE perpetrator of the following parody explained to those present at the Reception and Social preceding the N.S.S. Annual Conference at Manchester that it was written in retaliation against those who impose on the ordinary man and woman's liking for a sing-song by organising Community "Hymn-Singing" from which secular compositions are excluded. Try it, to the tune of "There is a Tavern," and you and your friends may find yourselves singing it as heartily as Conference visitors did.

There is a Parson in the Town, in the Town,
Whose Congregation's going down, going down,
As one by one its members come to see
What silly sheep they used to be.

Chorus

Parson dear, I have to leave you
And I'm sure it's going to grieve you,
But I've found you out and so we two must part, must part.
Adieu, my pious friend, adieu, adieu, adieu.
I can no longer pray with you, pray with you.
I'll hang my hopes on an outlook sane and free,
And may the world soon follow me!

That Parson kept me in the dark, in the dark,
Until a Speaker in the Park, in the Park,
Explained that Facts can often disagree
With Fables learnt at Mother's Knee.

Repeat Chorus

O dig a Grave that's deep and wide, deep and wide,
And drop that Parson's Creed inside, Creed inside,
And on a Stone above, for all to see,
Put "Dead and Done-for, R.I.P."

Repeat Chorus

P. V. M.

INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

H. Day

"OYEZ! Oyez! ! Oyez! !!" And as this familiar war-cry resounds throughout the Broadway car park at Bradford, its frequenters are immediately alive to the fact that Harold Day is about to begin his meeting. A turn of humorous monologue will entertain the first arrivals for a few minutes, until there is a good nucleus for a crowd, and then the showman becomes lecturer, the entertainer passes into the educator.

Over his early years hovered the Chapel and all it stood for in social life, modes of thinking and practical customs, and it was from this grim background that he slowly had to emancipate himself. At 14 he was a Sunday School official and teacher, at 16 the boy preacher at Bethels and "glory-holes" in the W. Riding, testifying to his Saviour the Lord Jesus and rhapsodising about being washed in the precious blood of the Lamb. The Chapel authorities soon had him earmarked for the Ministry and he began acquiring a religious library. Innocently enough, he began asking awkward questions about religion. He is doing that to-day, less innocently. As an assistant regimental school-master he cultivated the technique of imparting information, and in India he came into contact with non-Christian religions. Gaining a commission on the field, his independent thinking frequently led him into conflict with the authorities. In the Second World War he was indicted for trial by Court Martial on charges of treason, sedition, political agitation, incitement to mutiny and disaffection, successfully conducting his own defence, except on a charge of causing alarm: he was actually "guilty of telling the truth." He was subsequently a shadowed man.

He had finally severed his connection with the Chapels over the Peace issue, and was invited to speak for the N.S.S. on an economic subject. His reception and experience were such that he began to attend secularist meetings, until at last, as he told us, "My mind was free. I needn't fear either roasting for ever in the nether regions, or being bored stiff for ever playing a harp on a cold marble slab, in the celestial." He was instrumental in reviving the Bradford branch and is now its chief speaker. The stentorian "Oyez" opening is the only violent part of the proceedings: the rest is an unruffled, even suave, statement of the freethought case. Noisy opposition from members of the audience is usually met with his characteristic devastating calm, or with extravagant, biting politeness. He is here interviewed by G. H. Taylor.

What is the effect of a religious upbringing on people's minds?

I find most of them totally unfitted for thinking objectively on political, economic and sociological lines owing to the inhibitions of religion and the mental cobwebs of a religious hangover. Whilst we can easily deal with the feeble defence put up by believers, these psychological fixations are far more obstructionist.

Do any of the political parties offer us a better avenue for reform?

I regard party politics as a deliberately organised system for the subversion of a true and effective democracy. The success of party politics is that of dividing and subdividing the populace and diverting them from their objectives.

What's the opposition like at Bradford?

We have here a tremendous proportion of Papists, very active and well represented on the City Council and in administrative positions. They bring their Jesuitical logic to my meetings and can be quite persistent, but they just don't stay the pace.

How did you get on with the Mormon invasion?

They provided a novelty, of course, so on occasions would close my meeting and invite my crowd to come over and hear me question them. Two of the Elders would try to divert me by engaging me in private debate on one side. What they intended as an aside would then become the hub of attention. Then a Mormon deputation led by the Senior Elder bore down on my meeting and publicly presented me with the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's own story. I challenged them to give me four weeks to read them and then answer my questions. They complied, and their "answers" were ludicrous in the extreme.

Can you get the parsons out into the open?

Not if they can help it. They prefer to give the atheist "private help" rather than public opposition. They don't mind my opposition so long as nobody can hear it. And when I turned up for the "pub parson" he found he had a pressing engagement elsewhere.

I notice you give your questioners plenty of rope, and often answer question with question?

