

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Ethics and Unbelief

THE more commonly a word is used, the more liable it is to be misunderstood.

The fact of its being used in everyday intercourse hides from most people the need for definition, and in course of time the word takes on a host of secondary meanings that are fatal to clear thinking; and sometimes these implications are not merely secondary—they may be antagonistic. Let anyone observe the use made of such words as "belief," "unbelief," or "doubt," and he will have in hand a first-class illustration of what has been said. Take up almost any sermon that comes to hand and it will be found that doubt and unbelief are treated as of almost equal value, with unbelief discussed as though it were to use a decent phrase or a string of empty negations. The unbeliever, it is said, adds nothing to the world's power for progress. His function is purely critical and destructive. It is only men of strong convictions that count, and if we must pass through seasons of doubt and unbelief, the best thing is to treat them as mental ailments and effect a cure as speedily as possible.

This attitude is not really justifiable even in relation to doubt. It is still less justifiable in relation to unbelief. So far as religion is concerned, there is always a positive aspect to doubt, there must be some flaw in the evidence presented, or some perception of a truth of an opposite character. In its lower terms it may imply indecision; in its higher it may foreshadow the growth of a very positive opinion against other points of view. If a jurymen finds the evidence for and against a prisoner so equally balanced that he is unable to come to any definite decision, he will "doubt," but his state of mind will be that of pure suspense. If the evidence of one side is of a slight character, but not sufficiently strong to be conclusive, he will still doubt, but in this case there will be present a positive element in the shape of a strong presumption in favour of either guilt or innocence.

Doubt, then, is a state of mind produced by the perception of conflicting evidence, or by recognition of the fact that the evidence produced is insufficient to warrant a conviction. The popular phrase "honest doubt" not only serves to hide this truth, but suggests an entirely erroneous conclusion. Doubt cannot be either honest or dishonest, speech may be, and one may pretend to doubt, but that is all. The only rational meaning to such an expression as "an honest doubter" is one who doubts and tells you so, and in that case it refers to honesty of expression.

Doubt, not disbelief, is the real opposite of belief. Popular thought, again encouraged by our clergy for interested reasons, treats disbelief and belief as opposites. This is not the case. Belief and disbelief are two sides of

the same mental state. If I assert that twice two equal four, I assert by implication my disbelief that they equal any other sum. The belief in a flat earth asserts to its rotundity. Belief and disbelief are two aspects of the same mental state. Each implies a definite conviction. That is why the sturdy disbeliever is also a sturdy believer. And when we are told that the world's saviours have been men of strong belief, we agree, merely adding that they were of necessity strong disbelievers also. As with doubt, it is absurd to speak of honest or dishonest belief. An honest unbeliever can only mean an unbeliever who acts honestly.

I do not mean by what has been said that it is of no consequence what a man believes. The social importance of beliefs remains quite unaffected whether belief is voluntary or otherwise. I hold that a man's beliefs are among the most important thing about him, they determine very largely what he does, and the historian, the sociologist and the politician must always reckon with them if the desire is either to understand or direct events. The really important thing here is, "What is it that we believe or disbelieve? . . . Is it true or false, useful or useless?"

Let us take first of all a question that marks the deepest religious world—that of the natural versus the supernatural. We unbelievers have no doubts on this question. Our disbelief in it is of the most positive and decided character. We see no reason for believing that at any time in human history has there been any manifestation of supernatural power in the affairs of man. We see things that are attributed to the supernatural in one generation coming under the category of science at a later date. Our disbelief in the supernatural is, therefore, only the reverse aspect of our firm belief in the omnipotence of natural forces and the universality of natural causation. Remove this and the foundation of our unbelief is gone. But ours is not a "bare negation," it is the strongest and most positive of affirmations. It involves a belief without which all science becomes an impossibility. It is the religious believer who, by his belief, is committed to scepticism concerning a generalisation which has stood every test that can be applied to it, and in the absence of which a sane ordering of life is inconceivable.

With regard to specific religious doctrines there is the same moral to be drawn. Every Christian professes belief in the divine birth of Jesus. In some mysterious manner, out of all the thousands of millions born into the world, this one individual was born without the aid of a human father. The unbeliever asserts that the laws of birth which held good for John Brown or Thomas Smith, and which are admittedly so for every individual in every part of the globe, hold good for Jesus Christ also. It is not a question of how many people believe to the contrary, it is simply a question of sanity of disposition, and of the reliability of human experience. Our belief here, again, is in the uni-

versality of the principle of causation. The disbelief of the Christian is in methods of reasoning, without which life would become a veritable idiot's tale, unreadable and unreliable.

The Christian has a certain belief about the Bible; so has the Freethinker. We do not accept his belief, because we have a very decided one of our own. We see that these supernaturally inspired religious writings or utterances crop up in all parts of the world, and that they become fewer and more negligible as civilisation develops. The Red Indian has his medicine man, the Siberian savage has his shaman, the African his witch doctor, they all declare their utterances inspired, and whether these inspired utterances are written or oral is a mere matter of detail. Seeing these things, the unbeliever declines to discriminate between the Bible and other religious writings. We believe that they all have the same origin, and that their value must be determined, not by the circular method of appealing to people's belief in them, but by what we know of natural law, human nature, and social evolution. We are not uttering a negation; we are affirming a principle. Or if it is a negation, it is of the order that every truth makes when confronting a falsehood.

