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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Migrations of a God

IN the year 1916 when the world was in the throes of the first world war, the English-speaking religious world was astonished and scandalised by the appearance of a novel written about ancient history by a brilliant Irish novelist of the day. The novel in question was entitled "The Brook Kerith," and it bore the sub-title "A Syrian Tale." The historical novel is a recognised literary medium which ranges widely over space and time. But in a Christian land, at any rate, there is one place, one place and, above all, one person, which are sacrosanct and must not be treated in avowed works of fiction. The place is Palestine and the time is the first century A.D. Whilst it is strictly "verboten" (forbidden) to have as a hero of literary fiction Jesus of Nazareth, "the Founder of Christianity," perhaps too much fiction has already been written about him?

"The Brook Kerith" startled the respectable Anglo-Saxon public of a generation ago—then, perhaps, more easily startled than now by religious heterodoxy—precisely because it so daringly violated all these conventional taboos. For its time is the first generation of our era, its place is the Palestine of the first century A.D. and—crowning blasphemy to pious ears still attuned to Victorian perspectives!—its "hero" and central figure, round whose doings the entire "plot" of the book revolves, is Jesus of Nazareth—none other!—conceived as an historical though human figure, who had been taken down from the cross alive and subsequently smuggled away by his disciples.

Put briefly, the "plot" of "The Brook Kerith" centres around what we may relevantly term the "post-mortem" adventures of Jesus of Nazareth. Not, we hasten to add, "post-mortem" in the sense understood by the Christian legends that have clustered around the alleged Resurrection and Ascension of this self-same Jesus. The gifted author has here gone to a different, an heretical source for his information, to another legend that recorded how Jesus, after his unusually brief sojourn on the cross, had been taken down alive and had been later spirited away to a place of safety by his friends, where the tortured Messiah had slowly recovered from his frightful ordeal.

This version of the Jesus saga—"myth" might, perhaps be here the more appropriate term—was current amongst some early Christian heretical sects of Unitarian persuasion and, as we shall shortly observe, is also held by some modern Muslim polemicists against orthodox Christianity. It is, of course, a view entirely heretical in the eyes of the Churches and, whether there is anything to be said of it or not in fact, cannot be said to have any positive evidence in its favour; not even the dubious evidence provided by our sole existing sources for the life of Jesus, viz., the canonical Gospels.

However, Mr. George Moore, the author of "A Syrian Tale," which so shocked the dying embers of

Victorian religiosity, was a major literary artist, who relied, not unjustifiably, on his brilliant literary gifts to even out the lacunae and the inherent improbabilities of his "Tale." As and when judged from the purely literary angle, "The Brook Kerith" must be regarded, we think, as a major work of literature; one of the very few novels—if novel be, indeed, the right name for it—produced in English during the course of the 20th century, which attain, or at least, approach the status of a literary classic. If the shadowy figure of Jesus never really comes to life in the rural solitude in which the author places him, the style of the book is exquisite, the Palestinian milieu is admirably drawn; whilst the concluding dialogue between Jesus and Paul who, brimful of zeal and bursting with dramatic assurance, makes a (necessarily unsuccessful!) attempt to convert Jesus to a belief in his own resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven, is really tremendous.

This closing scene almost ranks with the famous conclusion of Anatole France's "Procurator of Judea," that famous occasion when Pontius Pilate, then a gouty official spending his last years in an Italian health-spa, confesses that he has positively no recollection of condemning anyone of the name of Jesus—"Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth? No! I don't recollect him at all."

"The Brook Kerith" describes how Jesus ultimately became a shepherd in an Essene community and his famous interview with Paul, whom George Moore, following what was then a current fashion in liberal theological circles, evidently regarded as the real founder of what history calls "Christianity." Finally, Jesus joins a caravan of Eastern fakirs en route for the Far East and vanishes from Palestine and from history, leaving Paul in full spate, preaching Christ Jesus, Crucified, Risen, Ascended, Glorified, and Deified.

Where did Jesus go on his Eastern trek—into oblivion? The author of "The Brook Kerith" has no information on his hero's ultimate rendezvous. However, we are not left in the dark as to his ultimate resting-place. This time, our informant is, rather curiously, a present-day Muslim pundit, J. D. Shams, described as "Imam of the London Mosque." In the year of grace, 1945, this Muslim scholar finally enlightened us upon the exact whereabouts of the burial place of "The Founder of Christianity." Attention, all Christians! Jesus of Nazareth, the alleged Founder of Christianity and sometime Second Person of the most Holy and Undivided Trinity, is actually buried in Khan-Yar Street, in the town of Srinagar, in the Vale of Kashmir, Northern India. To clinch the matter beyond dispute, Imam Shams includes an actual photograph of the Tomb where the Saviour of Mankind actually ended the Oriental tour which we have seen begin in the closing pages of "The Brook Kerith."

Our Muslim theologian reaches the above conclusion—certainly a startling one!—in a book entitled "Where Did Jesus Die?" The book appeared in London in English in 1945, and it must in fairness be conceded

that the learned Imam pursues his somewhat fantastic quarry, not only with immense ingenuity and persistence, but also that his comprehensive bibliography indicates extensive learning; it includes not only an army of specialised theological tomes, but also such world-famous classics as Frazer's "Golden Bough" and Paine's "Age of Reason." Even *The Freethinker* is laid under contribution in the shape of a reference to "The Crimes of Christianity" by J. M. Wheeler, one of this journal's most eminent past contributors. And to think that all this vast erudition and the author's frequently admirable criticisms of Christian orthodoxy ends in Khan-yar Street—Srinagar—Kashmir—India N. No wonder India and Pakistan are now at daggers drawn over this delectable land which contains the Tomb of the Second Person of the Trinity!

According to Imam Shams, the purpose of Jesus in going East was to preach the Gospel—his own, not Paul's—to the Afghans who claim to be the authentic descendants of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel whom the Assyrians carried away into captivity. (A similar claim has been made on behalf of another "chosen race," the Scots!) From Afghanistan, Jesus, or Issa, as he was known locally, migrated to Kashmir where he died at the ripe old age of 122, and was buried in Khan-Yar Street, Srinagar, where his tomb is still shown.

So much for the Muslim Shams. We refer the curious reader to his book for the further details which he so copiously provides. But amongst his "authorities" he cites a Russian Buddhist scholar called Notovitch who edited "The Unknown Life of Jesus"\* from Tibetan monastic sources. According to this "authority" