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FIRST PRIZE TO FANATICISM

(—HUMANITY ALSO RAN)

Last week the world's press echoed with revulsion and shock at the atrocious murder of Israeli sportsmen at Munich.—“Another Arab gold medal for cowardice” was how the *Evening Standard's* cartoonist, Jak, aptly viewed this act of warped vindictiveness. There is indeed a place here for indignation, and for mourning, but also, and perhaps more important, a need in such situations of great provocation and trial, for attempting to return to a stand for reasoned, critical appraisal, for objectivity and justice. The killings at Munich were indeed loathsome, but before we are tempted to deduce from them that all Arabs must therefore be bestial and subhuman, we would do well to remember that fanaticism has a nauseating, and very catholic history. The massacre at Munich, for example, differs little, except in terms of venue and technique, from those carried out by Jewish terrorist gangs during the last days of the Palestine mandate. It has its parallels in the history of almost every modern nation.

Religious overtones

Fanaticism, so often made more terrible when it includes religious overtones, as in the Middle East and Ireland, seems to have the lion's share of publicity in this age of mass communications. Reason, compassion and mercy rarely merit banner headlines; so often they are dismissed as weakness, expediency or compromise.

In the case of a previous massacre, at Lydda airport, the Israelis set a splendid example to the world by refraining from a judicial lynching of the survivor of the suicide squad which perpetrated those killings. Last weekend, however, Israeli planes carried out reprisal raids in Syria and Lebanon; from first reports casualties seem, ironically, to be largely women and children. Deplorable as this is, the fact remains that Israel's neighbours, however much they may dislike Zionism, will have to stop harbouring gangs of fanatics whose philosophy seems to consist of a mixture of the worst features of the crusaders, the Nazis, and the Japanese *kamikaze* warriors.

Enough for everyone

The present emotionalism should not blind us to the realities of the Middle East conflict. The Jews have a right to live in peace; equally, the Arabs, and particularly the Arabs of what was Palestine, have a right to justice and equitable treatment. As long as Moslem bigots preach holy war and driving the Jews into the sea; as long as Zionists impose *Pax Hebraica* by force of arms there will be neither lasting peace nor progress in a land that is surely large enough for all of them.

MISCELLANEOUS HYPOCRISY

“What,” asked the *Guardian's* “Miscellany” columnist on 6 September, “. . . has happened to the apolitical Ethical Society, which owns Conway Hall?” (She means South Place Ethical Society.)

—The National Front has been holding meetings both public and private there; meetings which have clearly furthered the

success of Front ploys like the march of the Smithfield meat porters in protest against the incoming Ugandan Asians. Other, less eminent halls have declined to shelter the Front . . .

It is, of course, not so long ago that “other less eminent halls” declined to shelter freethinkers, socialists and communists. Perhaps Conway Hall's “eminence” has something to do with the fact that, besides the National Front, it allows its premises to be hired for a rich profusion of Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist and anarchist meetings, as well as for more conventional conferences, examinations, dances, recording sessions, blood donations and, of course, the famous South Place concerts. With the exception of the South Place concerts, none of these forms part of the official activities of South Place Ethical Society, which uses the hall as its headquarters and for its own meetings as well.

“As far as letting rooms is concerned,” said Peter Cadogan, the General Secretary of South Place Ethical Society, “we make no discrimination against anyone. We believe in the freedom of speech and association and we practice what we preach.” He suggested that “Miscellany” had regurgitated her ‘facts’ from a copy of an anonymous letter issued from Liverpool a while back.

If South Place were to ban left-wing organisations from Conway Hall there would be an enormous, and quite justifiable, outcry in the liberal, leftist and humanist press. What, then, we may well ask, has happened to the *Guardian's* former liberalism that “Miscellany” should imply that an apolitical society should exercise censorship against the right, not to mention providing the National Front with political capital by so doing?

Since these columns are in no wise “apolitical” we may freely add that we utterly loathe the National Front and all its works, but we are of the opinion that, as long as it keeps the peace and pays its bills, its followers should have the same freedom of assembly as Communists, Catholics, Ulster Unionists, flat-earthers—and even *Daily Express* and *Guardian* journalists!

THE FREETHINKER

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. **Glasgow:** Clyde Books, 292 High Street. **Manchester:** Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. **Brighton:** Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL. Telephone: 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the N.S.S.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

Humanist Holidays, 29 September—1 October, "Brighton for Freethinkers" (leader: William McIlroy). Details and booking forms from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 24 September, 3 p.m.: Annual Reunion (guest of honour: Richard Clements). All members and friends welcome.

EXHIBITION: "Thomas Paine and the Rights of Man," Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Until 10 October. (Monday-Friday, 4-9 p.m.; Saturdays, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.) Admission free.

EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meetings every Sunday, 3 p.m.

London Young Humanists, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8. Sunday, 17 September, 7.30 p.m.: discussion on "Religious Humanism" led by Peter Sutherland.

South Place Ethical Society. Sunday, 17 September, 10 a.m.: outing to Guildford and Wisley (£1.50 a head). Details from the Socials Secretary, S.P.E.S., Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL (telephone: 01-242 8032).

