

The Freethinker

"WHAT IS A MATERIALIST?" is the question posed by Fred Hoyle, the eminent scientist, at the commencement of his recent book, *Man and Materialism*. He continues, "In the popular view I suppose a Materialist is a pretty unpleasant person who gobbles babies for breakfast. This is a view I do not agree with. I am a Materialist and I haven't gobbled any babies yet.

"Nor has Materialism anything to do with Soviet Communism. It is true that Communists profess a crude style of materialism, but this has small similarity with the deeper materialism of the Western world.

"The essence of materialism lies in a refusal to separate Man and his environment into the mutually exclusive categories of 'spiritual' and 'material'."

Where is the "Mind"?
His chapter on Mind is right in line with contemporary developments in materialist philosophy, represented by a growing and influential school of Critical Realism (e.g. the symposium *Philosophy for the Future*). If one asks, "Where is the mind?" their answer is, "Under the hat." It is not something standing outside the electrical processes of the brain, independent of them and merely experiencing them as an observer. It is the label we give to the actual new phenomena which emerge in the brain when the signals coming to the brain through the senses are automatically sorted out and analysed in those areas of the brain which, through evolution, have become adept at the job.

Mind, then, is not a separate entity such as could go on existing after the bodily disorganisation called death; it is, rather, a name for the functioning of the body through one of its parts, the brain.

No detached entity is needed in the heart to make it beat. Why, then, should one be required in the brain to make it work?

Vitalism in the Past Tense
Mind, then, is a function, not a principle. And just as no unrelated Mind Principle is wanted to explain the output of the brain, likewise no Vital Principle, or Life Force, is any more necessary when explaining the distinction between living matter and non-living matter. This theory, called Vitalism, Hoyle properly refers to as a thing of the past, not as something defended by philosophers today. Vitalism, in its modern setting, was born with Bergson (*Creative Evolution*, 1907), flourished for a time with Joad, was attenuated with the Neo-Vitalists, and today it only remains to write its obituary.

Science has shown more profitable ways of explaining complexity than by introducing an external agent on a par with magic. Our author puts it this way:

The following association was once current:
Stone is matter.
Human is matter plus vitalising agent.
Nowadays, with fuller knowledge of the properties of

matter, we should write it thus:

Stone is matter organised in a simple way.

Human is matter in a highly complex organisation.

That is, the human body with its ways of behaviour (a wide range which includes mind), is no more the aggregate of materials which comprise it, than a house is a mere collection of bricks and other materials. Without structural organisation there is neither house nor human person.

This is sound science and a basic position of materialism. And with every year that passes science is learning more and more about this quality of structural organisation and how it mechanistically evolved through the natural process of selection.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —
Fred Hoyle
Materialist
— By G. H. TAYLOR —

Stars and Men

At the higher levels of structure, of course, it will take the scientist longer to formulate his account of what is taking place. In other words, the astronomer can get on with his work faster than the psychologist. "Instead of admitting this as proof that stars and men belong to rootedly different categories," says Hoyle, "the materialist points out that a star is a much simpler structure than a man, so it is no wonder that we know more about the inside of a star than we know about the inside of our own heads."

"God" an Unintelligible Label

Therefore, whether we are dealing with inanimate things or with living things or with conscious organisms, we are dealing only with different levels of complexity, and not with basically different orders of existence. Nor is any "God" needed to make things work out as they do. Commenting on the following sequence,

Q.: *What does religion consist of?*

A.: *A belief in the power of God.*

Q.: *What is God?*

A.: *The eternal, the almighty.*

Q.: *What is "eternal," what is "almighty"?*

Hoyle's observation is: "At each stage here the questioner is asking for an explanation of the concept underlying a particular label, and by way of answer he only receives other equally unintelligible labels."

He disposes of the theologian's *deus ex machina*, the sort of God who runs the Universe like a spinner at the wheel, and comments: "Indeed, according to Catholics, 'God' did such a poor job in his 'making' of the Universe that it is constantly necessary for 'Him' to be making adjustments ('miracles') when things go wrong, rather as the girl may have to keep adjusting her spinning wheel." The notion of something "outside" the Universe, he says, should be dropped, because the Universe means everything there is.

If we care to make "God" mean the Universe, of course, the above objection disappears, but, as Hoyle remarks, religious people would object to such a meaning. While completely contemptuous of Revealed Religions, our author would not object to the formulation of some kind of materialist religion which would recruit man's

energies for the *human* creation and fulfilment of *human* purpose. Instancing the belief that Jesus was born of a virgin, he says beliefs like this "contradict the very fabric of the world" and are unworthy of the reasoning power marking man's advance from the animal.

Divine Establishments

In the setting up of divine establishments for the practice of religion the author sees one way in which surplus goods were disposed of. That is, as a materialist, he looks for natural, as against supernatural, origins of organised religions. Primitive agriculturalists associated their annual crop cycle with the fertility of a goddess, to serve whom was the special task of a priesthood, and it was customary for them to receive, on her behalf, the first fruits of the harvest. (The Harvest Festival of today is an attenuation of this ritual.)

