

The Freethinker

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VISCOUNT HAILSHAM was installed as Rector of Glasgow University on October 21st, and he celebrated the occasion with what the *Glasgow Herald* (22/10/60) described as "an oration . . . which did not fall short of some of the highest standards set in the past". It was, we are told, "a passionate peroration, which was to bring him a thunderous round of applause". I believe that it was sadly misguided, and I shall try to show how.

Lord Hailsham is, of course, Minister of Science; he is also a theist, and he chose as his subject, "The Need for Faith in a Scientific Age". I confess that I find his opening remarks incohesive, though this may be due to the reporting (I follow the *Herald's* very full text). What can a man intelligently believe? he asks. "Does it matter? Will anything do? Or is the scientific method enough . . .?" "I begin," he says, "by asserting my passionate belief in the importance of general ideas." Well, few would disagree with this last assertion: certainly I don't; but I fail to see how it conflicts with a belief in the importance of the scientific method. To my mind, general ideas should be reached by use of that method, and examined in conformity with it. For Lord Hailsham, however, scientific theory, philosophical reasoning and religious dogma "All depend for their discoveries as much on intuition and poetic imagination as on careful reasoning". As much? I dispute it. I have no space to elaborate, but I would say that the "flash of insight" that comes to a scientist and enables him to correlate previously uncorrelated data is essentially related to his scientific mode of thinking, his "careful reasoning", if you like. Certainly "poetic imagination" is far too vague a term to use in this context.

But by this time, Lord Hailsham's "general ideas" have become "metaphysical speculation". Fair enough, perhaps, though one would have liked a little more precision from the start. And his imprecision really becomes serious when he says that religion, philosophy and science all start from "an unconquerable belief in the intelligibility and rationality of the Universe". "Intelligibility" may be allowed, but "rationality" no. Lord Hailsham may only mean that our own reasoning powers discern things about the Universe (which I accept) but his words attribute rationality, reasoning powers, to the Universe itself. This cannot be accepted.

The Absolute

Like all theists, of course, he is after an absolute, and he will do anything (logically speaking) to get one. He concedes that "The relative and the contingent may be all that we can ever have", but, he argues, "relative and contingent are words which only have a meaning in a world where the absolute also reigns". This is a particularly obvious example of confusion between words and things, between adjectives and nouns. Lord Hailsham is, as the *Glasgow Herald* says, "no logical positivist". One is tempted to add that Lord Hailsham is no logical anything.

"Relative" and "contingent" are words used to describe phenomena. It is true that they expressly imply a distinction from absoluteness, but they by no means imply the existence of "the absolute". They imply only the existence of the word "absolute" in man's vocabulary; a concept, not a thing. Lord Hailsham read philosophy at Oxford 30 years ago, but like many others he must have neglected G. H. Lewes, who taught the great philosophical lesson: speak in adjectival phrases and avoid using nouns that don't stand for things. It is a lesson Lord Hailsham might learn even now. "The absolute"—and for that matter, "the relative" and "the contingent"—would then be dropped from his philosophical dictionary. I doubt it, though. "The more we deny the existence of an absolute the more confidently we are involved in the assertion of it", he says. To which there is only one possible reply: nonsense.

Consciousness

Nonsensical, too, is the oft-repeated claim that modern science "has killed materialist philosophy stone dead". I have no time to counter all his Lordship's assertions. I will concentrate on one: that "consciousness . . . excludes a purely materialist conception of any universe which contains it". First let me invoke Lewes again. "Consciousness" is a noun, therefore suggesting a thing. But there is no such "thing" as "consciousness": it is not an entity. In fact it doesn't really exist. What do exist are animals (including man) that behave in a way we call "conscious". There are "conscious beings" (adjectival phrase): there is not "consciousness" (noun).

What makes them conscious is the possession of a brain and a nervous system, and this is what the materialist has always maintained. Lord Hailsham is compelled to admit that "consciousness"—as he calls it—is dependent upon "the chemistry, the physics . . . the electronics of the brain", which is essentially yielding the materialist case, but he is naturally not content with this.

However it is produced, whatever the chemistry, the physics or for that matter the electronics of the brain, the thing which says in regard to the reality it studies, including itself or its fellows:—"I know, I believe, I deny, I understand, or worse still, I love, I admire, I detest", is not a thing which can be described simply in terms of molecules, hormones, ionised particles, or electrical activity—unless, of course, as has been seriously suggested by philosophising scientists, these things in their turn have a "within-ness", an inner character of life depriving them of the right to be considered solely in their mechanical or material aspects.

Lord Hailsham's poetic language fails to make clear whether "the thing" in the above passage means "consciousness" or the brain, though from the context I suspect the former. But in fact only human beings with brains say "I know, I believe, I deny", etc., and the matter is best treated in this way. No materialist would say that a person "can be described simply in terms of molecules, hormones", and the rest, but what he would say is that no person would exist without molecules, hormones, etc.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Our Minister of Science

By COLIN McCALL

Let us get that clear. We are continuously learning more and more about the physico-chemical basis of living organisms, including man; more and more about the mechanistic functioning of his muscles, his nerves, his brain, and so forth. And our discoveries confirm the scientific materialist view.