Welwyn Garden City Humanist Group, Backhouse Room, Hand-side Lane. Thursday, 21 September, 8 p.m.: Annual General Meeting, followed by wine-and-cheese party and bring-and-buy sale.

NEWS

THOMAS PAINE EXHIBITION

Readers will be pleased to hear that the Thomas Paine Society's exhibition on "Thomas Paine and the *Rights of Man*" opened last Saturday and will run for a month. The exhibition, at the Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1, will be open from 4 to 9 p.m. Mondays to Fridays, and 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Admission is free.

WITHOUT COMMENT

"To all intents and purposes, the present [I.R.A.] campaign is under the personal dictatorship of [Seán] Mac Stiofain who, I am convinced, has become a bigoted murderer, quite willing to permit sectarian killings as a means of keeping in action and in power.

"... Like most converts, he is certainly a staunch Catholic. At one time we were using contraceptive condoms to make acid bombs in Dublin. Such articles are, of course, obtainable only in the Black North. But Mac Stiofain always resolutely refused to bring back a consignment down with him after a trip. He would rather have been caught with a Thompson in his car boot than with a parcel of French letters in his pocket."

—Maria McGuire in *The Observer*, 3 September 1972.

4004 B.C. AND ALL THAT

Archbishop Ussher (who calculated that God created the world in 4004 B.C.) and "Soapy Sam" (Bishop Wilberforce) can relax in their boxes! The world is not a few thousand million years old, after all—according to the August number of the *Evangelical Times*, which informs us that an American, Professor Robert L. Whitelaw, writing in the *Creation Research Quarterly*, has announced that "radiocarbon [dating] supports a date of creation at approximately 5000 B.C."

That is not all! Radiocarbon "supports the contemporaneous appearance of all living forms of matter at creation. Man and modern animals, along with extinct flora and fauna, all appear equally ancient and with equal suddenness."

Of course, Christians have tried this sort of thing before. Back in the 1860s Lord Kelvin calculated that if the sun was dissipating an initial quantity of heat it could only be a few thousand years old, too. No time for evolution to occur, therefore! However, the wicked T. H. Huxley duly replied that whilst Lord Kelvin may have been an excellent mathematician, this did not make his initial pre-suppositions correct. Huxley's misgivings have subsequently been justified by the discovery that the sun's heat is provided by a continuous nuclear reaction. In the present case we are not even certain that the fundamentalists have got their sums right.

Anyway because of the short half-life of carbon-14, nobody pretends that radiocarbon dating is reliable for substances more than about 8,000 years old, and even with refinements, the method's limit is reached at about 45,000 years. However, the neo-Ussherites still have to explain away other methods of radioactivity dating, such as the uranium/thorium (zircon), rubidium/strontium and potassium/argon methods, which have, for example, suggested an age for basement rocks from the Congo region at around 3,490 million years.

S AND NOTES

ORIENTAL JEWS AND DRUZES

"There is," wrote Marie Syrkin in 1952 (*The Jewish Frontier*), "an unqualified delight with which the entire [Israeli] population views and cherishes the numerous children of the Oriental communities . . ."

—This is the best evidence of the country's faith in One People that will emerge in the course of one generation . . . One people and a fruitful Jewry enriched by the traditions of the East and the dynamic energy of the West.

Today, twenty years later, "that effusion lies less happily on the Israeli tongue," writes Alfred Friendly in the Minority Rights Group's report on *Israel's Oriental Immigrants and Druzes*.^{*} "In place of the dream of One People is the fear of Two Israels. The gap between Israelis of European-American origin and those of Oriental descent is the nation's most dangerous and pressing internal problem in the immediate future."

The report examines the income and housing situation of the Oriental Jewish immigrants (about half of Israel's population), and also considers their political, educational and social status. Mr. Friendly, the former managing editor of the *Washington Post* who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Six Day War, concludes that their disadvantages are considerable: "In Israel, as in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the effects of economic and educational disadvantages become the causes of further disparity."

The Druzes, numbering 33,000 within Israel's pre-1967 borders, are a small religious minority, akin to the Arabs, who arose as "schism of a schism." They tend to find that they "cannot become undifferentiated members of the society nor are they able fully to participate in the Establishment." On the other hand, they are allowed freely to practise their religion, and, "relative to their past and to their Arab neighbours, are flourishing economically."

The author believes that the problem of the Oriental Jews, at least, will be solved, "because the disaster if it is not is all too clear." However, "if there is a flash-point for the Oriental Jews it is probably some way off—far enough off for it to be averted by really effective measures in the interim."

* Copies of *Israel's Oriental Immigrants and Druzes* may be obtained (price 45p plus 7p postage) from the Minority Rights Group, 36 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG.

THEATRE REVIEWS

Readers of our review section will be sorry to learn that David Tribe has had to give up his work as *The Freethinker's* theatre critic as he is leaving London—though whether for a *Clematis*- and *Wistaria*-covered thatched cottage in the country, or for a more exotic habitat, is not yet certain. His very considerable contributions to the free-thought movement, both as a president of the National Secular Society, and as a former editor of this paper, have already been acknowledged, but we would like to take this opportunity of thanking him for the numerous theatre reviews he has contributed in recent years, despite the very heavy demands on his time. He will be much missed by the London movement, though we hope that he will keep in touch from his desert island.