Starting as mere receivers of gifts, the divine establishments grew in prosperity and came to own land and wield great power, employing their own workers and craftsmen. They were also better able to afford the latest methods

Francis Thompson

By MIMNERMUS SECUNDUS

FIFTY YEARS AGO was buried in obscurity that tragic genius Francis Thompson (1859-1907), described by William Archer as "that creature of transcendent vision who made a strange pretence of wearing the blinkers of the Roman Catholic Church."

Amid thousands of obscure graves at Kensal Green Cemetery is his with the arresting inscription, "Look for me in the nurseries of heaven." Then almost unknown, during his lifetime he had suffered the hardships of lonely poverty to a degree seldom surpassed. He had sounded the whole gamut of misery and privation. Many nights he slept upon the Thames Embankment, and under carts in Covent Garden Market. He hawked matches in the Strand, and was a bookseller's porter, staggering through London streets with a heavy sack upon his back. When he was carried to his grave only a few intimate friends, who had looked after him for the last sad months of his life, were present to mourn. Now Thompson is placed by good judges of literature in the ranks of poets and the proud garland of laurel decorates his tomb which was denied to the living man.

A very unequal writer, he sometimes soared to the ether of the great singers, and at other times fell to the lower slopes of Parnassus. He had, indeed, his faults; but against them must be placed his unbalanced, imaginative, reckless nature. There can hardly be a sadder story than his in the whole history of literature, though Chatterton, Villon, Poe, James Thomson, and Paul Verlaine have claims. To be at once a genius and a drudge, to live in dire poverty, and to die of a lingering disease, is as melancholy a lot as can be imagined. Nor would he deserve less pity if we denied his genius. His faults injured himself alone.

Thompson's genius was Oriental, exuberant in colour; woven with rich and strange textures. His poetry was mainly a splendid rhetoric, imaginative and passionate as if the moods went by robed in imperial purple in a great procession.

One of his masterpieces, his *Anthem of Earth* is molten white with passion. Listen to these magnificent lines in which the alchemy of the poet transmutes a threadbare subject into the fine gold of poetry: --

Ay, Mother! Mother!

What is this Man, thy darling kissed and cuffed,
Thou lustingly engender'st,
To sweat, and make his brag, and rot,
Crowned with all honour and all shamefulness?

and copper tools. "A movement that had started as a thanksgiving for the bounty of the earth had ended by controlling the whole society."

Moreover, when the progress of knowledge showed the old beliefs to be false, the divine establishments were by now powerful enough to prevent newer knowledge from interfering with profits. Therefore the primitive superstitions were not discarded. We thus have a materialistic explanation of why religion took hold and prospered for so long.

Starting from his materialist basis, Mr. Hoyle proceeds to study human groups in their environment over long periods of time. He produces a brilliant analysis which deserves treatment in another article. At this stage one can say that if his historical analysis is correct, and his conclusions legitimate, *Man and Materialism* is the most important book bearing on the destiny of mankind that has been published for years.

[*Man and Materialism*, by Fred Hoyle; George Allen and Unwin, 1957; 161 pages; 12/6 net.]

From nightly towers

He dogs the secret footsteps of the heavens,
Sifts in his hands the stars, weighs them as gold-dust
And yet is he successive unto nothing
But patrimony of a little mould,
And entail of four planks. Thou hast made his mouth
Avid of all dominion and all mightiness,
All sorrow, all delight, all topless grandeurs,
All beauty and all starry majesties,
And dim trans-stellar things! even that it may,
Filled in the ending with a puff of dust.
Confess—"It is enough!" The world left empty
What that poor mouthful crams, His heart is builded
For pride, for potency, infinity,
All heights, all deeps, and all immensities,

Science Front—18

LIFE FROM MATTER

Before the rise of life, the oxygen now in the air was absent, since it has been produced by plants in the course of their photosynthesis of food substances. The earth's atmosphere then contained gases like ammonia and hydrocarbons, produced by the reaction of water with metallic carbides and nitrides. A well known example of such a reaction is the production of acetylene from water and calcium carbide. Experiments like those of Miller and Abelson in America have shown how these gases were converted by the energy of sunlight into the basic "organic" compounds necessary as a chemical basis for life.

Hydrocarbons are what chemists call "reducing" compounds, as opposed to being "oxidizing" like oxygen itself. Hence all chemical elements on the earth were then in a less oxidized condition than at present, including phosphorus. It so happens that, while the highly oxidized compounds of phosphorus, phosphates, are nearly insoluble, the less oxidized compounds, phosphites and hypophosphites, are more soluble. Thus phosphorus was more abundant in the early days when beginning life needed it.

As a matter of fact, new living matter is being produced from non-living matter every day, though the means used are not completely known. The housewife with a potted plant in her window is producing new living matter from non-living matter in the soil and water she adds to the pot, and the air, containing essential carbon dioxide, she allows to surround the plant, though she knows practically nothing of the mechanisms involved.

—Dr. G. Fink, *American Rationalist*.

REVIEW

Saint Simonism, Mill and Carlyle

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN HIS RECENT WORK of the above title, Dr. Richard Pankhurst, a member of a family famous in Women's Rights, draws attention to a little known episode in English and European social history, the impact of the short-lived but highly original and influential movement known after its French founder, Henri de St. Simon. The author shows the profound effect produced by the St. Simonian "missionaries," as they styled themselves, on some of the most remarkable Englishmen and women of the day, notably on John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle, certainly two of the most "eminent Victorians."