This is not to say, for example, that a thought is a material thing. No materialist has ever suggested so. What he does say is that the process of thinking is inseparably connected with, and is indeed physically dependent upon, a material organ, the brain, in a material organism, man. The materialist conception has been schematically represented by Professor R. W. Sellars in the form of a spiral, giving continuity but at the same time, different planes. Each plane or level represents an advance in complexity, with consequent new qualities, over its predecessor, though continuous with it and developing from it. On the human level (the most complex we know)—to put it very crudely—we find a particular combination of molecules that exhibits not only the behaviour we call living (and which we study in the biological sciences) but also that which goes under the heading of mental (the province of psychology). The emergence of new qualities necessitates the extension of our studies—the development of new sciences—but their interconnection should never be overlooked.

In his attempt to demonstrate the need for faith, Lord Hailsham makes the most of the perhaps unfortunate use of the word "creation" in cosmogony. Both "continuous creation" and "the doctrine of the explosion of the primeval atom", he says, "involve creation of a kind". He realises that they don't necessarily involve a Creator, but in some way they suggest to him that nature has a "direction". "Something has to be added", he says, "either at the beginning, or all the time . . .". He agrees that "a kind of pantheism—an inner within-ness of everything emerging from a state of *Urdummheit* or primeval stupidity and struggling to express itself in ever higher states of consciousness", might fill the bill of his stated requirements to this point, but then this "evolutionary pantheism . . . seems . . . to break down utterly". "A world in which something which does not yet exist is striving dumbly to bring itself into being" and so forth, doesn't make sense to him. Nor does it to me. But then we part company again.

For Lord Hailsham,

If consciousness, if purposiveness, if morality, and love and self-sacrifice and justice, are at the end of the chain of evolutionary phenomena it can only be, it seems to me, because intelligence, purposiveness, yes, and justice, love, and self-sacrifice too, are themselves at the centre of reality, not in inchoate but in transcending mood, not as abstract qualities like the Platonic ideas, but because they inhere as such qualities only can inhere in transcendent personalities.

In other words, as he goes on to say, "the only true reading of human experience, remains at the end of the day a theistic one".

What can one say? That to talk of "the end of the chain of evolutionary phenomena" automatically suggests a beginning, but that in fact, evolutionary processes haven't ended; that they are continuous and that, therefore, no beginning can be envisaged? That the materialist doesn't postulate a coming into being out of nothing, a creation, but says, as Chapman Cohen so often said in these columns, "Give me existence and I will build a world"? That because we detect certain qualities in an end product, we mustn't assume them to have been there all along? These are some of the things one can say; there are many more, but there is no time now.

I hope I have said enough, however, to show that Viscount Hailsham's address, which the *Glasgow Herald*

has received with acclaim, is muddled and imprecise from the start, confused throughout and, ending as it does in talk of "the evidence of things unseen", philosophically valueless. One shakes one's head ruefully. Minister of Science!

Points from New Books

By OSWELL BLAKESTON

THE BAROQUE CHURCHES of Spain and Portugal evoke, with their mingling of the sensuous and the spiritual, colourful pictures of the patron kings, men like Joao V who raised a costly chain of churches and had a number of affairs with nuns. In his book, *Baroque In Spain And Portugal* (Batsford, 35s.), James Lees Milne reminds us just how oppressive has been the influence of the pious voluptuaries in the Iberian Peninsula.

"Until the nineteenth century," he writes, "the nude was totally banned from painting by the Inquisition. Such representation was termed 'pintyra deshonesta', and was liable to the severest penalties. Where straightforward portraiture was not involved, religious subjects were held to be obligatory. It was usual for artists to prepare them in a state of grace and with prayer.

"King Philip II would not tolerate paintings of secular subjects, even refined from the least suggestive profanities. He sharply reprimanded El Mudo for depicting a cat and dog fight as a detail in a religious picture, and commanded that thenceforth 'neither cat, nor dog, nor any other indecorous figure, but only saints moving to devotion' should be represented."

Religious oppression in Spain and Portugal has, of course, been sustained right up to the present day. Part of the trickery has been the encouragement of all sorts of local cults aimed to keep the populace docile. In Portugal, one of the last representatives of the generation of the old Aviz dynasty of kings, a certain Sebastian who was killed at the Battle of Alcacer Kebir in 1557, has been turned into a local "saint". Mr. Lees Milne recounts the story that "as late as 1808 the prophecy that he (Sebastian) was about to be wafted up the Tagus by miraculous fogs in a divinely illuminated ship was even made into a political programme!"

All freethinkers should read the brilliant new novel by Hugh Sykes Davies, *The Papers Of Andrew Melmoth* (Methuen, 16s.). The book is superbly well written and has all the grip of a thriller. It is a cry for humanity and a renunciation of atomic warfare, and it is packed with challenge. One particularly telling philosophical reflection deserves quotation here.

The novelist recalls the biblical tale about the Philistines seizing the Ark and placing it in the temple of Dragon, whereupon "the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction; and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts". Mr. Sykes Davies comments: "It is curious to note the satisfaction with which the author attributed to Jehovah the practice of what is now called bacteriological warfare—something in which even the human race has not yet indulged."