To replace David Tribe, *The Freethinker* has been most fortunate in obtaining the services of two very talented young people, whose names are already familiar in these columns.

Lindsey Harris, who reviewed *Jesus Christ Superstar* a few weeks ago, comes from Scotland, and trained at Dundee College of Art, though she is at present working in journalism in London. She has also worked backstage at the Old Vic and the Aldwych theatres in London, and assisted with the Lamp of Lothian summer festival of music and drama in Scotland. She has taken acting and directors' courses and is a member of several London and Edinburgh theatre clubs.

Our other drama critic will be Jim Herrick, who teaches history and English in Surrey. He has been interested in theatre ever since playing Sir Andrew Aguecheek at school. At Cambridge he moved from acting to directing, with productions such as *Major Barbara*, which toured Moscow and Leningrad. In Shropshire he produced Ionesco's *The Killer* and also a play of his own. He is interested in experimental theatre, but hopes that ideas, arguments and words "are not going to be completely submerged by mysticism, muttering and hysteria."

THE SAME, ONLY DIFFERENT

An English missionary, the Rev. H. Lansdell . . . has been arrested in Russia on a charge of circulating Nihilistic literature. He proved that he was only distributing Bibles. The Holy Czar, being head of the Russian Church, is about to have a revised version made expunging the passage stating that the early Christians had all things in common, and printing in extra large type the passage which says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; the powers that be are ordained of God."

—From *The Freethinker*, 17 September 1882.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

"At the General Congress of the International Association, after much quarrelling and disagreement, it was decided to dissolve the London General Council, and to transfer the headquarters of the Association to America. Karl Marx at once left the hall, threatening to resign; but afterwards said that, at the wish of his friends, he withdrew his threat. The English delegates present permitted it to be said publicly, and without contradiction, that the principal working men representatives in this country were sold to either 'Gladstone or Morley.' As for France, the Internationalists denounced everybody, refusing to admit the existence of any honest French politician out of their own ranks."

—The *National Reformer*, 15 September 1872.

FREETHINKER FUND

We are most grateful to those readers who have contributed so generously to the Freethinker Fund. Our thanks to: R. S. Anthony, 50p; W. Armstrong, £1; H. M. Atkins, 45p; J. W. Brown, £5.25; J. G. Burdon, 25p; S. Clowes, 38p; William Craigie, £1; W. V. Crees, £1; W. H. Dobson, 35p; H. Gaspardis, 25p; W. Gerrard, £3.40; Mrs. E. M. Graham, £1.45; R. J. Hale, 13p; J. R. Hutton, £1.45; I. S. Low, £1; H. Madoc-Jones, £1.75; Cyril Marcus, £1.05; J. A. McKechnie, £1; R. G. Morton, £25; J. Sykes, 45p; E. Wakefield, 50p; E. Williams, 35p; J. Williams, 14p; Carrie Wrench, 15p; P. A. L. Young, £1. Total for August: £49.25.

"Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it."

—Thomas Paine (1737-1809).

PRECAMBRIAN FOSSILS: AN EVOLUTIONARY ENIGMA

ROBERT MORRELL

In his book, *The Transformist Illusion* (1955), the late Douglas Dewar wrote of the Precambrian as not having produced a single undoubted fossil, and having reviewed the various claims in respect of fossils (in the light of what one or two of their geological critics wrote) concluded that the era was "unfossiliferous." The anonymous writer of another anti-evolutionary work (for which a sale of over 200,000 copies to date is claimed), *Evolution: Science Falsely So-Called*, writes of the absence of fossils in the Precambrian as being "one of the greatest problems of evolutionary geology." R. D. Porter in his *Evolution and the End of an Era* (1970) claims in a somewhat illogical manner that "Precambrian fossils never did exist and the evolution of life theory is a myth." In their book, *The Genesis Flood* (1961), J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris stress with quotes the absence of Precambrian fossils. The same claim appears in the pages of *Evolution versus the New World*, a widely distributed Jehovah's Witness publication. And so one could go on multiplying the quotations from the still innumerable anti-evolutionary publications which flood from fundamentalist presses throughout the Western world.

Abundance of fossils in Lower Cambrian

The claim, then, that there are no Precambrian fossils is well established in anti-evolutionary circles and can also be found in many of the older geological textbooks—although if you go too far back, say to D. T. Ansted's *Elementary Course of Geology, Mineralogy and Physical Geography* (1856), you will find no Cambrian at all, for the problems associated with the Ordovician, Silurian and Cambrian had not been sorted out—such as Lake and Rastall's *Text-Book of Geology* (1913), which refers to the evidence for Precambrian or Archaean fossils as not being conclusive. In contrast to the claimed lack of fossils in the Precambrian is the abundance of fossils in the Lower Cambrian, and it certainly would be rash to play this obvious geological fact down. From the literature quoted it seems well established that there is a major break in taxonomic continuity at the base of the Cambrian. However, is the problem as real as the quotations given suggest?