The short-lived movement, which made a sensation in England and Europe in the 1830's, did not, as might at first be supposed, derive its title from some canonised Christian saint, but from the French Utopian Socialist St. Simon who, though subsequently eclipsed by the rise of the Marxist school of sociology, rivalled our own countryman Robert Owen among the Socialists of the pre-Marxist era. St. Simon was an aristocrat ruined, like so many of his class, by the French Revolution, prior to which he had fought in the American War of Independence. Dying of poverty in 1825, he had evolved one of the first Socialist systems of modern times, as famous in its day as that of Marx was to become later. The best known of his books was *The New Christianity*, for St. Simon, unlike Marx, put forward Socialism not primarily as a political doctrine but as a new religion. St. Simon, however, was very critical of traditional orthodoxy in both Church and State. The French Revolution and its economic counterpart, the Industrial Revolution, had opened up a new era in which at long last the hitherto submerged masses, which St. Simon termed "the largest and poorest class," would come into its own by the adoption of St. Simonism, a social religion with *this* world as its theatre and with *social* transformation the aim. This was the species of Socialism later described by the Marxists, not quite accurately, as Utopian.

St. Simon himself tended to be eccentric: he appears to have had a messianic belief in his own unique destiny! This was fully shared by his followers, who after his death formed themselves into a school, or rather, sect, and his successor as head of the sect assumed an almost Papal character, styling himself "Father" *Enfantin*, a title emblazoned on his dress! If a crank, he was nevertheless a crank of genius as master of an international propagandist movement. The Europe of the early thirties was deluged with St. Simonian pamphlets and appeals. Our author informs us that Rome still keeps several of these on the Index of Prohibited Books—a tribute to their influence. These combined an original analysis of contemporary society and also a demand for Reform, in religious appeals of, to put it mildly, an extremely eccentric character in which "Father" received almost divine status and honours. *Enfantin's* own original contribution to the Socialism—a name which came into use at this time—of his master St. Simon, was an insistent demand for the emancipation of women, to which Dr. Pankhurst's own family were later to make such notable contributions, though this assumed the eccentric form of seeking for The Mother, a kind of female Messiah, in, of all places, a Turkish harem! One can perhaps dub *Enfantin* and Co. as half geniuses, half cranks.

A reviewer of a book on the St. Simonians nowadays has to spend much of his limited space in first explaining

who the French missionaries were and what was their sect's actual teaching; so completely has their name and fame been since obscured both by their own eccentricities and by the rise of later schools of Socialist thought. Our author does this to some extent though the greater part of his 150 pages is taken up with the English "mission" and with its current effects on British thought, particularly on that of Mill and Carlyle. While they deplored the eccentricities of the missionaries aiming to convert England, they were much influenced by their teaching. The Socialist views which Mill was later to incorporate in his *magnum opus* were partly, at least, derived from St. Simon. Dr. Pankhurst would perhaps have added to the value of his investigation had he examined in more detail the actual connection between the pioneering advocacy of women's rights by St. Simon and his school, with Mill's own famous essay on the subject. It has usually been assumed that Mill's interest in women's rights was first aroused by his famous affair with Harriet Taylor, who later became his wife, but perhaps he actually got it from the St. Simonians' insistence that human emancipation required not only the social, economic and political emancipation of "the largest and poorest class," but equally of the largest and poorest sex? The powerful advocacy of women's rights by *Enfantin* and his followers is perhaps the most important legacy to modern thought bequeathed by the St. Simonians.

Like other pioneer sects and missions of the early Socialist era, the St. Simonians had their full share of eccentricities, in which respect only their near contemporaries, the Mormons, who also began as a Socialist sect of a rather similar character, surpassed them. Mill had already warned them of the consequences of their fantasies, whilst *The Times*, more bluntly, demanded that the St. Simonian mission should be "ducked in a horsepond." In France retribution eventually overtook them in 1833, when in one of the most celebrated trials of the century *Enfantin* and several of his disciples were sentenced by a French court for breaches of public meeting regulations and, more sensationally, for inciting to sexual immorality. The accused all delivered rambling but eloquent speeches in their own defence.

Their influence, however, lived on in other channels. Many of the leading pioneers of the French Industrial Revolution, in which St. Simon had taken the greatest interest, sprang from his school, and their influence ramified in many directions later in the century. Rather curiously our author omits to mention perhaps the two most influential of such manifestations. It was a former St. Simonian, Isaac Pereire, whose letter to Pope Leo XIII emphasising that the future lay with the workers, a pivotal idea of St. Simon's, which induced that astute ecclesiastical statesman to issue his famous encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* on the social question, the starting point of modern Catholic sociology (1891); whilst to another disciple of St. Simon, the French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, was due the subsequent opening of the Suez Canal. The project for the famous canal appears to have originated in the fertile brain of "Father" *Enfantin*. The canal deserved his statue at the junction of Asia and Africa.

Dr. Pankhurst has given us a most valuable and absorbing book, of great interest to the student of ideas whether in the domain of sociology or religion.