It is the same with other matters. In a dozen different ways Christian preachers are found asserting that religious doctrines—the belief in God, in a soul, in a future state, are essential to right living. The man who forsakes these beliefs loses his hold on all that makes life worth living. Put in plain language, there is here the belief that human nature is such that without a bribe or a threat man is a beast—if not worse than a beast. This involves the denial of the possibility of any marked degree of excellence in the absence of a coercive external force. Man must never be allowed to stray beyond the vision of a watchful policeman—on earth or in heaven. The Freethinker disbelieves this, but his disbelief carries with it the belief that poor as human nature is, it has at least enough inherent goodness to carry out its legitimate domestic and social functions without being bribed by belief in heaven or terrified by belief in hell. The Christian is fond of talking about the pessimism of unbelief, but, whether it be right or wrong, there is certainly greater nobility in a teaching that takes man at his highest and appeals to the best that is in him, than one that treats him as a compound of fool and felon, incapable of recognising where his duty lies, or of carrying it out.

It is absurd to speak of opinions as opinions, or being either good or bad. One might as well talk of the colour of a sound, or the size of a smell. But it has been part of the policy of the clergy for ages to identify special opinions with undesirable social qualities, and the trick has been played for so long that it is no easy matter nowadays to expose the deception. But if it is ever justifiable to speak of a mental state as being immoral or dangerous, it must surely be of that set of opinions which, rejecting all human experience and sane science, reduces reason to a mere delusion, and morality to the repression of criminal instincts, under fear of punishment or hope of reward.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"Whereas only a comparatively little while ago theology was almost universally conceded to be the very acme of human knowledge, to-day it occupies a position among the sciences almost exactly like that of alchemy or astrology."—*Prof. D. S. Robinson.*

## "WHAT IS RELIGION?"

THERE is no word more ambiguous, and no subject more controversial, than religion. The assertion of anachronistic survival is a contradiction in terms. Survival is evidence of adaptability, which implies continual modification, while persistence implies identity, and so the paradox, the more it changes, the more it is the same.

The idea of anachronism arises in that analysis is necessarily regressive. The past must be reviewed to see how the present is affected. Available research shows a continual evolutionary transformation, involving confusion, direct contradiction and open conflict; with the development of religion becoming more complex, new factors appearing at successive stages.

The transformation is, in many respects, so fantastic, that it is idle to seek a primary essential in any particular culture stage, doctrine or creed. Religion is there throughout. Among so many variables, we seek a constant. A common denominator should be observed all through, but investigation seems unable to escape the thralldom of religious terms. To accept the test of religious shibboleths; assertion of belief or confession of faith; gets us no further.

Perhaps Tyler's famous definition "belief in spirits" may be taken as an epitome. It simply will not stand examination. Both "belief" and "spirits" are religious terms, and as such, ambiguous. And a definition of religion in terms of religion is a mere tautology, which leaves open the meaning of either term; accepting, by implication, a basic duality.

Besides which, such a definition makes religion a matter of theory, leaving aside a whole world of religious practice. And it invites the question whether belief affects conduct, or creed, character; the age-old question of the power of mind over matter. It is passive, not active, making religion a morose acceptance of tradition. It is static, not dynamic, unless either term is given a religious interpretation. We still seek the animus of animism.

Frazer's psychological treatment of sympathetic magic was a step forward, in that it did relate theory with practice. But his failure to separate magic and religion points a fallacy in the psychological approach. Elliot Smith's diffusion of culture theory was a step further, and seems to call for something new as a definition of religion, for it gives far more consideration of conditioning circumstances.

An interesting attempt at relativity may be cited in Havelock Ellis, who essayed that religion was synonymous with mysticism, and its concern, the relationship of the self with the not self. In considering so many definitions and terms he became mystically lost in a maze of abstractions. There is really no need for such elaborate examination and distraction.

A common denominator should be observed in the simplest and plainest of definitions, which, avoiding confusion, might even point a more dynamic approach to the subject. Such a definition may be found, in common parlance, which describes any action that is strictly methodical, implying zeal or enthusiasm as religious. It may seem that this is far too prosaic, yet it does contain our common denominator. It does not contain theological shibboleths, and specifically referring to action, it is dynamic.

Applying this principle to religious practice, we leave aside shibboleths, contradictions and intellectual confusion; we see types of action and intensity of feeling. It applies to the hypnotic somnolence of the yogi, and to the wild delirious voodoo; to all forms of religious cult, social and personal, orgiastic, corybantic, evangelistic, mystic. And we can see a clear relationship between the type of action and that of the feeling involved.

We see also, in this relationship, a sequence and consequence. For a given series of methodical or repeated action, a specific psychological state arises as a consequence. The method may

have a negative aspect in abstinence or segration; e.g., a mystic uses a specific method in order to achieve a requisite psychological state, which is thus, a consequence and not a causal factor. It is vital, to be sure, and dynamic. It may be allergic, erotic, delirious, morbid. In considering psychological states as causal, religion is consequential.

From this viewpoint, religion is not system of belief, but systematic action. Whatever theory may be, the consequence is the resultant of conditioning circumstances. We are concerned with the actual performance, ritual, ceremonial, incantation, prayer; with an actual technique; conditioning training, discipline; actual cultivation of psychological states. Religion is practical psychology; a technique or illusion, with all the inconsequential character of the dream, including wish-fulfilment and delirious ecstasy.