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Conversions and Deathbeds

By Dr. J. V. DUHIG

AS AN APOSTATE from the Roman Catholic Church, I am naturally interested in the reverse process. Why I ask do people like John Henry Newman, Alfred Noyes, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Clare Booth Luce and, above all Heywood Broun, the distinguished American writer—all people above average intelligence—forsake reason for faith, which I define as an effort of the will in defiance of reason to believe something for the truth of which there is no evidence, since, if there were evidence, there would be no need for faith? How is it that such a sterling fellow, though towards the end a very heavy drinker, as Broun, a radical, labour leader and fighter for Trade Unionism, especially amongst his fellow journalists, could possibly believe the appalling drivel of the priestly folk-lore? Newman's case is easy; he was born a mystic and thus could persuade himself of anything by just getting in the requisite mood: he believed in the Salvation racket and in the intensely selfish style of the mystics he chose the routine he thought best suited to that end. And I think Newman the prince of religious liars; one need only read his mellifluous *Apologia* to realise that.

But for the others the only reason can be a loss of nerve; they fear the future and especially death and the possibilities of a post-mortem life of misery. Theirs is not a reasoned faith but the craven emotion of unreasoning panic in the face of inevitable fate with which, feeling defeated, they feel compelled to compound. And thus we get such freaks as Halliday Sutherland, whom I met out here in Australia but who was so committed to the delightful entertainment he had that he could not possibly remember me, and Arnold Lunn, the most fatuous child I ever read. The sole interest of these wretched people to me is the terrible failure of good natural intelligence in some to pierce the Catholic fraud. And the most startling thing is the success as a converter of Bishop Fulton Sheen. This fellow, something of a clown, came out here some years ago and one Sunday night gave a broadcast at which I believe he is a bit of a dab. But it was such a tactless mess that he cleared out home in a hurry. I heard another recorded broadcast of his and, making allowance for my atheism and prior hostility, I am sure I am being truthful when I say his thin, piddling jokes and his lack of any intellectual force just staggered listeners in view of his power as a converter. His feeble mind can be judged by the following. Asked about Atheism, he said, "The fact that there are anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco leagues indicate that there must be such things as alcohol and tobacco. Similarly Atheism must presuppose such a person as God". Now this fool must believe in this rubbish as his prestige is staked on his replies to inquirers, and he must evidently have thought that reply fully adequate. But any intelligent child knows the difference between the prefixes "A" "an" not, and "Anti" against. It seems strange that a great converter should base his power on crass ignorance of something known to an educated child. But, as I say, converters are dealing with panic-stricken people who will swallow anything for mental repose, especially if it is to be taken on the billowing bosom of Holy Mother Church.

But Fulton Sheen's ignorance is not so startling when we consider the ignorance, deplorable in persons set in authority, of the Catholic priest, which remains with him right up through the hierarchical rungs of the ghostly ladder to the Pope. What did Pope Pius X know? What does John XXIII know of life and the modern world of

Science? Practically nothing. Up to the time I left the Roman Catholic Church, I had never met an archbishop, bishop, priest, Jesuit, Dominican, secular or whatever, for whom I could possibly have any intellectual respect or whom I regarded as my equal, still less my superior, intellectually. They fulfilled to the letter the old adage about the Trinity of ignorance, the Bishop, the Judge and the General.

The sole power the priest possesses, is the reputation of being able to remit sin and thus confer a nice sense of mental comfort on crooks and spielers and income tax evaders. This is fine for the panic-stricken old reprobates and debauchees approaching the age when they get a nasty whiff of the brimstone through their remorseful and whisky-sodden nostrils.

The best example of this is a former fellow student of mine at the Roman Catholic University College at Sydney. As a student he was a very heavy drinker, he spent at least one in four weekends in a brothel and he had the dirtiest mind of any man I ever met. Now he is pillar of the Church, is *the* Roman Catholic doctor in his town and goes to Mass every morning. On a visit to his town I was a subject of Operation Conversion at his hands, but I said, "Joe, old son, please don't work off your remorse on me". He has not spoken to me since. Since I left the Church I have been subjected to a barrage of conversion tactics so silly and so malignant that they sickened me and simply confirmed me in my apostasy. I had only one priest at me. I said to him, "Father when you can tell me the difference between you on a Sunday morning and a New Guinea jungle witch-doctor, come back and tell me and I'll listen to you". He hasn't been back.

Recently we have been told about the alleged deathbed conversions of Prof. Gilbert Murray, and M. Herriot in France. Both have been repudiated by the respective families. In both cases clerics burst in, uninvited by the great men concerned, when their minds were clouded and unconscious. In this regard let me present a translation of a beautiful bit from the July number of *La Nouvelle Revue Francaise*. I think it should be enough to put an end to the fraudulent claims of corpse-snatching clerics.

The material is in the form of an open letter in the May number of *Defense de l'Homme* to Francois Mauriac, a prominent Catholic, a noted French novelist and a Nobel Prize winner, concerning the late Roger Martin du Gard, also a noted Nobel Prize winning author who in my opinion is superior to Mauriac as a writer. Martin du Gard's stuff is serenely clear and deeply human and sympathetic in the French sense; that of Mauriac is tortured, horribly obsessed with the primacy of evil and the inevitability of damnation; it is, in effect, intensely Catholic though, of course, very ably presented. Martin du Gard was a lifelong Rationalist and Mauriac wrote about him in the well-known weekly *L'Express* and referred to his death. This is the reply of Marius Paulin Nicolas.

In the *Express* you regretted that Roger Martin du Gard, who was an agnostic, as we all know, from one end of his life to the other, thought it necessary to repudiate in advance any change of attitude which might possibly occur in himself—which however was not the case—at the moment of his death.