[*The Saint Simonians. Mill and Carlyle*; by Richard Pankhurst; Sidgwick and Jackson, 21/-.]

This Believing World

The BBC Press Conference had as its guest the other day, Mrs. Ena Twigg, well known as a Spiritualist medium, and her replies to some of the searching questions put by the journalists who interviewed her were quite on a par with the answers given by Mr. Harry Edwards, the well-known "Spirit-healer," to the two doctors when they interviewed him on TV. Mr. Francis Williams, for example, asked her repeatedly to tell us what the "spirits" did all day, and all Mrs. Twigg could do was to "hedge." She hadn't the ghost (or is it the spook?) of an idea. Almost everything she said was, so to speak, on the defensive, for she knew no more about "spirits" than the journalists there. And, of course, she produced not a scrap of evidence that there were any at all anywhere except in her imagination.

★

Like everything else, Christianity has to move with the times, and we are delighted to learn that at last there is to be a jazz recording of the Lord's Prayer for sale all over the country. This should impress its solemnity and grandeur even on our rock an' roll enthusiasts, especially when rocking an' rolling their utmost. It brings true Christianity even to our most spirited teenagers, especially the bit where the Lord is implored to lead us not into temptation. If the record is a success, what about jazzing the Sermon on the Mount on a long-playing record?

★

We are so used to seeing eminent people—not so eminent on religious questions, by the way — joining the Roman Church, that it comes quite as a shock to learn when a Benedictine monk becomes a parson. He was 17 when he first went into a monastery, and now at 49 he finds he cannot believe in the Supremacy of the Pope, in the Infallibility and Adulation of the Pope, and in the insidious increase of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in the Church. Well, he will soon find that as an Anglican he will have to believe in the Supremacy of the Bible — the Authorised Version as far as possible — in the Infallibility and Adulation of the Bible, and in the insidious increase of the cult of Jesus Christ as against that of God Almighty himself — which doesn't seem very different from what the ex-monk had to believe in his first love of which, he tells us, he still has "happy memories."

★

One point ought to be particularly noticed — it is that as soon as possible after giving up his monkhood, Mr. de Mendieta fell in love and got married. Alas, how often does corrupt human nature win a victory over sacerdotal celibacy even after years of iron devotion to a religious vocation!

★

The London "Evening Standard" appears to be quite surprised to find "charity in the Church." It tells us that a clergyman's marriage went on the rocks and, after he and his wife agreed on divorce, he married again — in a register office this time, but was given an incumbency in a country parish — just as if Jesus had never denounced divorce with most Christians backing him up. Still, no matter what "our Lord" thought about it or said, the fact remains that divorce even among the clergy has come to stay.

★

A book has just been published about the ill-fated airship the R.101; and we need not be surprised that "new evidence" from spirit sources has come to light. The old "evidence," the sitting with Mrs. Garrett under the late Harry Price, was, as some readers will remember, exposed

as a blatant fraud in these columns some years ago, but of course this has now been superseded by details of more sittings under Mrs. Garrett which that lady, strangely enough, did not appeal to when her first sitting was challenged as sheer imposture. We do not mean that she never sat or talked in her seances. We do mean that the story about the unfortunate Flight-Lt. Irwin coming through was a tissue of lies as even Harry Price himself had to admit.

★

The details of the "new evidence," unsuspected all these years, are in an Appendix to the book by James Leason, and it should prove interesting to see how they will look after the same searching analysis the old "evidence" received. One thing we do note in a review of the book, and that is that, while only poor Irwin turned up at the first seance, at these new ones quite a crowd of the victims came in—like Sir Sefton Brancker, Major Scott, Squadron Leader Johnson, and others. This was only to be expected. It would never have done just to repeat the first seance. But can credulity go much further?

A Merry Levite in His Cups

When Bacchus once the Priest subdued,
With his prevailing Liquor,
The Man in spite of Art breaks Loose,
Abstracted from the Vicar.

Sober he kept the Formal Path,
In's Cups he's not the same Man,
But Reel'd and Stagger'd in his Faith,
And Hiccup'd like a Layman.

A many pretty things he spoke,
Deserving our Attention;
Not Scripture fit to Feed a Flock,
But of his own Invention.

Yet whether Truths said o'er his Glass,
Of which I took great Notice,
Were, said in Vino Veritas,
Or Verbo Sacerdotis,

We could not tell; yet Praise was due,
Tho' unto which to give it,
I Vow I know not of the two,
The Liquor or the Levite.

He Drank in Earnest, broke his Jest,
No Scripture Phrases utter'd;
The Man he Play'd, and not the Priest;
But put the best side outward.
Till Drown'd at last in Bacchus streams,
The Prophet's weak Condition,
Lull'd him to Sleep to Dream strange Dreams,
Or see some wond'rous Vision.

NED WARD (1698)

Christ had no knowledge of the general condition of the world; he was unacquainted with science, he was harsh towards his family and was no philosopher.—RENAN.

—NEXT WEEK—

FREETHOUGHT ON TV
JOSEPH LEWIS (U.S.A.) INTERVIEWED

THE FREETHINKER

41 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1.
TELEPHONE: HOLBORN 2601.