Although religion has played its part in social and cultural development, in language and the arts, as well as custom and law, it is concerned with personal feeling. In its personal appeal, it finds a psychological necessity for the continuance of the conditioning performances. Aesthetic delight, moral virtue, and personal satisfaction, are excuses for essentially religious practices. The pomp and circumstance of civic and political ceremonial still retain a religious character, for they are cultural survivals which mould present conduct, and have a psychological consequence.

We are concerned not only with intellectual and moral, but also with aesthetic and the so-called spiritual values. To religion the psychological aspect is the omnipresent Alpha and Omega. Concern for psychological states is visionary, and verbal, as well as actual; in picturesque imagery, rhetorical eloquence; the meaning of symbolism; the necessity for metaphysical assumptions. In excuse for persistent customary practice arise concentration on, and reinterpretation in, theory; methods of which, are equally customary. So that technique becomes, as with the mystic, more psychological less physical, but none the less practical.

Though academic and philosophical, it yet remains both practical and dynamic. With constant repetition in both word and deed, rationalisation is a consequence of its survival. Its conditioning, training, discipline, involves both exhibition and inhibition, sublimation repression. Religion is a practical problem.

H. H. PREECE.

### JOHN FAIRBURN—PRINTER EXTRAORDINARY

AT a cost of one shilling, the curiously inclined, during the year 1820, bought profusely, copies of a remarkable tract that was printed and published by John Fairburn, of Broadway, Ludgate Hill.

This bore the title "The Queen that Jack Found," and was embellished by no less than 13 woodcuts. This tract was in such demand that many editions were printed. The copy before me is taken from the sixth edition. It was dedicated to Matthew Wood Esq., M.P., who was also an Alderman of London.

Gentlemen of the Royal Court, patriots of the common people, sailors, horse-leeches (lawyers we call 'em to-day) are some of the Queen's subjects that figure prominently in the "scandals" and as is to be expected, My Lord Bishop was not excluded.

A rude woodcut shows My Lord Bishop standing, fat and pompous, dressed in the full panoply of his infamous ceremonial fig, wearing a mitred crown, with black vestments trailing behind his feet, and full flowing sleeves of what is intended to be white lawn. Dangling from his podgy left hand are the keys of his ignoble office. His right hand clutches tightly a copy of the revised Liturgy whilst a large important legal deed testifying to the infamous 40 Articles is gripped under his arm. His right foot is pressed heavily on the Charter of Common Sense that lies on the ground before him.

A caption by Hudibras is quoted immediately below:—

"What makes a Church a den of thieves?  
... A dean and chapter, and white sleeves!"

Then follows this dedication:—

"This is The Bishop to whom is given,  
In room of St. Peter, the Keys of Heaven!  
Who thinks, if *he pleases*, to shut people out  
Who dare of his *Creed* or his tenets to doubt,  
But who never thought it A Capital Sin  
To strike from Religion the name of his Queen  
But joined with the Crew in their councils so evil  
By giving her up from the Church to the Devil!  
Unlike the Brave Tar who indignant had seen  
A Low Hanoverian insulting his Queen  
And challeng'd the villain who dastardly fled  
For fear of the vengeance held over his head," etc.

As the rest of the diatribe is purely political we will leave it and pass along to notice another tract bearing the usual woodcut at the top, which this time reveals a miserable and weird figure standing in a large barrel inscribed, "Tale of a Tub."

The figure is supposed to be exclaiming in tones of anguished mien:—

"Yea verily, brethren, I, even I, have been weighed in the balance and found wanting." Held up in either hand are copies of the Vote of Justification and Act of Excommunication.

The usual quotation from Hudibras completes the sketch:—

"He straight converted all his gifts to pious frauds and holy shifts,  
And seffled all the other shares upon his outward man and heirs."

The Burlesque proceeds:—

"This is The Methodist, fam'd for his cant,  
A Puritan, Hypocrite, Statesman and Saint,  
Who declar'd that the prayers of the Church and the State  
Might be kept from us all by the will of the Great;  
And told our Good Queen, in the face of the Nation,  
She ought to submit though depriv'd of salvation.  
That if she were damned, yet the Parliament's vote,  
Could make the Anathema not worth a groat,  
And thus for the Ministers ventur'd to l—b—l  
The Liturgy, Decatalogue, Creed and the Bible!  
And by one huge stride left the mask of Good Sense,  
Descending to pander for sins of the P—e,  
But Caroline's wisdom and deep penetration  
Saw through the thin veil of this *New Revelation*;  
So strange, so absurd, yet so plain, and identical,  
Held out by this prosing arch-priest of conventicle;  
And the Jesuit dismiss'd with a dignified pride  
And told him the Cause to John Bull she'd confide," etc.

There can be no doubt that in their day these pamphlets exerted a powerful influence in revealing and showing up to the common people the scandals at Court and the terrible corruptions that existed amongst the leaders of rank and fashion both in and out of Parliament, which in turn created the host of narrow restrictions that were imposed on the printers and their presses, by Act of Parliament, in an effort to scotch any further revelations becoming public property, as we know to our sorrow. History read about, and treated of in dreary and dry books at school, was never a subject that made any appeal, yet I venture to think that were our children permitted to be regaled with readings from these old tracts and pamphlets, they would be very quick to understand and realise the many and repeated privations that beset and troubled the people that the history books never tell of, but such consideration will never be granted by our still piously inclined Board of Education. More's the pity!

ED. H. SIMPSON.