From these remarks of yours it unequivocally follows and, on top of that, the relevant statement quite clearly implies if such a reversal "in extremis" were to occur, you would have regarded it as perfectly valid and of a kind to convince us that Roger Martin du Gard, suddenly undeceived, had, quite

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

We are delighted to introduce readers to "His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh (via the *Daily Mail*) who is a Yogi, and whose mission is—with rare originality—"to bring peace and happiness to the world". We fervently hope he will succeed. In the meantime, it is most interesting to learn that he already has a devoted disciple in an American lady; and of course he "does not concern himself with money matters".

★

Yogi Mahesh has already founded "the Spiritual Regeneration Movement" in Britain, and as he teaches "meditation" his followers have given him "a long strand of beads hanging from his neck to his navel". His principal object appears to be giving them "a word or a syllable to which their vibrations respond". They then lose their "tension", and therefore "there is so much less tension in the world". Needless to add, he comes from "the Valley of Saints", and wants "volunteers to give up their careers and homes", and follow him to a life of "meditation" in "caves high in the Himalayas". If we did not believe everything in the papers we would not have believed that such optimistic Yogis still exist.

★

Good old Joanna Southcott still regularly turns up in advertisements. The *Daily Express* had one the other day reminding us for the 3896th time that "Crime and Banditry, Distress and Perplexity" will continue to increase "until the Bishops open Joanna Southcott's Box". Strange how this Box continues to elude the Bishops! We have read of dozens being opened, some of them containing nothing but a rabbit's foot and erotic French books—but God forbid that we should accuse Joanna who was to have been the Virgin Mother of the next Messiah but failed in the attempt, of having actually read them!

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With the aid of Mr. Christopher Hollis's script, I.T.V. put on a "reconstruction" of "Dr." Paul's visit to Athens (about the year 50 AD) where he was "interviewed" by three solemn gentlemen about his activities in spreading the Gospel. Dr. Paul was once a ferocious and bloodthirsty Jew always ready to murder other Jews who were not quite as ferocious as he was; but at last, he was convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that he rose from the dead, and ascended to Heaven. So he became an enthusiastic Christian.

★

Mr. Hollis, as a good Roman Catholic, however, managed to work into Dr. Paul's account of his missionary activities quite a lot about the necessity of a Christian "organisation". It was not enough only to spread the Gospel. An "organisation" was just as necessary. Dr. Paul's estimate of his apostolic fellow workers, however, of Peter, Barnabus, and the rest, was pretty dismal. They were all "good fellows" but as to "intelligence"—the less said the better. What a bunch of idiots they actually were!

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Most Freethinkers are of course aware that there is no evidence whatever that such a place as "Nazareth" existed at the date given by Christians for Joseph and Mary and the birth of "our Lord". But this does not prevent the present little town being one of the famous "showpieces" in what is always called the "Holy Land"—though we haven't the least idea why Palestine should be still called "Holy". In any case, Nazareth is now almost wholly inhabited by Arabs who provide "guides" to the "holy" shrines—most of which (if not all) are more or less modern forgeries. And if pious visitors don't pay up, they may

well find the tyres of their cars slashed, or other even more unpleasant happenings.

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Visitors to Nazareth and other "shrines" are shown where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph worked, St. Mary's House where the "Conception" took place, and the door where the Holy Ghost came through. There is a "Nazareth Holy Souvenir Shop", and the more pious visitors can buy "Holy Water Bottled at Nazareth", or they can have a lunch of "eggs and chips" for £1. We are quite sure that the Arabs (who don't believe a word of the Christian story unless it is vouched for in the Koran) must be having the time of their lives—and the cash. And the Christian sheep swallow it all in the name of—Gospel truth!

★

Introduced by Robert Kee, two very Christian gentlemen and one equally Christian lady discussed the other Sunday for TV "romantic Christmas card pictures of Jesus", and we hope we are not doing them an injustice if we say that the BBC has rarely put on anything more ignorant and fatuous. So completely unintelligible were they that Mr. Kee had, time after time, to ask what they meant—a more polite way of asking what the heck they were talking about. They all got hopelessly confused with the "Incarnation"—and no wonder. What in 1960 is meant by the "Incarnation" in intelligible terms?

CONVERSIONS AND DEATHBEDS

(Concluded from page 363)

consciously, at that supreme moment, cast discredit on everything he had thought, said and written and practised up to that time.

But from your reasoning, there follows another consequence to which you appear not to have given attention. You argue as if you forgot that we, all of us, such as we are, necessarily do not know what thoughts, what purposes, what incentives the death agony could suggest to or impose on our intellects when a prey to delirium, which is always possible in our last moments. So much so that, nothing stops us from supposing that, you yourself, a believing and practising Catholic that you have been until the end of your life, in this ultimate condition you too might reject the faith of your whole life, reject the sacraments and have entrance to your door forbidden to all such ecclesiastics as might present themselves.

According to your reasoning we would be justified in believing that the true Mauriac had at last revealed himself in his true self; that you had been hoodwinked up to that time and that now you repudiated the errors of your whole life and that the light of Rationalism had at last most fortunately reached you before it was too late.

The Editor remarks, "That's a fair question, let us await the reply".

Martin du Gard had evidently left instructions to forestall the priestly body-snatchers. If Mauriac replies, I shall let my readers know.