All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs DAY, CORINA, and SHEPPARD.

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

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

London (Tower Hill).—Thursday, 12-2 p.m.: Messrs. D. TULLMAN and L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, FINKEL, SMITH or CORSAIR. Sunday, 3 p.m. (Platt Fields) Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, etc. Sunday 8 p.m. (Deansgate Blitzed Site): Messrs. WOODCOCK, MILLS, SMITH or WOOD.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 11.30 a.m.: R. POWE. Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE.

Wales and Western Branch (The Downs, Bristol).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: D. SHUPPER.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.

Worthing Branch N.S.S. (Beach).—Sunday, August 25th, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER, GORDON, and McCALL.

Notes and News

FREETHINKERS in the Worthing area should note that the National Secular Society Branch there is holding outdoor meetings on the front on Sunday at 3 and 6 p.m., when the speakers will be J. W. Barker, J. Gordon and C. McCall. We hope they will support the venture and keep in touch with the local Hon. Secretary, Mr. W. Perkins of Valley Holme, Grinstead Lane, Lancing, Sussex. Friendly indoor gatherings of members and sympathisers are projected for the winter months, and those who are interested should write to Mr. Perkins.

It is interesting to note that among his manifold activities our esteemed contributor, the Rev. J. L. Broom, has compiled the *Reader's Guide to Philosophy* for the Library Association (County Libraries Section). Under the heading "Materialism" it is gratifying to note that he includes Mr. G. H. Taylor's book, *Can Materialism Explain Mind?*

AMERICA easily leads the way in the matter of fair shares for freethought on the radio, and this even in the land of the late unlamented MacCarthy. The biggest show since Robert Scott's recently took place in a programme called "Night Beat," in which Mr. Joseph Lewis, America's Number One headliner for freethought propaganda, was interviewed for half an hour and permitted to put over the most militant uncensored attack on the Bible. A verbatim report will be appearing in THE FREETHINKER. In an unrehearsed programme there is not much time to dot the i's and cross the t's but one can imagine that the aural impression on over three million listeners must have been excellent propaganda.

★

A RECENT visitor to the officer, Professor Benjamin Sacks, of the Department of History, University of New Mexico, considered Mr. F. A. Ridley's four-page leaflet, *France and the Vatican*, an admirable, succinct treatment of the subject. Reprinted from THE FREETHINKER, the leaflet is published for propaganda purposes by the N.S.S. at 1d.

★

A READER in Grimsby, Mr. K. K. Lucas, tells us that in contrast to most public authorities, Grimsby library is "very fair to us." THE FREETHINKER is on show in the reading room alongside religious newspapers, and in the lending section there is a varied assortment of Freethought works. This reminds us that readers can do much to get such works into their local libraries by regularly filling in application slips.

★

THERE was an unusual occurrence at a recent open air meeting of the Manchester N.S.S. Branch when the postman arrived with a special delivery of one letter. It had come from Australia and was addressed to The Secretary, Manchester Branch N.S.S., Deansgate Blitzed Site, Outdoor Lectures, weekdays 1 p.m., Manchester, England." The recipient, Mrs. H. M. Rogals, rang the *Manchester Evening News* and gave them the story, and it was published in their feature, "Mr. Manchester's Diary," in the issue of August 6th. As the address was printed, it was obviously a good free advertisement for the lectures and excellent publicity for the N.S.S.

★

THE Matron of the Leicester Royal Infirmary has been worrying because nurses do not attend prayers. Some publicity was given to the matter, and Mr. C. H. Hammersley took the opportunity to get the following into the local press: "It is quite possible to love one's neighbour and to heal the sick without recourse to religious ceremonies. In his biography on the life of Florence Nightingale, Sir E. Cook says: 'She had little interest in rites and ceremonies as such, and she interpreted the doctrines of Christianity in her own way. . . . She did not belong to any Church.'"

★

IN Vicksburg, South Michigan, U.S.A., five Protestant churches celebrated Christmas with the thermometer showing over 90 degrees on July 21st last. This was in protest against "the commercialism that accompanies Christmas in December." We trust we are in time to wish them a happy New Year.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

METHODIST Sunday Schools lost 30,000 of their children in 1955 and the figures for 1956 would probably reveal a similar loss, bewailed the Rev. R. Shearer, a former Methodist President, a few weeks ago.

Searching the Scriptures

By C. G. L. DU CANN

PEOPLE WILL DO ANYTHING with the Bible—except read and consider it.

They will keep a copy as a domestic fetish or a literary pet. They will go to the extreme of opening it and dipping into it for a favourite text or a familiar passage. They will extol the book and speak of it with reverence. They will give a copy away and feel good about that. They will use it for oath-taking, caring nothing for the fact that it contains the injunction: "Swear not at all." They will solve crossword puzzles with it (much as Victorians like Charles Dickens used the big "Family Bible" as a record of family history).

But read the whole book attentively and critically, people will not. Probably it is the only best-seller in the world which is never read by its devotees from cover to cover in spite of its vast sales.

Now, if ordinary decent folk did read their Bibles they would be shocked and horrified. Truthfully it can be said that within the canonical Christian Bible there is more blasphemy of God (whom the letterpress aims to laud) and more dishonour to Man (whom the book professes to edify) than any other "holy book" of any other of the eleven major religions of the world.