That there is a problem one cannot deny, and its implications for evolution are clear: at the point where the theory should get off the ground there is a major gap in its supporting evidence. But having pointed this out we also have to decide whether this gap really stems not so much from the absence of fossils as from the inadequacy of the techniques available in the immediate past to locate them. There certainly seems to be something in this for in the past few years recovery aids have become much more sophisticated and these coupled with electronic microscopes have demonstrated that the Precambrian is far from devoid of fossils.

In discussing the absence of fossils in the Precambrian Era certain important facts have been ignored by many anti-evolutionists and not a few geologists, and these principally concern the nature of certain rocks and minerals. The Precambrian in many parts of the world has limestones among its rocks, and this material is a sedimentary rock mainly of biological origin. Among the minerals in the Precambrian is graphite, a substance produced by contact

metamorphism of coal seams. Thus even if no fossils were ever discovered there is strong evidence for the existence of life in the Precambrian, life forms moreover which were soft bodied, as would be expected if evolution be a valid theory.

Precambrian plant remains

The earliest known Precambrian fossils are the remains of primitive plants and are found in cherts from Canada and other places. These remains display cellular differentiation and organic residues. In certain rocks from India there are tiny disc-like impressions thought to have been made by primitive brachiopods. Precambrian limestones in Montana and South Africa are built up of *stromatolites*, which are algal in nature.

A problematical fossil long considered by certain geologists as Precambrian, *Xenusion auerswaldiae*, but rejected by others on the grounds that the erratic boulder it was discovered in may not have come from a Precambrian deposit, and also that the creature was unlike "any known organism," has now been re-examined and attributed to Upper Precambrian of the Varangian period. Fossils similar to *Xenusion* have been found in Precambrian deposits in England, Australia and South-West Africa. From Africa has come *Rangea schneiderhoehni*, which differs from *Xenusion* only in respect to the nature of the axis. Australia has given us two species of *Rangea*, *Rangea longa* and *Rangea grandis*, while from the Precambrian of the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire we have *Charnia masoni*, named after its schoolboy discoverer and now on display in Leicester Museum. These fossils are considered as colonial coelenterates. Modern representatives of the coelenterates include *Hydra*, *Obelia* and *Metridium*.

The Ediacara discovery

By far and away the most interesting and important recent discovery of Precambrian fossils was made at Ediacara in South Australia. Due to a local environmental chance centuries ago modern geologists have discovered a magnificent range of soft-bodied marine creatures, and to date over thirty species have been described, but while it is not possible as yet to place them all in their respective phyla most have been attributed to at least two. The fossils and trace fossils are found on the lower surfaces of sandstone blocks which have been split by natural weathering. The sandstone is now partly altered to quartzite and is flaggy, a condition brought about by the existence of argillaceous laminae and thin lenses which in their original form represented areas of finer particles laid down in temporary quiet periods. On the surface of this sediment the remains of dead creatures settled while others left the marks of their passing in the form of tracks. The finer material was covered by sand waves and the sand, which had some of the qualities of foundry sand, formed moulds of the remains and casts of the surface, hence when erosion uncovered the sandstone the rock split along the laminae to reveal fossils on the underside of the blocks. The whole reveals just how much chance plays in the preservation of the remains of ancient forms of life.

A new chapter in the search for Precambrian fossils was opened with the recognition of the value of certain microfossils in oil exploration. For economic reasons oil companies tend to be secretive about much of their geological research. However, an increasing number of Precambrian microfossils have now been described and in their book *Bibliography and Index of Fossil Dinoflagellates and Acritarchs* (1964) C. Downie and W. A. S. Sarjeant give references to many Precambrian forms. The acritarchs (the word means "uncertain origin"), so Sarjeant points out in one of his papers, are "the *only* microfossils which afford a hope of use in stratigraphic sub-division of the Precambrian."* This statement highlights one of the major problems in geology, that of the division of the Precambrian. The development of radio-active dating techniques in recent years has resulted in some stratigraphic schemes being advanced for the era. However the conclusions drawn must be treated as tentative. If acritarchs and other

microfossils are discovered in sufficient numbers they could effect a revolution in our understanding of the divisions within the Precambrian which, in terms of geological time, an immense period. Some clues as to what might be possible are revealed in the use of late Precambrian acritarchs to establish stratigraphic correlation between Russian and Scottish sediments.

The claim, then, that there are no indisputable Precambrian fossils must be dismissed as wishful thinking based upon dated information. There has been a quiet revolution in our knowledge of life in the Precambrian since the book by Dewar, possibly the most comprehensive statement of the anti-evolutionist position to have appeared, was published. Then the claim was reasonable but now I seriously doubt if a single geologist would support it.

* "Xanthidia, Palinospheres and 'Hystrix'." *J. Quekett Micr. Club*, 1970, 31: p. 247.