## ACID DROPS

Many of our readers will remember a book by Arthur Machen, "The Angels of Mons," published during the First World War. The British forces were in rather a dangerous situation, in fact, so far as our troops were concerned, it was surrender or die, when at the critical moment Angels appeared in the sky, and forced the retreat of the enemy, and thus our men were saved. The author wrote the story as a mere flight of fancy, but some of our prominent Christians got hold of the story, and with suitable embellishments the story spread all over the country, lectures were given lauding the greatness of God, and gloating over the downfall of the "Freethinker." All this despite the protest of the author that the story was written as fiction. But to the Christian leaders, the miracle of the War Angels was preferable. In the end the story was killed, and we are pleased that we helped to kill the monstrous swindle.

Now Mr. Machen is dead. His death was announced in the "Universe" a few days ago. We believe he was a member of the Anglo-Catholic Church. We do not think that he encouraged the story, that was the work of others who preferred to regard it as fact. Arthur Machen protested again and again, but our Bishops saw a chance to give religion a fillip in spite of the patent absurdity of the story, the discussion of the "miracle" filled the papers for some considerable time. Fortunately we filed a great deal of data concerning this swindle. Indeed we believe the "Freethinker" helped considerably in killing the yarn.

The age-old method of the Christian Church in dealing with heretical books was to burn them, the writers were often treated likewise. Other times require different methods, but the principle is the same. The Leanington Library committee met to consider whether Bishop Barnes' "The Rise of Christianity" should be allowed to find a place on the library shelves. It was only accepted after long and acrimonious argument. We are not surprised, but point out that it should always be borne in mind that, given the power, the Christian Church would act in the same way as it did in the "Dark Ages."

The Rev. G. T. Baker, writing in the "Church Times," complains of the quality of the defenders of Christianity during the recent "Belief and Unbelief" discussions on the wireless. For once we agree, we have heard better discussions on Sunday evenings in our parks.

There is a movement afoot in the House of Commons to endeavour to have the "Witchcraft Act" of the 18th century repealed. The belief in witchcraft was responsible for the execution of countless men and women and children, who were drowned, burned, and met their death in many painful ways. The belief was widely held, and even to-day in some form or other the belief is still going strong. For example, Roman Catholics wear a piece of cloth in the form of a necklace—Scapular—suitably blessed by a priest. This is guaranteed to ward off the "evil eye" and save the wearer from harm. Spiritualists believe that we can talk with those that have passed over, and so on. Our readers will remember that spiritualists have been prosecuted under the "Witchcraft Act," which is still a law in this country.

When one considers the crimes that have been committed in the name of Religion one is amazed that so many can still believe in its inherent goodness. The belief in Witchcraft and all its attendant horrors of the many trials is based, at least as far as the Christian religion is concerned, on a passage in the Bible, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." This command of God was delivered with great clearness, and was obeyed with great brutality and savagery. The ducking stool, the stake and the fire, in fact witch hunting in general, was a part of the very heart of Christian teaching and belief. One of the stalwarts of Christianity, John Wesley, declared that to give up witchcraft was tantamount to throwing over the Bible; we can only repeat what we have so often said: man is more civilised than his gods.

The Rev. W. H. Elliott, fond of setting the world right, said that an old man said to him that the Royal Wedding means that this nation believes in God and there can be no doubt of

its future. Mr. Elliott did not see that the man was probably just pulling his leg. What the old man meant was that the way the marriage performance was arranged goes to prove that common sense will never be common here.

A report in "The Star" (London) says that serious crime among women is decreasing, and that the population in women's prisons is down to half the peak figures of the war years. "The return of their men folk from the forces is credited for this startling improvement among women." While the boys were away fighting the ladies had God and the clergy to look after them.

Conscience, when not carefully watched, is likely to misdirect. Generally impulse is responsible for what a man does, and generally it operates as well as one would wish. An intended kindly help by impulse may be stopped by calculating whether the one to be helped deserves it. It is better to blunder in kindness than to run the risk the failing where kindness is needed. Impulse does not inspire praise for a god sacrificing his only son, such praise comes from conscience muddled and humbugged by Christian influence.

In the parish of Abdie (Scotland) money was needed for the church. A man—guided by impulse—ran a series of card games for money and presented the church with £41 as the result, and all were pleased—for the moment. But a couple of clergymen thought it would not look nice. They did not object to playing cards, and the £41 would be useful, but reflection told them that playing cards for the church was bad. No doubt a way out will be found for using the money on God's behalf other than returning it to the card players.

Christians celebrate Christmas by feasting, drinking, and a mental black-out. The world of reality is forgotten for the time being, fiction takes the place of fact and a dead prince of peace is propped up on an imaginary throne and reminded of his universal victory for peace on earth, goodwill towards all men. The 1947 nonsense has now ended and Christians awake once more to the world as it is after 1947 years of Christian teaching and influence, with civil war in China, fighting in Greece, Arab and Jew slaughtering each other in the Holy Land, and the shadows of a third world war drawing nearer. Religion and stupidity have always been very close companions and the golden opportunity for the tyrants and humbugs of the world.

An interesting quarrel is brewing regarding Roman Catholic Hospitals, and the bone of contention seems to be whether religion is to come before medical service or vice versa, now that the State is taking over control of hospitals. The "Universe" declares that "Daily Mass must come before all other duties." That this ruling is contrary to all medical practice, in which care for the sick is the first thought, is ignored by the writer. We feel sure that the majority will agree with us that a doctor's service is worth a hundred Masses.