Yes; I'm all for the interplay of question and answer. It's noticeable how the crowd immediately begins to increase. I let it be known that I can be stopped *any time* with a question.

An excellent tactic for a marathon speaker like yourself, adding variety to the proceedings.

My aim is to jolt people into thinking objectively, and the best way to effect this is to hit them hard with a suggestion they don't like or an unequivocal question that calls for a direct answer. A large proportion of the provincial population have never heard the case against religion and are rudely shaken—for the better—when they hear it riddled with scorn.

How do you tell whether a questioner is a possible convert to our cause?

By experience. I get the indication from his manner and phrasing as to whether he is a genuine inquirer.

Are these genuine inquirers mostly men or women?

Speaking generally, men are more rational than women and therefore more readily impressed by sound argument—that, at least, is my experience.

Do you find younger people more amenable to reason?

No. I think people take longer nowadays to learn independent thinking.

Does the Christian Bible still wield great influence?

Yes—especially among those who don't read it. The great mass of the public hold it in awe and respect, as an ancient and authoritative text of divine origin.

Do you encourage your listeners to learn something about comparative religion?

Yes; Christianity is only the name given to that particular religious theory which happens to be the official one in this country. There are no ethical precepts which are peculiarly Christian. And I expose all forms of religion that postulate supernatural entities.

What about those people who ask for something in place of religion?

Let us say a common-sense practical philosophy of life called Scientific Humanism, based on knowledge and verifiable by experience.

Do you think that, as a movement, we are making headway?

We could all wish our progress to be faster, but I'm satisfied that our propaganda is taking root. I seem to sense a good deal of tacit support and approval, but for the most part discreet. There is considerable hesitancy in allowing oneself to be identified with unpopular views.

A few "Don'ts" for inexperienced speakers, please.

Don't be unnatural; don't try to be too clever; don't claim to know all the answers; don't make rash statements;

don't be too serious, and above all, don't get rattled. Be frank and straightforward and friendly. Get right on top of your subject and familiarise yourself with the arguments of Bradlaugh, Blatchford, Ingersoll, Paine, McCabe and Cohen.

A Lost World

By LOUIS S. VERNON-WORSLEY

THOUGHTFUL people everywhere cannot help but feel perturbed by the continued world tension and the vexed state of international relationships, which show no improvement as the years roll by. For this, primarily, the responsibility rests upon human beings, whose faulty judgment and deep ingrained prejudices mitigate against world stability.

That there have always been Wars and rumours of Wars is not a valid reason for blindly accepting the doctrine of the inevitability of Armageddon. The first world conflagration of 1914 was reputed to be the War to end War, which would cure all the ills the world is suffering from and abolish the curse of Dictatorships. When it is remembered how far we have progressed along scientific lines, it is a chastening thought that the political and economic problems of our times cannot be solved without recourse to force of arms. Conference follows conference with monotonous regularity, at which we witness the same obstructive tactics by one or other of the Delegates, and this leads to the conclusion, painful though it may be, that in order to achieve a settled World Order, we shall in the end be forced to accept the old group system consisting of great Powers who will carry on independently of other groups; this in effect means a fuller realisation of the great gulf that divides East and West no matter what some Politicians may think.

Let us face only the fundamental issues. It is not to be expected that Races with historical and other backgrounds as far apart as the poles, just by meeting round a table will hasten the millenium, when it is perfectly clear to those who study these problems that there are so many conflicting interests which have all the appearances of being wellnigh insoluble. The very suggestion is preposterous and the unchanging East with its inscrutable and face-saving tactics will never see things through Western eyes. Such attempts to "make the leopard change its spots" border on the absurd and show a complete misunderstanding of important factors. It is precisely on this account that we think the solution lies in Asia being left to develop along its own lines, and the Western World to do the same.

For centuries, Western Powers have occupied large parts of other lands, drawing large supplies of raw materials therefrom, as well as exploiting the native populations, but with the disillusionment that has followed upon the heels of two world wars, a spirit of Nationalism has sprung up in many of those overseas territories, with insistent demands for self-expression and independent Government, with the result that in a period of so-called Peace, there are several wars raging, ostensibly for the very purpose of dispossessing those whom the so-called "Terrorists" deem to be Oppressors, with the deplorable results we are at this moment witnessing in several parts of the world.

It would therefore appear that the time is at hand when a completely new approach will have to be made in the handling of these complex problems, and in view of the deplorable blunders of the past made by people who are reputed to be authorities in such matters the prevailing scepticism is more than justified. In the pursuit of democratic ideals precedents have already been established in the case of India, Pakistan, Burmah and Ceylon, and there are repercussions taking place at the present time in the Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Kenya and Persia for release from the

various Treaties concluded with those countries many years ago. There can be little doubt that similar demands will be made by other territories with native populations, who believe, although erroneously, that they have reached political and economic adult-stature, and if violence is to be avoided their aspirations in this direction will have to be met. In the last analysis it is the common people who are called upon to make supreme sacrifices and there is now a much greater awareness of lines of demarcations in international affairs which ought not to be crossed without the Nation being consulted. Only by adopting this policy can the Powers-that-be hope to lift some of the grave problems which press heavily upon the people in every land.