You need not take that from me. The book is extant; and you may read it for yourself, making up your own mind upon it. "Search the Scriptures." Seek and ye shall find—truly astonishing stuff. Absurdities, atrocities, obscenities, contradictions, errors, fictions abound as plentifully as ants in an anthill.

Fabulous animals like the unicorn with two horns, not one; cockatrices living in dens; poisonous dragons that snuff up the wind and make a wailing; satyrs that cry to their fellows; fiery flying serpents; and other interesting beasts that biology never knew and zoology never dreamed of, exist in the Bible. Not as fictions but as facts! But the animals are nothing to the Gods that wander through its pages.

There is a tailor-God making clothes for Adam and Eve. A barber-God shaving with a razor in Isaiah. A penitent-God grieving (as he well might) over man's creation. A hissing-God calling for Egyptian flies and Assyrian bees. A roaring-God of the prophets Jeremiah, Hosea and Joel. A finger-writing God in Exodus. A culinary God who preferred the roast meat of Abel to the fruit and garden-produce of Cain; evidently no vegetarian. An anti-feminist-God in Leviticus who told Moses that it was twice as unclean for a woman to bear a female as it was for her to bear a male baby.

These gods are as interesting as the gods of Roman and Greek mythology and quite as lively. Call them symbolism or metaphor if you will, for only as such, can modern minds believe in them. But you cannot do that to explain away the legislation said to be inflicted by the God of the Old Testament upon his chosen people, the Israelites. Hitler was kind and Stalin was mild compared to him and his delight in "capital punishment" for tiny transgressions.

"Whosoever doeth any work on the Sabbath Day he shall surely be put to death" (Exodus xxxi, 15). There is a text for you that the English "Lord's Day Observance Society" never quotes. Death is decreed in the Bible for idolatry, heresy and witchcraft; for picking up sticks on Saturday; for "doing aught presumptuously"; for touching a holy thing; for even approaching the vessels of the

sanctuary; for entering the Holy Place without linen breeches; for the unchastity of a bride, a priest's daughter being especially burnt; for eating animals killed by another animal; and for many other crimes, including blasphemy.

How superior was the legislation of God in ancient times to the legislation of Man in these modern days you may see by looking at the Homicide Act of 1957, which allows the sinner to do all these things without being put to death!

Seldom was the "Lord" of the Old Testament satisfied except by the wholesale slaughter of men and animals. Some bizarre instances are the killing of 50,700 men for looking into a box, and 70,000 more for being enumerated in a census. Grotesque, too, is the "tearing" of forty-two children by a couple of she-bears for calling Elisha bald (as he probably was, like Shakespeare and Julius Caesar). It is difficult to believe that this story was not invented by a child for other children, for it is exactly the sort that the horrid little things do "make up."

It is often said by those who know their Old Testament and the diabolical things in it, that Christians may ignore all this and firmly base themselves on the New Testament, "which is quite different." Most certainly the New is milder. And yet Jesus said expressly that he had not come to destroy "the Law," that is the Pentateuch; and that it was easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the Law to fail.

Besides, the New Testament has terrors and atrocities of its own. True, its everlasting unquenchable fire and eternal torments are allegorised by Western Christians into mere figurative speech meaning next to nothing, merely because modern squeamishness cannot stomach them. But this modern interpretation was unknown to a terrorised Christendom for some nineteen hundred years. And fundamentalist Christians still believe in eternal burning, on the whole "for you and not for me."

We should be careful. Not only murderers, idolators, sorcerers, and whoremongers are specifically threatened with hell-fire but also the "unbelieving" and even the "fearful." Worse still, "all liars" (but if the Psalmist is right in saying "All men are liars," and for my part, I am quite certain he is right except that he should have added all women too; apparently none of us can escape).

In the New Testament, too, God is represented as sending "strong delusion" to entrap people into believing lies that they may be damned; as blinding people's eyes and hardening their hearts. Christ is represented as speaking in unintelligible parables so that people may not understand and be saved. Yet in plain defiance of Biblical statements and quite contrary to many texts, it is the general Christian belief that the "salvation of Christ" is intended for all mankind. That is not what Christ says at all. Salvation is for the elect, predestinate "few" who find "the strait and narrow gate" as against the "many" who are destined to tread only the broad way "that leadeth to destruction."

The late Dean Inge loved to point out that Christian salvation, like culture, was not for the herd or the mob, but for the select few. It is in no sense democratic, it is for the spiritually aristocratic, and the Bible makes that clear. The royal blood of Jesus is much emphasised; and his claim was to be King of the Jews, not to be the servant of the multitude or their spokesman.

Contrary to what is generally thought and taught, it may be reasonably argued that the message of the New Testam-

ment is more wicked than that of the Old. In both, of course, "blood" is the remedy for the atonement, and the remission of sin; but in the Old Testament it is the blood of animals which has to be offered up, and in the New it is the blood of the Man Jesus—which is a more grievous thing, surely. A Father-God who requires the agonising death of an only Son as a substitute-victim before he will relinquish the punishment of other persons (the real offenders) is a shocking conception of Deity. No modern mind ought to entertain so low an idea as that.