THE HUMANISM OF RICHARD CONGREVE ERIC GLASGOW

If one wants to examine the religion of humanity, concerned for progress and the identity of the individual without any of the supernatural trappings, one cannot find it better set forth than in the story of Richard Congreve (1818-1899). He did not, of course, originate the philosophy of positivism: he took over from Auguste Comte, but in 1878 he did make his own peculiar contribution to that philosophy by explicitly rejecting the notions of Comte's successor, Pierre Laffitte.

(1862). These, especially the last three, emphasise Richard Congreve's passion for freedom and liberation during the crucial years of 1855-1862.

From Congreve's works it is possible to discern both the theory and the practice of his philosophy of politics, and to discover the meaning of the concept which, in 1876, he was to call his "human catholicism." Not until the large and diverse range in his books is considered does it become possible to appreciate that Congreve's humanism was neither a negative nor a barren theory: it rested upon a very definite and eclectic philosophy of life which, perhaps just because it repudiated traditional Christianity, has the greater message for the world of our own times. Richard Congreve cannot be passed over in any history of the secular philosophies of nineteenth-century England.

The story is the more remarkable because Richard Congreve received a very traditional sort of English education, under the great Thomas Arnold at Rugby, and at Wadham College, Oxford, where he did brilliantly in Classics. The real turning-point in his life came when he visited Paris soon after the Revolution of 1848. Radical change was then in the air and Congreve duly absorbed it; so much so that, thereafter, the ideas of Comte became his religion, one which he elaborated with meticulous dedication and resolution.

As a result, in 1855, he had to resign his fellowship and leave Oxford, moving to London to set up a positivist community there. He also studied medicine, with some success, and met Frederic Harrison and other positivist exponents. Most of these followed him when he broke with Laffitte in 1878, and he used the breach to permit himself, and his followers, still greater latitude in ceremonial and ritual. Although his cult never really caught on in England, he continued until his death to exercise what he regarded as a priestly function in relation to his "secular religion."

A passion for freedom

One would do serious injustice to Congreve's humanism by concentrating upon the operations of his own peculiar brand of positivism. He did produce books of more solid worth, for example, his edition of the *Politics of Aristotle* (1855, second edition, 1874) which has been described by the *Dictionary of National Biography* as "a thoughtful and scholarly performance"; or his sundry published lectures, on *The Roman Empire of the West* (1855), *Gibraltar* (1857), *India* (1857), and *Italy and the Western Powers*

TOUGH LUCK

To wrestle a dark and dismal night,
 To wake before the dawn,
 To sit and ponder gravely,
 What am I, and wherefore born?
 Sure, if I knew the answer
 As some folk say they do,
 I'd gladly change my ways of doubt
 For what they say is true.
 But always there recurs the thought,
 It niggles at my brain,
 That never yet has storm been stopped,
 Nor yet disease, nor pain;
 And innocents are slain,
 Again and yet again.

The Bible has the answer ?
 Sure, the Talmud has the same;
 In every global corner
 Many hasten to proclaim
 That He is in His heaven
 And our welfare's His first care . . .
 Forgive me, all ye faithful,
 When we call He's never there.

ALEX WINTER.

BOOKS

NOT FROM THE APES: Man's origins and evolution by Björn Kurtén. Gollancz, £1.75.

Dr. Kurtén is a vertebrate palaeontologist at the University of Helsinki and author of several specialist books, among them being his well-known *Pleistocene Mammals of Europe*. The present book is his first public excursion into the field of fossil men, in which he has some original ideas to unfold, in a pleasant, popular style.

No author can assume a sufficient background knowledge among the general reading public to enable many of them to appreciate advanced ideas on this subject without making his book practically self-contained, with a generous glossary and chronological tables. On the whole, Kurtén has succeeded remarkably in this limited space, though, to an absolute beginner, without some geological and anatomical background, it will prove fairly heavy, if worthwhile, going.

The book is in four main parts, respectively dealing with the geological and historical background, the earliest Hominids in their natural environments, the later Ice-Age men and a final view of present-day man and his future prospects, in a world no longer entirely natural, but greatly modified by himself.

The argument suggested in the title is that man was not, as has generally been supposed in the century since Darwin, descended from an ape-like ancestor which gave rise both to his stem and to that of the surviving great apes. On the contrary, even further back than we recognised, perhaps 20 million years ago, in the Oligocene, there were some recently-discovered unspecialised Primates with teeth much more like those of man than those of any monkey or ape, extinct or living, so that it seems rather that the latter represent branches from the already-differentiated human stem which have acquired their monkey-like and ape-like specialisations since that separation.

That this is no crazy theory of a specialist from another field of palaeontology venturing far beyond the area of his own expertise is guaranteed by the well-known names of men whose help in reading this text in typescript is acknowledged in the preface. It will, nevertheless, provoke plenty of argument in specialist circles, as do all sudden turn-about in scientific thinking, however well founded.

For this reason, the present book will be of use to specialist students, even if much of it should be already familiar to them. For this reason, too, one must deplore the absence here of either index or bibliography, which might have led the more involved reader back to the original sources, many of which are quite recent and so not yet well known.

The general reader will be fortunate in finding a review of the subject, if brief, yet not shallow, and right up with the front runners in its conclusions—a thing which cannot often be said of any summary of scientific thought published on a popular level.