AN EVENING AT UNITY THEATRE

On October 28th, Unity Theatre (1 Goldington Street, London, N.W.1) produced an interesting double-feature bill. In *L'après-midi de Mr. Shaw*, a conversation piece by Crome Mathers, we meet G.B.S. and acquaintances at tea in his garden at Ayot St. Lawrence talking, mostly about Mr. Shaw. One of his characters, Eliza Doolittle, comes to bother him (they always do, he says) and foretells that she will be made into a musical. He thinks the idea preposterous. He also conceives *Androcles and the Lion* and this "pantomime" (as he called it) forms the second feature. It is based, of course, on the well known fable of the Christian who removes a thorn from a lion's paw, the lion repaying the kindness when they meet again in the Roman arena.

The gentle Androcles is played by Denis Comey; the lion, sometimes fierce, sometimes playful, by Molly Sole, while Thomas Mercer plays Ferrovius, a militant Christian, who raises a cheer from the audience when he emerges unharmed from the arena after killing the gladiators. They are ably supported by the rest of the cast. This theatre was founded in 1936 in a converted chapel, most appropriately, since Shaw referring to the Christian Church "founded gaily with a pun" having become the church where you must not laugh said, "In the Church, to which I belong, the Theatre, the oftener you laugh the better".

P.F.

THE FREETHINKER

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square, Nottingham).—Every Friday, 1 p.m., Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY

INDOOR

Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Tuesday, November 15th, 7.15 p.m.: G. N. DEV (India), "The Problem of Religion in Modern India".

Leicester Secular Society (75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 13th, 6.30 p.m.: E. C. LAST, "The Roman Catholic Menace Today".

Marble Arch Branch NSS (The Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, Edgware Road), Sunday, November 13th, 7.15 p.m.: E. MILLS, "The Evolution of an Atheist".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Centre, Broad Street), Sunday, November 13th, 2.30 p.m.: E. W. S. MARTIN, "Slum Clearance".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1), Sunday, November 13th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Remembrance Sunday".

Notes and News

WHATEVER THEIR VIEWS of the literary merits of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, all who concern themselves with freedom of expression (and this includes Freethinkers almost by definition) will welcome the judgment of the Old Bailey jury of nine men and three women. These anonymous twelve deserve our thanks, and it is worth noting at this time that the record of English juries is relatively good in cases concerning liberty of the spoken word—better than that of magistrates' courts. In this instance the jury declared Penguin Books not guilty of publishing an obscene article, despite a not-too-favourable summing-up by the judge.

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MR. JUSTICE BYRNE is, we understand, a Roman Catholic. Perhaps that influenced him, though another Catholic, Mr. St. John Stervas, gave evidence for the defence and even suggested that priests would profit from reading the book. Mr. Justice Byrne thought this "a little presumptuous" and indeed, generally played down the expert evidence called by the defence (now allowed for the first time in English law). "This is a Christian country", he said, "and right throughout Christianity there has been the lawful marriage, even if it was only contracted before the registrar". "When you read the book", he asked the jury, "were you capable

of understanding what the author's view was on marriage?" (Mr. Gerald Gardiner QC, in his closing speech for the defence had said, "The book was by a pagan and not by a Christian".) The judge was particularly worried, it seemed, about the effect of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* on "the person who perhaps knows nothing at all about literature, and nothing at all about the author Lawrence, but who buys the book for 3s. 6d. or borrows it from a library and reads it during the lunch-time break at the factory, and then takes it home in the evening to finish". No doubt he would have had less qualms had the price been £2 2s. 0d.! At any rate, his attitude contrasted sadly with that of American Federal Court Judge Van Pelt Bryan, who said that, under American law, obscenity did not depend on the effect of the book on the "irresponsible", the immature, or the sensually minded", but on the "average man of normal sensual impulses", and ruled that the book was free from the smirch of obscenity. Fortunately, as *The Guardian* Legal Correspondent said (3/11/60) the English jurors "would appear to have adopted Judge Bryan's statement in arriving at their decision", rather than that of Mr. Justice Byrne.

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THIS YEAR at Hyde Park has been particularly good for the National Secular Society, and has seen the advent of a number of new young speakers. But we should like to take this opportunity of mentioning one of the older stalwarts, W. H. Wood. Mr. Wood has done splendid work for the Society at Speakers' Corner, having represented us there for over thirty years. He is still as bright and humorous as ever to listen to, and we hope to be able to listen to him for many years to come.

★

A READER IN Bognor Regis reports an example of preferential treatment for the Roman Catholic Church. Other Churches, he says, advertise their whereabouts on a large board at the railway station—and pay for doing so. The Roman Catholic Church does not, but "recently the local Council has erected direction signs in the street, such as 'To Railway Station' and 'To Public Library'. Among them is 'To Catholic Church'." There is apparently no sign "To Parish Church" or to any other place of worship. Our reader wrote to the Council protesting at the Catholic Church being advertised at the ratepayers' expense, and he was told that "the provision of signs is a matter which is continually under review and your comments will be borne in mind". We hope they will not only be borne in mind, but acted upon and we hope readers in other places will watch out for similar occurrences and make similar protests.