The Bishop of Liverpool is trying to make our blood curdle. He is reported in the "Southern Guardian" to have said: "We are reaching a clear division between the spiritual on one side, and material indifference and opposition on the other. The stress of the material is on conforming to the ways of the world, whilst spirituality calls for the right of individual personality." Would it be an insult to the Bishop to suggest that he does not know what he is talking about? Yet the Bishop has been "educated" and should know, or is he aware that he is talking nonsense, in that case we have a word for it.

The Bishop continues with more "clotted bosh" when he says that the great evil today is that we must believe either in individuality or State control. He also complains of the character of the education that is given today and compares it with the education of pre-1800 when the Church had control. The Bishop must be aware that our education compared very unfavourably with other countries, and during the time of which he speaks, filth and ignorance were widespread. We suggest that the Bishop reads the "Black Book" of 1831. We do not say that it will alter his feelings, but it may make him a little more careful.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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For "The Freethinker."—J. Hupp, 10s., A. Addison, 10s.

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## SUGAR PLUMS

Apropos the recent discussions over the radio on "Belief and Unbelief" we think the following letter to one of our newspapers worth publishing:—

"Sir,—Now that the B.B.C. are broadcasting controversial religious discussions on Tuesday evenings, it would seem that the clergy of the Church of England should be well on their toes when explaining their beliefs and faith.

"Listening to a rather deplorable talk between a complacent unbeliever and a very inadequate clergyman, one foresees that our future (and present-day) clerics will need to be much better armed with attack and knowledge. Would it be possible for the Church to put up a group of men able to explain and also eager to show that Christ really lived?

From the wide-spreading humanism and materialism one sees a great danger, particularly as these people are educated and are teaching in universities. They can do much harm to the faith if the Anglican is lacking in knowledge of his faith.

"Do, therefore, let us have real clear-cut speech from men of conviction. Because a man (or woman) is sincere is no reason for agreeing with them; nor do they respect the Christian who does not think fit to show his devotion to his attitude of mind.

"Please do urge for men who are thus equipped to broadcast, instead of those wishy-washy people whose one desire seems to be to agree with their adversary quickly."

ELIZABETH CONIS.

We have often called attention to the very low intellectual level of Christianity that the B.B.C. presents. There was a time, even in our own day when believers of real ability were to be found debating with the unbeliever. That phase has almost gone. The rule now seems to be, leave the Unbelievers alone, refer to them if you must in terms of pity and condescension, but in God's name do not argue with them. The B.B.C. follows this rule very closely.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. begins the new year with a visit from Mr. J. T. Brighton who will lecture to-day (Sunday) in the Science Room of The Mechanics Institute, on "Man, Mind, Middle." Mr. Brighton is well-known on our platform and those who have heard him will need no pressure to be present; those who have not heard him should make a point of attending. The lecture begins at 6-30 p.m.

## A BISHOP AND CHRISTIANITY

### IV

WHEN Bishop Barnes in his "The Rise of Christianity" comes to deal with the writings of Paul—and Paul is always cited by Christians, and by those Rationalists who believe in Jesus as a Man as their heaven-born witness to his "historicity"—he shows almost as much scepticism as John M. Robertson. He points out that they were known and "generally accepted" by A.D. 140, but were "practically unknown forty years earlier," and he rightly asks:—

"Who gathered these letters of Paul? Where had they been in the meantime? In what condition were they when they were prepared for publication? Were they tattered manuscripts? . . . How did the man, or men, who published the material determine what in it was actually from Paul: almost certainly there was nothing in his handwriting . . . although none of these questions can be answered. . . ."

Although none of these questions can be answered! To read the various handbooks on the Bible one would imagine such questions were quite superfluous—and so they are for those who believe in "Divine Inspiration." God did it, or God revealed it, or God inspired it, was the way in which (when burning and torturing heretics became unfashionable) the heretic was told to shut up. Most clergymen still shut him up this way when they can—but not quite so easily.

Years ago Gerald Massey showed how the Christian Church deliberately mutilated and interpolated the Epistles of Paul, and how he was in reality its life-long opponent. And the Bishop now has sadly to confess that we cannot with certainty "attribute to Paul all the teaching and advice" the Epistles contain. In fact, the question whether all the varied teaching of Paul really comes from him is a question "highly controversial." When the reader has gone through Dr. Barnes' arguments and detailed analysis he may well be as bewildered as the Bishop himself. And it must be heartbreaking for a really pious and thorough believing Christian to find Dr. Barnes again insisting that "the pious rabbi or strict pharisee was not a man who, naturally and almost of necessity, combined hypocrisy and arrogant fanaticism with ritual trivialities: he was, because of the Law, clean-living and honourable, kindly and charitable." The worst language in the Bible was used by gentle Jesus in his flaming invective against the Pharisees, so either Jesus or the Bishop is wrong. The reader can decide.

In any case, Dr. Barnes has to admit that it is difficult for a man who called himself a Jew like Paul to have written some of the things in the Epistles; and a good deal of it is "repellent to the modern Christian humanist." I should like to retort here that "Christian humanist" may be a contradiction in terms, but let that pass. Paul "left an indelible mark on Christian theology" and here the Bishop is right. I expect however quite a goodly number of "Christian Humanists" would like to throw Paul overboard these days, and no wonder; so much of him is just silly mumbo-jumbo and not worth the paper on which he is expounded. Even Dr. Barnes cannot hide his contempt for, say, the doctrine of the two Adams which he says is a "curious and fantastic fragment of theological speculation" which used "the old myth of Genesis." This kind of criticism is enough to make all the older writers on the infallibility of the Bible rise up in hordes in a grand resurrection of their own.