The awful implication contained in the term "cannon-fodder" is well understood to-day, and it is therefore not surprising that there is reluctance on the part of some people to undertake any form of service in Civil Defence Units, lest they become involved in more onerous duties later on. Whilst deprecating anything in the nature of defeatism, the fundamental basis of a strong Foreign Policy is a sound and vigorous Home Policy, and this fact is becoming increasingly realised by the Electorate as the results of elections show. The general public to-day are far better informed than ever before, through the media of Radio and Television, and they are not likely to succumb to the blandishments of candidates for political honours in whatever form these may take.

The ancient policy of "what we have, we hold" will ultimately have to give way to a more magnanimous attitude towards other people's desire for self-expression and self-determination, and not until that state of mind actuates the foreign policies of the Western Powers, are we likely to see much easing of present world tension. The egotism of some of those who are supposed to guide our destinies (save the word!) is colossal, and the overburdened taxpayer has to foot the bill for their foolishness and blunders. As Bertrand Russell remarked in one of his Radio lectures: "Some day, perhaps a million years hence, someone may discover a distant nebula upon which live logical beings."

Chapman Cohen on Laughter

THERE are few beliefs at which some folk do not laugh, and without their right to laugh being challenged. It is only in connection with religion that the right to laugh is seriously questioned. And even then it is a matter of geography. We may all, in this country, laugh at Mohammedanism, or Hindooism, or the religious beliefs of primitive peoples. In other countries we may as freely laugh at Christianity. The Christian forgets that the Free-thinker, in laughing, is exercising a privilege of which the Christian freely avails himself. . . . It is decidedly suggestive that we only laugh at what are called "living" religions. Dead ones are quite safe. The religious stories of the Egyptians, or the Greeks or the Romans may be recited or read without causing any amusement. Nay, we even forget they *are* religious stories, once believed in as fervently as any current Christian doctrine, and become interested in them as material for psychological study, as poetry, or as yielding a lesson for moral guidance. We read all these ancient legends and none of us laughs. We hear the Christian legend and some of us cannot forbear smiling. Why the distinction? Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Christian legends all belong to the same class. Well, the answer is that we do not really laugh at the legends but at those who believe in them. We do not laugh at the

story of Jesus walking on the water, or casting devils out of lunatics, or at the story of his ascension to heaven: we laugh at people believing in them as historical events. There is really nothing in the stories, as stories, to cause laughter. It is the Christian who is ridiculous, and he is never more ridiculous than when he is engaged in pointing out that other people must not laugh at him and his beliefs, but must discuss them with a gravity which they do not deserve. If the Christian were only out of the way we could treat Biblical legends exactly as we treat the legends of other people.—*Essays in Freethinking.*

Correspondence

REVERENCE

SIR,—It is surely a misnomer to say that a reverent approach is "a dogma in itself." Is the freethinker's reverence for truth a dogma?—Yours, etc.,

ROBT. H. CORRICK.

[One ingredient of reverence is fear. The freethinker does not fear truth. He has a respect for it. The dogma involved in a reverent approach is that of loading the dice by a preconceived conclusion.—Ed.]

IS HE ALONE?

SIR,—I may be alone in deprecating your use of the term "sky pilot" but I wish, nevertheless, to do so.

It seemed particularly inapt when used in the heading to a quotation from John Morley (11th June, 1954), which clearly showed that a writer can be militant and dignified at the same time.—Yours, etc.,

COLIN MCCALL.

ISLAM AND JUDAISM

SIR,—Thank you for your query appearing in *The Freethinker* of 7th May. Of course, I meant Islam. All Semitic religions are aggressive, probably influenced by the desert heat! Judaism is a spent force, a negligible quantity hardly known to the masses.

Islam, on the other hand, has not lost much of its fanaticism and intolerance. Witness the recent happenings in the Celebes Islands. It is reported in the papers that thousands of Indonesian Christians were forcibly converted and a great many who refused to yield were butchered in the traditional technique well known through history. Even though Christianity was a close rival in this matter, the labours of the freethinkers, atheists and others have civilised its savagery, but not its brother from the desert.

It is doubtful whether with all its achievements in history it will ever lose its intolerance.—Yours, etc.,

J. SEEVARATNAM JOHN.

[We thought you might mean both. *The Freethinker* is "agin" all religions.—Ed.]

Apostasy

The man all trusted when he fought the Huns
Now rushes forward to supply their guns.
His friend, the Yankee leader, not outdone,
To Guatemalan rebel hands a gun.

B.S.

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