★

SIXTY THOUSAND "pilgrims" have been to the little hamlet of Trewint in Cornwall during the last decade, because John Wesley slept there in the cottage of Digory Isbell and his wife Elizabeth (*Western Evening Herald*, 18/10/60). The poor ignorant Isbells thought angels had visited them because Wesley and two of his disciples were able to pray "without a book". Like most places of pilgrimage, Trewint has its superstitions and it was believed after the Isbells died that the bells of heaven could be heard after one had run twelve times round their grave. Come to think of it, a dozen runs around a grave would make one pretty dizzy: one might well get a ringing noise in the head. Which would prove the story, no doubt?

NEXT WEEK
FREETHOUGHT IN AN AGE OF CONFORMITY
By F. A. RIDLEY

On Rationalising Miracles

By H. CUTNER

MR. MORRELL'S NEW defence of the Exodus as having "an historical basis" needs but a few words in reply. He appears more confused than ever. Some people were expelled from Egypt at about the time of the alleged Exodus of the "Jews" (who were, he now admits, not Jews) and who were called Hyksos or Shepherd Kings. Even if they were not Shepherd Kings, they were at least "nomads". The Jews (or the Israelites or the Hebrews) were also "nomads" — but "this no more makes the Hebrews Israelites) into Hyksos any more than it makes the Hyksos into Hebrews"—a piece of marvellous logic.

But when exactly were the "nomads" nomading? The Hyksos were in Egypt about 400 years — do I understand that it was *then* they were "nomading"? As for the "Jews" (or Israelites or Hebrews) they are also supposed to have been in Egypt about 400 years as *slaves*. Were they "nomads" during that time? After leaving Egypt, the "Jews" (or Hebrews or Israelites) became intensely warlike, we are told, under Joshua — were they "nomads" *then*? This nomad business is just sheer invention and has nothing to do with the question. As Mr Morrell admits that the Hyksos were not "Jews" (or Hebrews or Israelites) what became of them after being expelled?

The only "Exodus" which has, so to speak, been universally discussed, is the Biblical one; and I found it very difficult to get a date for it. Dr. Ploetz in his *Epitome of History* gives the date of the Hyksos expulsion as 1800 B.C. and the Biblical Exodus as 1320 B.C.; but he admits that "English scholars put the Exodus at 1652 or 1491". You pays your money and you takes your choice.

One of the many "Histories" about the Jews is that by a nineteenth-century Dutch scholar, Dr. J. Knappert, entitled, *The Religion of Israel*, and on the Exodus he says: -

This story, which was not written until more than five hundred years after the Exodus itself, can lay no claim to be considered historical

I am sure that this pronouncement by a first-class scholar will go quite unheeded by Mr. Morrell—but I cannot help wondering why it is that so many young — and in some cases old — Freethinkers are so anxious to find "some historical basis" for one or more of the Bible myths? Must we save something out of the Biblical debris left by Freethinkers of a more robust kind? Before me is a pamphlet sent by a reader, a remarkable one by the Rev. Professor C. J. Mullo Weir who has in addition, a string of degrees to his name. It is the Annual of Leeds University Oriental Society (1959) and it should be read by all Freethinkers. He calls it "Some Thoughts on Old Testament Miracles", and the way these "thoughts" demolish the Myths (or could demolish them) provides us with a delightful way of believing and not believing at the same time.

As his "common-sense" tends to reject "miracles", Dr. Weir takes a few typical ones, and shows how easily they can be "rationalised". At the outset, however, he tells us that "the English word 'miracle' is an ambiguous one". Scholars who use the word are "vague" and "the Old Testament conception of miracles is not the same as ours" — which may or may not be true. It appears that E. Jacob in his *Theology of the Old Testament* says, "For the Old Testament the essential mark of a miracle does not lie in its 'miraculous' character, but in the power of revelation it contains" — an exposition of a miracle which, to me at least, wants another exposition; I haven't the least idea what this one means.

Dr. Weir feels that some of the Old Testament miracles and stories "have caused mental distress to modern readers"; but in my own experience I should say that "modern readers" could not care less. I suspect it is Dr. Weir who has had some mental distress at the "infidelity" around him caused by utter disbelief in miracles — whatever their "explanation".

Dr. Weir himself, as far as I can judge, swallows everything in the Old Testament literally; but he does provide us with "explanations" which he says may account for what looks to us as a miracle. And he appears quite surprised to find that "the wonders recorded in the Old Testament seem, on its own showing, to have surprisingly little effect on those who witnessed them, or were directly influenced by them". He is astounded that "Egyptian annals do not mention either Moses or the Plagues . . . The Israelites themselves seem to have been almost entirely unresponsive". He adds, the "majority of the wonders . . . tend to cluster, or to be invented, round the names of a few celebrated holy men", and some of the stories "are closely parallel to the folktales of widely scattered peoples". Yet "none of them singly, nor all of them collectively, can disprove any of the Old Testament wonder stories" — a statement which leaves me breathless! How in the name of Heaven can a wonder story, written as a *true* one, "disprove" itself?

The story of Elijah's contest with the prophets "is probably a phantasy based on wishful thinking". The account of Elijah ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire "may have been derived from the metaphorical phrase that he was the chariot and horseman of Israel". The story of the Deluge "seems to be based upon some purely local flood". The story of Lot's wife "could have been invented to explain a grotesquely shaped pillar of rock salt near the Dead Sea". Behind the story of the fall of Jericho could be "ordinary earthquakes", for "there seems to be no need to postulate an abrupt intervention by God to precipitate events just when they were wanted". The "plagues of Egypt and the passages of the Red Sea might also have a natural explanation". Volcanic disturbances might have caused "the waters of the Nile to be reddened", or "the Red Sea could have receded through a tidal wave"; but "the east wind mentioned by the Old Testament might have done equally well". The death of the firstborn in Egypt could be a "later embellishment" of the story.