The matters to which I have alluded are sufficient to show what a very interesting book the Bible is. It is a great pity that Christians confine their reading of it to selected, favourite and hackneyed pieces and passages. This miscellaneous collection of Eastern books—for such it is—contains fiction, poetry, legends, myths, prophecy, aphorisms, philosophy and several religions. There is much that is beautiful, noble and exalting; much to elevate the heart and satisfy the mind. There is much to interest and to excite. On the other hand, there is plenty that is ugly, squalid, sordid, foul, obscene, and downright wicked.

Except in small bits, the Bible is a largely unexplored masterpiece, or, more accurately, series of masterpieces. Some of the best of it is to be found in the Apocrypha, both of the Old and New Testament; of the latter not one English person in a thousand has even heard the titles of

the books, such as, for instances, the Gospel of Nicodemus or Barnabas. The Bible should be known to all. English husbands could hardly do better than read the very sound views of Saint Paul on the proper subjection of women, and especially wives; they should repeat them morning and evening to edify themselves and educate their womenfolk, at the same time praising God that they are not American husbands married to American wives. Every Marriage Guidance Council in Britain should learn by heart that notable text, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord," and add the words, "as well as to every right-thinking British husband."

For my part, I enjoy Bible-reading even when God is depicted as the villain of the piece, as he so frequently is, in that astonishing collection of tales. I comfort myself with the reflection that God is not as black as he is painted. No God could be, and no man or brute either. Having myself enjoyed this holy book so much, I am anxious that other — religionists, irreligionists and indifferentists — should also enjoy the feast. Yet I fear I am a voice crying in the wilderness when I cry aloud: "Seach the Scriptures. Seek and ye shall find—all sorts of things that will make you sit up and take notice."

Just look here. Just look what I've found—in this article.

The Chronicler as Editor

By JOHN BOWDEN

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONALISTS are unceasing in their condemnation of critics, "higher" and "lower," who have presumed to reinterpret and reconstruct "God's Word" to suit their "preconceived notions."

It is undeniable that in their analysis and reconstructions of the Bible many modern critics have gone to unwarranted lengths and thereby left themselves open to the strictures of their opponents; but not one of them has ever gone to the extremes of "reinterpretation" pursued by a Hebrew "critic" of olden times—to wit, the author of the Books of Chronicles.

When this worthy set out to write a resume of the history of his race he had before him several ancient documents, which included those we now know as the Books of Samuel and Kings. Sections of these ancient writings which conformed to his ideas of things were reproduced verbatim; but when he came across passages which offended his susceptibilities—and that was often—he pursued one of three courses. 1. The offending passage was entirely omitted. 2. It was revised, generally by the insertion of more or less relevant comments, but often by a complete reconstruction; or 3. The Chronicler gave an entirely new and highly coloured version of the incident recorded by the ancient authority.

The Chronicler's recasting of the earlier writings, often amounting to positive falsification, can be perceived at once by anyone who takes the trouble to compare the narratives in the Books of Chronicles with the earlier versions. Yet at no time have the pious folk who are so severe in their condemnation of modern critics of the Bible uttered a word of disapprobation of the ancient "critic."

Just when the Books of Chronicles were written is uncertain. The Hebrew text of 1 Chron. 3: 19ff carries the line of David on to six generations after Zerubbabel, who flourished circa 550 B.C.. The Septuagint carries the genealogy on to 11 generations after Zerubbabel. If we allow only 20 years to a generation we have a choice of dates ranging from 400 to 330 B.C. Most authorities accept

the latter date, which means that the books were not completed until some seven centuries after the exile, an account of which closes the Chronicler's historical survey.

The identity of the Chronicler is shrouded in anonymity. There are, however, a few things which can confidently be asserted about him. First, he was a native of the southern Palestinian state of Judah and shared to the full the prejudices and patriotic sentiments of his fellow-countrymen, especially their hostility to the tribes which broke away after the death of Solomon and set up an independent state in the north—the state variously known as Israel, Ephraim and Samaria. Secondly, he was a fervent Jahwist. Those who were loyal to the Hebrew god, no matter what their moral character, were extolled by him; while those who renounced allegiance to the god were "beyond the pale." Political events in Judah were assessed, not in proportion to their intrinsic importance, but as they exemplified Jahweh's help to the obedient and chastisement of the rebellious. Thirdly, he was an uncompromising upholder of Levitical prerogatives and privileges. There can be no doubt that he was himself a Levite, in all probability a member of the dominant (Zadokite) priestly caste.

One can imagine the Chronicler's perturbation at the discovery that in the older records there is an almost complete absence of any reference to the Levites. They were virtually ignored, being mentioned twice only in the Books of Samuel (1 Sam. 6: 15 and 2 Sam. 15: 24) and once in Kings (1 Kgs. 8: 4). There is in addition a passing mention to the house of Levi in 1 Kgs. 12: 31. Not another allusion to Levites can be found anywhere in Samuel and Kings.

The Chronicler, however, more than made up for this neglect. There are more than a hundred references to the Levites, their status, functions and activities, in his books; they are everything and everywhere.