Besides the writings gathered in the New Testament, there were many non-canonical received with reverence by the early Christian communities (whatever the date assigned to them), and what Dr. Barnes has to say about their contents is intensely interesting; for he has studied them with care and is not afraid to insist that "the difference between the mental background

of the early Christians and our own must have been enormous"; which gives point to the insistence of all Roman Catholics that their Church has never, never changed and is the same as it came fresh from the Saviour's hands. As a proof he gives many instances some of which, as exemplified in such documents as the Epistle of Barnabas, he calls "a mixture of nastiness and foolishness." And, of course, judged by modern scientific and cultural standards a bigger bunch of fools and lunatics than some of these early Christian writers were, could never again be found.

I was particularly interested in what Dr. Barnes had to say on Justin—who, the reader will perhaps remember, wrote a Dialogue with a Jew called Trypho. In this, he quotes Trypho as ridiculing the Christian Messiah and as saying that we know nothing whatever about him, when he was born, for example, or even whether he lived; and Trypho taunts Justin and the Christians either with "inventing" the story or following an idle yarn. I have often quoted the exact words as being undeniable proof that there were some Jews as early as the year A.D. 150 who denied the historicity of Jesus because those Rationalists who believe in a man called Jesus Christ always insist that the Jews never denied him—their denial was only his being the Son of God. My argument was never received kindly and my Rationalist opponents—in my opinion very dishonestly—always retorted that when Trypho used the word Christ or the Messiah he did not mean Jesus but some other Messiah. Bishop Barnes says that "in the most careful way, Justin quotes the Old Testament to show that Jesus is rightly to be regarded as the Messiah, the Christ. His is the first systematic attempt thus to challenge Jewish credulity." In other words, the Dialogue is about Jesus as "the Messiah, the Christ." And it was this "Jesus the Messiah, the Christ," that Trypho said was "invented" by Christians. I cordially agree with him.

To go through all the "Rise of Christianity" in detail from a Freethought point of view is not possible in a few articles, but I hope that I have said enough to show what a fine book it is for our own cause. The way Bishop Barnes throws overboard some of the most cherished and most deeply religious Christian beliefs would not perhaps be too astonishing were it not for the fact that he is still a member of the Church of England. All honour is due to his courage in putting clearly down his doubts and perplexities in print—doubts and perplexities which must be shared by the more intellectual of his Christian contemporaries.

He has no delusions about the widespread fraud and forgery which distinguishes early (and late for that matter) Christian literature, and is not afraid to say that the longer reference to Jesus in Josephus "is surely not genuine," though the shorter "was possibly" in the original text. He can even add, "There is no definite non-Christian evidence of the mere existence of Christianity that can be dated earlier than A.D. 110," a confession which will not please the Churches. He might have added—though it is clearly implied in his book—that Christian literature itself cannot be dated before the same date. That the first Christian writings dealt with a God in the sky seems to me to be undeniable, and not until the second century do I find that this God was brought down to earth to become a Man-God or a God-Man. But whether in the sky or on earth, Jesus remains a God, and Gods do not and never can exist.

Perhaps even the Bishop of Birmingham will one day come to see his "divine" Jesus as a myth. He is almost on the road already.

II. CUTNER.

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## THE GHOST THAT CANNOT COME TO REST (Jewish History)

IN the field of obscurantism, even the Roman Catholic Church as a standard bearer of world reaction is being eclipsed by the Jewish Religion, this errant ghost from clan society.

About 1300 B.C., a few nomadic clans (the "12-Tribe" scheme is obviously an invention to answer the needs of astrological congruity) in Palestine confederated on a totemistic base and under the denomination of "Israel"; the common deity—the Ba'al Berith ("Lord of the League")—was probably a bull (cf. the Golden Calf, the Serim Idols and the name of "Israel" as the "Strong One Who Fights"). In 1229 B.C., "Israel" is for the first time historically recorded as one of "peoples" in Syria and Palestine who were vanquished by the Egyptians. That they ever had ventured to come to Egypt is highly improbable.

Adopting the Nile Valley civilization, the Israelites discarded their totems, accept the God Osiris in the form of Joseph and his Mythical Coffin as the Ark of the Covenant. "Elohim"—the plural of "El"—God of Light—in the late Bible version is adopted as a name of a presumptive SINGLE God.

About 933 among the multiplied members of the League, a bid for supremacy takes place with the rise of a block of clans around Jerusalem where the Planet Saturn (Shabbathai) is venerated under the name of Yahve (hence the Yehüdi=Jews). By that time, in Israel, solar cult with holy stones (for instance in Bethel) prevailed. Saturday, the day under the "reign" of Saturn, an ill-boding planet, among all Semites is considered an "unlucky" day not propitious to any kind of work. With the Yehüdi, it is the tabooed day, and Fear of God outbalances Love.

Palestine is too remote a corner of the ancient world to allow her peoples a further orbit of development, they remain tools in the hands of their surrounding big powers. In the field of culture they cannot escape the influence of both Egypt and Babylonia. Politically impotent, they resorted to spiritual compensation in a narrow-minded theocracy. Whilst the Iron Age can democratize the civilized world at large, Palestine still can go on imitating the Oriental Despoties, yet always a vassal to some more progressive power:

933—722: Israel, under Egypt domination.