Though the story of the Exodus is quite true, "it seems certain that only a tiny proportion of the ancestors of the nation ever can have been in Egypt". How neatly this disposes of the "nation" leaving Egypt in one night — nearly three millions of them according to God's Holy Word.

Moses striking a rock to get water was no miracle for "water has been known in modern times to flow unexpectedly from a rock"; volcanic phenomena or thunder and lightning "might explain some of the phenomena at Sinai"; the pillar of cloud and fire "might be a garbled reminiscence of two associated phenomena"; the defeat of the Amalekites "when Moses held his rod aloft at Jehovah-nissi recalls to mind the well-established fact that men fight better when they see their banner uplifted".

In this easy way, Dr. Weir "rationalises" story after story in the Old Testament. Miracles are made to disappear, and everything in God's garden is lovely. It can be seen how every incident in the Exodus can be accounted for, and its "historical basis" soundly established. After all,

we can in the same easy fashion save the story of Aladdin and his wonderful Lamp — as I think I have shown often in this journal. There is nothing marvellous in the son of a laundry woman marrying a princess. The Wonderful Lamp may have been a valuable "antique", studied with precious stones, the sale of which provided the money for the fabulous meals and other things given by Aladdin to so many people. A little ingenuity, and anybody can outdo Dr. Weir in this kind of thing.

But did he believe in his own "explanations"? Not a bit of it. He contends that "the whole story of Israel is itself a miracle" — by which he means that it all actually took place exactly as narrated. He believes every word of it. That is, he believes it is "God's revelation", and that should settle the matter. He finishes with.

Whether the wonders ever occurred, we shall probably never know on this side of the grave. Those, however, who like, for whatever reasons, sentimental or other, to believe in them without asking for other proof than their inclusion in the Sacred Writings, may continue with a good conscience to believe in them, with or without reserve, in the assurance that it will probably never be possible for anyone in this life to disprove even one of them.

We Freethinkers thus have never disproved a single Old Testament miracle — and I am sure Dr. Weir would include the New Testament miracles as well.

What a blessing must be such unbounded faith in God Almighty, and his Sacred Writings!

Far From The Madding Crowd —November

By RUSTICUS

I would not enter on my list of friends,
(Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility) the man

Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.—*Cowper.*

COWPER WOULD CERTAINLY have entered the name of Jude Fawley on his list of friends: some of you may recall the child Jude carefully avoiding stepping upon worms. Hardy loathed cruelty in all its many forms, and a recent reading of his poem on fox hunting has caused me to recall Wilde's perfect summing up of the fox hunting fraternity—"the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable".

Some time ago the editor of *The Humanist* got into hot water for having a go at stag hunting. With our editor's permission I propose to have a go at all forms of hunting. The fox hunting season is now upon us, and if my brief investigation of hunting in general causes only one of my readers—if any—to join the League Against Cruel Sports, my efforts will not have been wasted.

The fox hunting fraternity—the unspeakable—have now emerged from their lairs, having spent the last few weeks sharpening their teeth and talons. What a shower they are! Colonel Bulling-Bloodstock, for instance, a well-known local devotee of John Peel. Nothing would give the Colonel—a purple-nosed, red-faced, bull-necked barbarian—more pleasure than to lead a cavalry charge against the annual general meeting of the local branch of the Agricultural Labourer's Union. (I grudgingly admit that the Colonel looks rather a dashing figure, mounted upon his magnificent bay mare.) I can clearly visualise him, sabre held aloft, yelling obscenities, giving the peasantry a dam' good lesson.

A glance at the "official" vocabulary of these barbarians is instructive:

Speaking. A dog—or hound—never barks. It "speaks".

Babbler. A hound which barks for nothing, when it cannot smell its quarry.

Blood. A pack of hounds "out of blood" when it hasn't killed anything for a long time. The pack is "in blood" when it has killed many times in succession.

Broken Up. When the hounds have caught a fox, torn it to pieces and eaten it.

Music. The furious barking of the hounds when they are close behind their quarry.

Some of these "County" types look well enough astride a handsome hunter. However, I have often been quietly amused by the appearance of a lifelong devotee of hunting on the rare occasions when he descends to *terra firma*. Inarticulate and bow legged, these gentry remind me of nothing so much as an antediluvian animal which has just crawled out of the primeval slime for the first time, and is in some doubt as to whether it can stand up. As for the female of the species, many provoke far from heavenly visions. And some of the words these ladies use when in hot pursuit of Reynard are pure Saxon.

While leaning over a field gate in a Somerset lane some time ago, my somewhat large ears were suddenly assailed by the sound of a human voice raised in anger. Dreadful four-letter words came hurtling along the hedgeside, and soon a red-faced hunting lady in full regalia hove into sight. On spotting me her mount took fright and nearly deposited its fair rider on the grass, at a point much frequented by cows. Having, with some difficulty, recovered her equilibrium, the lady addressed me.

"What the ——— d'ya mean, fright'nin' the mare like that?"