When reading the account of the coronation of King Joash (2 Kgs. 11: 4-11) he was horrified at reading that Jehoida, the high priest, "sent and fetched the captains

over hundreds, of the Carites and of the guard, and brought them into the house of Jahweh." The Carites were foreign mercenaries, and their admission into the house of Jahweh would in his eyes be the most horrible profanation. While he mentions the captains of hundreds and gives their names, he substitutes "Levites" for "Carites," at one stroke getting the Carites out and the "legitimate" Temple attendants in.

Equally, if not more, perturbing would be the discovery that priestly functions had been exercised by non-Levites in contravention of the provisions of the Levitical Legislation (this is one of the facts on which the Higher Critics base their contention that the Priestly Code was not then in existence). Samuel had performed all the priestly tasks, including the offering up of sacrifices. David had also officiated as priest and even worn the priestly ephod. David's sons also were priests (altered by the A.V. into "chief rulers").

Long and deeply the Chronicler pondered over the problem which faced him. He could not deny or even ignore Samuel's priestly activities. But Samuel was an Ephraimite. Then came a happy thought: why not turn him into a Levite? This was done by the simple expedient of including him and his two sons in a Levitical genealogy (1 Chr. 6:28). All reference to the usurpation (so the Chronicler would regard it) of priestly functions by David and his sons was suppressed.

The Passing Show

In a new church in Mansfield are oil-paintings showing the Virgin Mary with a shopping basket and wearing a modern coat, and Joseph with a yellow pullover and trilby. "The idea is that they should make people think," said Mr. N. M. Lane, Southwell Diocesan Surveyor. An apparently empty frame contains a striking likeness of the Holy Ghost (so our Art Correspondent assures us.)

* * *

One of the world's largest R.C. parishes is in the Arctic, with H.Q. in Churchill. Fr. P. A. Lessard's parish extends over 1,000 miles and includes 3,000 Catholics. As most of the natives would regard Hell as a warm and welcome change, there seems little likelihood of frightening the locals into mass conversions.

* * *

The Sunday school of Cardiff's City Temple now has vehicles to tour the city picking up children, most of the kiddies willingly visiting Sunday school—just for the ride! About 100 children are taken (in) by this fashion every Sunday. Proof of the (horse-) power of religion!

* * *

After the National Coal Board announced their intention to close the Ystalyfera pit the local Free Church Council sprang into action, and chairman the Rev. T. Arfon Jones stated defiantly: "Ystalyfera is not going to take this lying down. In this free country everyone has a right to fight for what he believes is right."

Following this brave talk 200 people carrying Bibles and prayer books sang hymns and offered a mass prayer outside the colliery, pleading with the Almighty to keep the pit open. The matter is shortly to be discussed by the Heavenly Arbitration Tribunal.

* * *

When the Pope received 150 dressmakers from the Roman fashion house of the Fontana Sisters, he remarked that it must be difficult to design women's summer dresses which are "chaste as well as elegant" (he may be celibate but he

doesn't keep his eyes shut). The Pope was wearing a full-skirted black-and-purple cassock with a rucked bodice and daringly cut away above the calf. DAVE SHIPPER.

CORRESPONDENCE

COURAGE WANTING

We should all like to see the circulation of THE FREETHINKER increase very substantially, but the editor of every periodical still being published is facing the same problem. One half-minute on radio or TV would no doubt help enormously for there must be many thousands of sceptics, and many thousands whose religious beliefs are of a very nebulous kind. With the growing interest in science, particularly in the International Geophysical Year, a show of courage from unbelievers is badly needed. There is a very definite fear on the part of many to express their unbelief; in some cases their fears are well founded, but in others they are not. The recent article by Mr. John Gilmour in *The Observer* was admirable and I have written an appreciation to the Editor of that paper.

FREDERICK E. PAPP.

MILITANCY

On this question, why respect Christian feelings? Some Christians will go so far as to say grace at the same table as an Atheist. Do they respect *our* feelings?

E. CROSSWELL.

WHEN IS MARRIAGE NOT MARRIAGE?

Louis Michel's reference (in THE FREETHINKER, 9.8.57) to the now-ended controversy over the intended marriage of Princess Margaret to Peter Townsend brings to my mind a very recent case of (R.C.) Church Law operating in reverse. As your contributor says: "According to C. of E. Law regarding marriage, Townsend, although divorced, is still 'spiritually' married and cannot, therefore, marry again." But what do readers think of this for ecclesiastical casuistry?—

A divorced lady film celebrity got into the news a week or two ago by marrying again in a Roman Catholic Church. This caused perplexity to at least one newspaper reader who, under the pseudonym "Puzzled," asked through the correspondence columns of *The Yorkshire Evening Post* how it was that a divorced person could be remarried in a Roman Catholic Church? Had there been a recent change of attitude on the part of that Church?

There was an editorial footnote, which said that the attitude of the Roman Catholic—or, for that matter, the Anglican—Church remained the same in regard to the remarriage of divorced persons. But it so happened that the previous marriage of this divorced lady took place in a register office. And since in the eyes of the Church such a marriage is not a marriage, there was no ecclesiastical objection to what the profane world regards as a remarriage.

I do not express comment!

G. I. BENNETT.

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