I. W. CORNWALL

FREETHINKER

THE VATICAN BILLIONS: 2,000 years of wealth accumulation by Avro Manhattan. Marshall, Morgan and Scott (Paravision Books), £3.

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the greatest financial empire of all time. Avro Manhattan's latest book is a survey showing how it came to be so. Ranging from that eighth-century forgery, the Donation of Constantine to the twentieth-century ecclesiastical take-overs of real estate in the U.S.A., it presents an indictment, of a body founded allegedly to "seek first the Kingdom of God," on a charge of avarice so colossal, so continuous, so corrupt as to be incredible were the evidence less fully documented, with the names, the dates, and the figures.

Readers familiar with any of Avro Manhattan's earlier works will know better than to expect a fair assessment based on analysis of all sides of the argument. That is neither Mr. Manhattan's style nor his brief. He does not presume to be judge or jury; he is the prosecuting counsel.

As such, he presents an admittedly biased picture. One effect of this is to make the Church's accumulation of wealth appear too far-seeing, too single-minded, too skilful almost infallible! Whilst there has certainly been a strong alliance between the forces of God and Mammon, many of the opportunities for financial enterprise have surely come about more by luck than judgment. One huge piece of luck being the historical privilege in most countries of tax exemption of religious bodies, this being almost infinitely more valuable now than when granted.

However, the bias of the book falls into place as long as the reader takes it as the case for the prosecution. And this is fair enough. After all, the Church has a formidable array of counsel for the defence—such advocates, for instance, as the Catholic Truth Society—which are likewise briefed to put only one side of the argument.

Avro Manhattan plays David to the Goliath of Rome—and with what deadly aim! This book—though it could hardly be expected to knock the old giant out—has at least goaded the *Catholic Herald* into a full-length review that has recourse to sarcastic abuse for want of contrary evidence.

The *Catholic Herald* reviewer, Gregory Lomax, complains that *The Vatican Billions* lacks objectivity—rather as if Casanova were to complain of a woman's infidelity—and continues with jibes about "little green men" (Mr. Manhattan having an interest also in astronomy and being a member of the British Interplanetary Society) and about the order of Brothers that manufactures jellies (one of the less significant commercial enterprises mentioned in the book).

Mr. Lomax finds parts of the book "offensive":

Lourdes is dismissed as an economic hoax inspired by local dignitaries on the off-chance of creating a tourist trap. Miraculously far-sighted you may think. But then, of course, not miraculous, for Mr. Manhattan rules miracles out of court.

However, the reviewer concludes with so illogical a denunciation of the book that it amounts almost to a recommendation:

REVIEWS

And yet for all its facility, for all its glibness and superficiality, it is a book which deserves to be treated seriously. And then, having treated it seriously, rejected.

How cleverly Mr. Lomax suits the syntax of that last sentence to its logic!

Yes, I do remember this is supposed to be a review of Avro Manhattan's book, not a review of the *Catholic Herald's* review of it—but as an item of cross-examination it must be regarded as admissible. (Besides, there may be some readers of *The Freethinker* who are not also regular readers of the Catholic press.)

However, let the book speak for itself. Here are three typical passages:

Since the ecclesiastical practice of commercialising miracles could be turned into a most gratifying source of money, it soon appeared that the more spectacular the miracle the more spectacular the profits to its promoters. Miracles thus became a kind of church investment yielding a steady, if uneven, flow of revenue . . .

In December 1964 the total value of all these shares was 5,500 billion lire, which put the capital invested by the Vatican, as early as 1964, in Italian stocks alone, at about 500 million dollars. By 1972 this had arisen to above 700 million. Yet the Vatican's investments in Italy represented, according to reliable Vatican sources, only between one-tenth and one-twelfth of the whole of its world investments . . .

Up to 1964, Spellman had built 130 new Catholic schools, thirty-seven churches and five big hospitals. He spent \$90 million a year on construction. In 1960, a survey of the financial magazine *Fortune* estimated that his Catholic charities were worth \$50 million a year, and his schools another \$22 million. Spellman used to bring the Pope \$1 million in Peter's pence annually. This was collected, usually in all New York churches, in January of each year. Again according to the authoritative *Fortune*, in 1960 the revenues and collections of Spellman's archdiocese totalled about \$150 million a year.

My summing-up, members of the jury, is a strong recommendation of this book, both as a handy reference volume for innumerable useful data (with an excellent appendix of sources but, alas, no alphabetical index) and as light holiday reading, combining the best qualities of spy and detective fiction, scholarly research, popular history, debunking biography, revelation of state secrets, law-court reports, and gossip-column scandal. Come to think of it, *The Vatican Billions* has some of the flavour of pornography, too: not only in the obscenity of such wealth co-existing with poverty and malnutrition, but also in the seemingly fantastic facts and figures themselves, which have the same mind-boggling effect as the absurd sexual exploits of "porn."