933—586: Juda, under the influence of Babylonia and Assyria.

586—538: Babylonia domination.

538—332: Persian Supremacy.

332—198: Under Alexander the Great.

198—168: Hellenistic Aera (Seleucides).

63—395 A.D.: Roman domination.

Returned from captivity in Babylon, all the tribal traditions were drawn up under a levelling and unifying edition—the Bible—with all the tribal gods represented as human "Patriarchs." Yahve retains, in places, the names of former gods, even that of the plurality of Elohim. This enables students, however, to distinguish between "Elohists" and "Yahvist" parts of the Bible. Though the Jews maintained their mythical descent from Ur-Khas-dim—the Light of the Khaldaens where Sin, the moon god, was worshipped as "Abram" (the Great Father\*), the revision of the Bible goes mainly on Persian lines; yet Yahve still retains the trace of a nomadic totem who can be locally worshipped—in Jerusalem only.

The cosmopolitan populations of the great Hellenistic metropolises were likely to be more tolerant than previous societies. The rebellion of the Maccabees, apart from being a war for national liberation, was the outcome of religious intolerance

\* Sinai, the Jewish Olympos of the Legend, is the dwelling place of Sin (-ai is ancient locative case!)

and spiritual totalitarianism with the aim of keeping Judaism exclusive. Unified though the hellenistic centres were, the Greeks were the profiting stratum, hence the resentment of the natives against their exploiters appeared under the aspect of not a social but a national antagonism. It was the reaction, led by the local priests, that knew how to utilize such feelings to their sombre ends.

But for all this, various hellenistic sects sprang up, such as the Essenes and the Nazarenes (Jesus is said to be a "nazar" = scion! His descent from a, then non-existing, village of Nazareth is due to later misunderstanding). At last, the Romans forced open the iron door of Judea.

The more progressive-minded sections of the Jews began spreading all over the Roman Empire, came into contact with open-minded people, served in the legions, intermingled with foreign races and by the scores dropped the creed of their bronze-age ancestors. It was in Spain, when in contact with the Moors, then the most enlightened people of the world—that things looked brighter for a more progressive development of the Jews, but unfortunately the expulsion from Spain of Moors and Jews alike put an early end to this hopeful start.

With the Jews tolerated as commercial and monetary mediators in the feudal societies, the Jewish creed was slightly affected by the mental bearing of their hosts; the former Persian sun god "Mitra" was borrowed as "Metatron," the mediator between the Jews and God, and in the Cabbalah they created an occult lore of their own; yet whilst the Alchymists applied their magic to matter, they kept to verbal magic.

Under the conditions of Ghetto life, devoid of any political aspect, the local Rabbi not only became the spiritual leader but an absolute prince in his tiny realm, endowed with the halo of mysterious faculties as is shown by the communities of the Khaluzim (mainly in pre-war Poland). Yet, where a proper civic standing was allowed to Jews, breaches were finally laid in this obsolete edifice. In these countries, however, the unthought of barbarities of the Hitlerites proved a sharp shock that, once more, could be fully utilized by reaction among Jewry to make believe in the necessity to close the ranks again and profess their mission as Jews. So, the eternal wandering Jew cannot come to die a natural death and be allowed to come to rest.

PERCY G. ROY.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### LEGAL MARRIAGE.

Sir.—The Rev. Mr. Harfitt is still evading the issue. He makes no attempt to deny your statement that "the person sanctioning a marriage must be licensed by the State." Throughout his correspondence he endeavours to uphold the "sanctity" of wedlock to the detriment of its legal or social aspect. His effort to differentiate between a licence and a certificate is pathetic. Although a registrar may not give a licence for a wedding in church, an ordinary certificate is usually accepted in place of banns; but whether the marriage contract is carried out before a public officer or a religious minister, it must carry legal recognition. The person officiating *must be licensed by secular authority.*

The word "marriage" is derived from the latin word *maritus*, meaning husband, and signifies the *legal* union of a male and female; the ceremony having no religious significance whatever. "United in holy wedlock," "Marriages are made in heaven," "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," and such like verbiage, is just downright ecclesiastical impertinence.

The so-called "religious rites" in connection with marriage are merely relics of very old customs. These "rites" did not exist even amongst the ancient Jews, but were gradually added simply as a concession to human weakness.

Originally, marriage was a capture, then it became a matter of purchase. The modern ceremonies contain symbols of the old customs. For instance, the bridegroom "captures" the bride by taking her hand, for which he needs the help of the best man; he "buys" her with a ring; the throwing of the confetti, to represent rice, is a symbol of fertility; knots and favours are symbolical of indissoluble unity, etc., etc. Friday is the *luckiest* day of the week for a wedding because it is the day of "Frija" the Goddess of "friendship" and love. The word "spinster" owes its use to the fact that in olden days the *law* did not allow any woman to marry until she had "spun" a complete set of bed-linen.

Hurrah! for the good old days.—Yours, etc.,

J. HUMPHREY.

### FREETHOUGHT POETRY.

Sir.—Referring to the letters from Mr. W. Hawes and Mr. W. Morris on Freethought Poetry it may interest them to know that an Anthology of Freethought and Agnostic Poetry is now being compiled in America by Messrs. Burwell and Breen, who have asked permission to include some of the verses I have written for the "Freethinker."