Raising my ancient pork-pie with a flourish—and frightening the horse a second time—I informed the irate lady that I had been watching a family of long-tailed-tits exploring the hedge.

"Long-tailed-wot?"

"Tits. *Ægithalos caudatus roseus.*"

"Tits my backside! Where the ———' hell am I, anyway?"
(Is that a Saxon word?) "I ain't seen a hoss or hound this last hour."

I informed my new-found friend that I had seen the main body of the hunt proceeding in a westerly direction, over an hour earlier. I added, with some satisfaction, that I had also seen Reynard pursuing his leisurely way in an easterly direction, about the same time. This piece of news provoked a stream of language of such brilliance and originality that I was forced to a reluctant admiration. Casting doubts on the legitimacy of the entire hunt, and finally alluding to her Saviour, the lady savagely ordered me to open the five-bar gate. Recalling the old jingle—

God bless the Squire and his relations
And keep us in our proper stations,

I complied with the lady's peremptory order. Acknowledging my gallant action with a curt nod, she charged through the open gate and cantered off down the lane, loudly cursing everything in sight, from the threatening rain-clouds overhead to the mud under her horse's feet—sorry—hoofs.

It is a safe bet that not one per cent of the population is aware of what goes on in this Christian country under the general heading of "field sports". I propose to return to the subject next month.

CORRESPONDENCE

AMIDST THE CROWD

Reactionary. Uncouth. Superstitious. Ignorant. Rustic. Bumpkin. Boor. Peasant!

So Eva Ebury lines up with the squire and parson in her supercilious regard of village manual workers. Madam Ebury's disdainful and haughty attitude to the rural worker is typical of city dwellers. These superior educated (!) people forget that the rural worker feeds and clothes them. And if some—or many—native country dwellers have not had Eva's educational and social advantages, is it not unreasonable and arrogant to accuse them of ignorance etc.? One might as well accuse my fair critic of being a woman.

As for Nature, red in tooth and claw—to coin a phrase—one accepts the fact, or attempts to, in the manner in which Hudson accepted it. If Eva Ebury imagines that this writer is a senti-

mental and gushing admirer of Mother Nature with straw in his hair, she is about as far from the truth as is the Pope from joining the NSS.

In due course—if readers can stand it—I propose to deal with all aspects of village life, religious, political and social, including the place of the village worker in the general set-up.

I trust I have not been unkind to a fellow freethinker above. If so, I can only say, in extenuation, that nothing raises my ire more than the supercilious attitude of the average town dweller towards native country dwellers. Would Eva Ebury prefer the workers portrayed in *The Angry Silence* or *I'm Alright, Jack* to the humble dwellers in our village? Both films gave what I am convinced was an impartial picture of factory workers; the village worker is planes above his opposite number in the city when it comes to loyalty and hard underpaid work. In view of Eva Ebury's attitude to the "peasantry", perhaps she would find the spiritual atmosphere of the Primrose League preferable to that of the NSS.

THE AZTECS

Mr. Ridley has made another gentlemanly attack upon the work of Prescott, and favours the account of the Aztec civilisation given by the late Professor Vaillant. "Most of history is bunk", as the late Henry Ford said, but I much prefer the history of the conquest of Mexico by Prescott than by Vaillant.

Prescott, in writing his work, had permission for making research in the archives of Madrid. He may have been prejudiced, but so was Vaillant; so are all historians. One certain travesty of truth made by both historians of the conquest, is the one made about the human sacrifices made by the Aztecs. This is as big a Christian lie as the lie told of the Druids of Wales. There is not a tittle of evidence that either of them made human sacrifices to the Sun God. There is no contemporary history of either, and the Aztecs' beautiful picture writing was burned by the Spanish.

PAUL VARNEY.

Christmas Cards

In response to many requests, we are offering two kinds of Christmas cards for sale, one of which is illustrated below. The size is 5" x 4" when folded. There is a simple greeting on the inside page. The price together with envelopes and post paid to your address is 5/- per dozen. A second design, "The Devil", price 6/- per dozen, will be illustrated next week.

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Have Faith!

THE MONARCHY

Mr. Snook and Mr. Ridley are to be congratulated on exposing the anachronism of royalty in a democratic set-up such as we have. Your northern scribe should ponder the words of Tom Paine: "To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession, and as the first is a degradation or lessening of ourselves, so the second is an insult and imposition on posterity . . . One of the strongest natural proofs of the folly of hereditary right in Kings is that nature disapproves it; otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ass for a lion".

J. S. REYNOLDS.

LORD HAILSHAM

Lord Hailsham has recently delivered himself of a speech in which he inferred that the present murderous state of the world, the crassness of political leaders, and the vapidness of contemporary entertainment, were all due to the lack of religion in the present age. What about the Inquisition, the Borgia Popes, the tawdry saints' day processions, all being due to the religion of other ages?

Freethinkers must admit that religion has no monopoly of stupidity, cruelty and vapidness, but freethinkers would point out that religion certainly does not cure these evils.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

A REMINDER

May I remind Mr. William Kent of the ancient paradox that—whereas religious nonsense makes sense because it postulates a reason; scientific sense makes nonsense because it does not postulate a reason. Leslie Weatherhead and Bertrand Russell are confined within the same incomprehensible prison, but they look at it with different eyes. Faithful Leslie is prepared to offer hypotheses about it, faithless Bertie is not. (DR.) RICHARD HOPE.

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