The almost poetic, and quite compulsive, itemisation of such vast sums makes one's head spin, as when contemplating billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, and the billions of light-years of space between. Here, perhaps, is the unifying factor in the author's apparently disparate interests: the only entity on earth that, throughout history, has actually acquired wealth of such an order as to merit the epithet "astronomical" is the Church of Rome.

In conclusion, Avro Manhattan quotes the telling comment of a Vatican official, who, asked to hazard a guess at the Church's wealth today, replied "Only God knows."

BARBARA SMOKER

THEATRE

MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL by T. S. Eliot.

Aldwych Theatre.

Before commenting on the Royal Shakespeare Company's new production of *Murder in the Cathedral*, I had better make clear my feelings about the play: I do not much care for it. As Eliot's views became, in his own words, more "classical in literature, royalist in politics, Anglo-Catholic in religion," and as he became increasingly obsessed with ritual and mystical moments of timelessness, I find his work becomes less interesting. In this play the picture of Thomas à Beckett, rejecting the temptations of worldly pleasures and temporal power, seems that of an arrogant man, even though such a reaction is forestalled by his subsequent rejection of the choice of martyrdom. And anyway, I have never really cared for the smell of incense, which wafted, literally, across the stalls.

Having said that I can only praise Terry Hands' production which held me gripped throughout. Richard Pasco gave dignity and simplicity, force and humility to the character of Thomas. But the triumph of the production lay in the staging of the chorus; choral verse can easily become monotonously rhythmic, but here it was vivid with contrasting pace and mood. These women became not merely commentators on the action, but by their continual presence were integrated into the action, so that we felt that the incidents related to a whole community.

The tempters/knights were well contrasted in the accomplished performances of Bernard Lloyd, Anthony Pedley, Tony Church and Brewster Mason. The shadows hovering on the back of the stage during the temptation sequence was a particularly effective touch—"the substance of our first act will be shadows." When they re-appeared to defend the murder, they became four darkly clad figures addressing a public meeting sinisterly through microphones: their arguments, especially that of the last knight, pointing out that Beckett, by demanding that the Cathedral door be unbarred, had chosen his own death, were most convincing. In fact, what were presumably intended as menacing caricatures appeared, to me, most plausible figures.

The music, by Ian Kellam, gave ecclesiastical atmosphere and the set opening with a sombre bare stage with one dark withered tree and later simply converting to the Cathedral interior accurately mirrored the text. Certainly a production of authority and integrity, which held me while it lasted; but once over, walking away over Waterloo Bridge, and observing life passing by, I could not help feeling that it is not man "who cannot bear too much reality" but T. S. Eliot determined to demonstrate the sainthood of Thomas à Beckett.

JIM HERRICK

LETTERS

Capitalism: Who or How?

Pat Sloan (letters, 12 August) believes that the U.S.S.R. and the People's Republic of China can in no way be described as "State Capitalist," as the bulk of the means of production is public property. This statement rather begs the question: what is done with the public property and who, or what, actually controls it.

In practice there certainly seems little difference between control by a State hierarchy and control by a large corporation hierarchy

in their methods and results, geared as they are to similar economics of production and growth.

In the international scene, the difference completely disappears, all states employing the same terms and ethics (or lack of) in promoting the expansion of trade, economic imperialism and military defence at the expense of their neighbours. Hence the designation, "State Capitalist," as that is just what it says; capitalism as practised by a state rather than by a company or individual.

The significance in the control of capital and resources, is not so much in whether it is Peter or Paul doing the controlling but *how* it is controlled and used—socially, ethically, and ecologically.

IAN CAMPBELL HARRIS.

Chance and Causality

It seems to me that we describe a happening as "chance" when we cannot explain or predict it accurately. For example, the heating of water, producing steam, we call "science"; and the winning of a game of snakes-and-ladders we call "chance." But all kinds of factors are present in the winning of this game: one's muscles, the design of the board, the way the die was lying before the game started—in fact an infinite number of causes going back, I should think, to the fact that our planet was favourably situated for the formation of life; and even beyond that!

Because scientific causes and effects are present in the world it does not necessarily follow that an all-knowing being set these processes in motion. It seems to be a characteristic of intelligence to act in the present in order to create a desired effect in the future; but single acts have more than just one effect (perhaps this is why chess and ecology are such intriguing subjects).

It seems to me that people conceived of a god in order to explain things they did not understand; and they gave this god the characteristic of intelligence (magnified into super-intelligence and designing all future events). In modern life people speak about "chance" when events are too complicated to be explained scientifically, and in this sense Trevor Morgan is correct in linking the use of the word "chance" with that of "god" (p. 270).

If, as Brian Khan (letters, 2 September) says, chance refers to the absence of design, not the absence of causation, then the automatic boiling of water, on being heated, is an act of chance.

The use of the word "chance" causes an untold number of tragedies, as people believe that chance (like God) will favour them, as in gambling, either on horses or football pools, or with their lives when driving a motor car.

M. A. FORSYTH.

Editorial Fun

So the N.S.S. outing is to include Guildford Cathedral! What fun the editorial pen would have had if this had been a Communist outing!

PAT SLOAN.