The work will include extracts from the ancients—Lucretius, Horace, etc., through the ages to the moderns.

As it is doubtful if this publication will reach many English readers, I too, wish that something could be done in this country as there must be a very large reading public to whom it would appeal.—Yours, etc.,

W. H. WOOD.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### LONDON—OUTDOOR

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Sunday, 12 noon: Mr. L. EBURY.

### LONDON—INDOOR

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 6th: Brains Trust. "Marriage and Divorce." Question Master, The Rt. Hon. Lord FARINGDON.—Dr. J. MALLESON, REGINALD PESTELL, R. S. W. POLLARD, Dr. HALLIDAY SUTHERLAND. Questions on postcards to R.P.A., 4-6 Johnsons Court, E.C.4.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: "Hopes and Fears for 1948," Mr. S. K. RATCLIFFE.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.

### COUNTRY—INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday 6-30 p.m.: "Man, Mind and Muddle," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON.

Glasgow Secular Society (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Is Christianity the Solution?" by Mr. HARRY McSHANE.

Halifax Branch N.S.S. (Boars Head Hotel, Southgate).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: "Miracles or Medicines," Mr. J. T. BRIGHTON. Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: MEMBER'S MEETING.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A lecture.

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Queen Square, Liverpool, 1).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: "Psychology of Faith and Reason." Mr. R. H. STANDEAST (Wallasey).

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—2-30 p.m.: "The Communist Manifesto, 1848—1948," Mr. W. PAUL.

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for To-day.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 4d.; postage 1d.

**THOMAS PAINE, A Pioneer of Two Worlds.** By Chapman Cohen. Price 1s. 4d.; postage 1d.

## ANOTHER LOOPHOLE FOR THE B.B.C.

"THE B.B.C. is to be congratulated on breaking the ground," commented Mr. Henry Reed, contributor of "Radio Notes" in "The New Statesman and Nation," writing after the last of "the B.B.C.'s controversial religious discussions." I feel sure that this quotation will go into the files at Broadcasting House, and will in due course be produced as evidence of the pioneer work the B.B.C. is doing in taking the truth to the people. Mr. Reed writes as "a fellow-agnostic," considerably more impressed by the Bishop of Bristol's "humanity and wisdom" than by the qualities of the representatives of unbelief.

Now one would imagine that the journalist responsible for the commentaries on broadcasting appearing in so good a journal as "The New Statesman" would know something about the facts behind the religious talks and discussions about religion that wireless listeners are able to hear. He ought to be fully aware that for a long time there were religious services and religious talks only, and that for a long time the B.B.C. would not allow any criticism of religion to be heard, and ignored the many protests against the one-sided nature of their policy. He ought also to know that only after the matter had become a public scandal and had been the subject of Parliamentary debate did the B.B.C. begin to promise to allow the unbeliever to state his case. Then, knowing that subsequent broadcasts were only allowed because public outcry had forced the B.B.C.'s hand, he surely would not have congratulated the B.B.C. on what it was doing!

Moreover, with the knowledge of broadcasting that is essential to his profession, he should have remembered the Bishop of Bristol's earlier discussions with unbelievers. As Canon Cockin, he had the habit of coming to the microphone with an anonymous atheist whose objections to Christianity he answered so devastatingly that the atheist invariably admitted how right the Canon was. Remembering this, Mr. Reed might have been on his guard against mistaking the same reverend gentleman's breezy and tolerant manner for "humanity and wisdom" now he is a Bishop, even though he has given up the questionable pastime of slaying dummy-atheists.

What Mr. Reed ought to know above all else about religious radio discussions in which unbelievers take part is that the B.B.C. does not want them to be free, honest and in any way conclusive. It has been forced to allow them as an alternative to abandoning all the religious propaganda and services with which it overloads its programmes, and is using all the ingenuity it can muster to make its "phony" discussions appear the last word in outspokenness and daring. It will not be able to maintain this policy for ever, but will be forced to jettison it, as it has others when they have been exposed in the past. It will, however, be encouraged to continue with half-measures of patent dishonesty, while timid "agnostics" pay it compliments for doing so.

A gem of a suggestion, too good to let pass, sets the seal on the value of "The New Statesman's" radio correspondent as a commentator on broadcast religious discussions. He writes: "When these discussions began, I said that I hoped Disbelief would be given a hearing; in the event, on the non-Christian side, there has been little else. It is a pity that the voice of genuine doubt, regretful and obsessive, has not been heard."

That, I submit, is handing the B.B.C. what it wants on a plate. Maybe, there is, in Mr. Reed's mind, a picture of himself, so wistful and appealing, as the genuine, regretful doubter, ready to fill the suggested role at the microphone. I have no doubt that the B.B.C. will welcome him with open arms, if he offers his services in this capacity. What a splendid opportunity it would be, moreover, for Dr. Cockin to come all

the way from Bristol and give a further display of humanity and wisdom by comforting the poor devil cursed with enough intelligence to suspect a tissue of fables, but not enough to be glad he is not a credulous dupe! I am doubtful, however, whether listeners would be edified by the broadcast.

No, that is not right. I am quite sure that thousands would be disgusted, for steadily more and more listeners are finding out the kind of tricks the B.B.C. plays on them when dealing with matters of opinion. The position is so scandalous that I suggest to Mr. Reed and "The New Statesman" that the duty of a journalist-critic not in the B.B.C.'s employ is to bring the offenders to book rather than to provide them with a loophole for escape.

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

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