The Editor comments:

In his eagerness our correspondent has snatched the wrong end of the stick firmly with both hands! It is South Place Ethical Society's outing which will include Guildford Cathedral, and we hope that the trip will prove most enjoyable.

We hate to distress Mr. Sloan further, but although the N.S.S. outing did not rise to such lofty heights as a cathedral, it did manage a Quaker meeting house and *two* churches in its itinerary (and very interesting they were, too). The N.S.S. and the Editor have even been known to visit Karl Marx's grave at Highgate from time to time.

Abnegation of Rationalist Thought

That the letter of our good friend, the Secretary of the N.S.S., which you published (10 September) was rejected by the *Times Educational Supplement* was a mercy. That he should use emotive terms about our classrooms being turned into mosques and temples whilst at the same time omitting to mention that they are already in his terms chapels and churches, might appear to one less objective than I as being in the hallowed tradition of secularist racialism.

It is simply a monstrous abnegation of rationalist thought to suggest that those who beat their offspring for failing to attend church are capable of the occidental barbarity of sustained vicarious and particularised murder being currently permitted in Northern Ireland. It is perhaps an idea worthy of the National Secular Society to obtain a cheap victory against a small and in-offensive community who are bearing the brunt of a rising tide of racialism.

GERALD SAMUEL.

One would take this letter a little more seriously had the Secretary of the N.S.S. failed to criticise the "occidental barbarity" going on in Northern Ireland, but he has done so in very forthright terms. Mr. Samuel himself seems emotive in his dislike of everyone and everything Irish. (Ed.)

Know Your Enemy

If you were a chess player like Spassky you would want to know what Fischer had behind his cranium; if you were a Ugandan Asian you would be interested to know what General Amin had under his hat, or Enoch Powell up his starched cuff-sleeve. And if you are a freethinker it is not a bad idea to know what some of the Jesus-freak supporters of the Festival of Light have under their dinghies, behind their guitars or inside their naïve hearts. Here are a few hints on some of the ploys to be expected from them.

1. *The Gentle Side-Step.* This arises in cases when you point out the inhumanity, which for 2,000 years has been committed in the name of Christ (such as the tortures of the Inquisition, or the present war between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland). The side-step is simple: "Well, you see, now, er . . . the people who did these things, er . . . I mean . . . well they didn't have Jesus in their hearts . . . I mean, they weren't true followers of Christ." It seems they said they were Christians, but I suppose these particular followers are entitled to know better?

2. *The Leaflet-Swap Gambit.* This is used when you attempt to offer an alternative view to theirs during one of their jamborees. "Well, could I have one of your leaflets, please . . . I mean I'll read yours if you read mine." But be careful, for they do it in teams, and they then tear the leaflets up or they are round the corner. Surely they could not be afraid of alternative ideas if they are so convinced of their own rightness . . . righteousness?

3. *The Historical Miz-maze.* This is much better than Hampton Court. Just suggest that a few favoured words in Tacitus could have been forged interpolations and they will say "Whoever he is he can't have read the Bible. Like it says . . . and there you've got the evidence of Matthew, Mark, Luke . . ." *et al.* Suggest that some of these gossellers might have had a vested interest in producing a distorted version, and, "Well, but these were the chosen words . . . you see?" And so on—I suppose all scholars go to the other place.

4. *The "I Know Jesus is Alive Today" Stalemate.* This often arises before any other arguments have begun to emerge. "But I mean I know him, man . . . he's here today." "Oh where?" "He's here this very day, in my heart, right now." (It is rather like talking to a clockwork doll, wound up to rasp the same phrase into infinity.)—"Yes, but in what sense do you know him—have you ever considered epistemology or what anyone can mean by knowledge?" "Epister . . . what ever it is—big words don't worry us. I've spoke to Jesus today." I suppose words, and hence ideas, could not be expected to concern those who have abandoned themselves to emotional clichés.

Of course there are many other moves, such as the "Moral Pollution Try" and the "Communist Conspiracy Catch," but however much you may have heard of their colossal naïvety, you can only see the simmering hysteria and twanging confusion by attending one of their "festivals" yourself.

JIM HERRICK.

Look, No Hands!

I was amused the other day to see a car with two stickers on the back window. The first read: "Turn to Christ!" The second, "No Hand Signals."

L. HANGER.

You Never Can Tell

Mr. James Hervey Johnson hopes that man will be permitted "to progress in intellect as he has in technology" ("American Atheists Push Ahead," 9 September).

At risk of seeming unprogressive I must confess to a certain unease at the prospect of an intellectual analogue to the hydrogen bomb.

L. G. BEELZEBUB.

Dialectical Eggs and Red Roses

It was a nice change from "looking at an egg dialectically" to have Professor Hyman Levy asking (letters, 26 August) "How do I decide whether stealing a rose from my neighbour's garden will further the revolution?"

Well, as guidance in such matters, there are always the writings of Marx (Karl). Indeed, one sometimes wonders to what extent Marxists think, feel and behave independently of Marxism. That may perhaps raise the old question of the relative antecedence of the egg and the chicken; and that possibly leads to the point that a scientific theory is surely open to scientific criticism.

CHARLES BYASS.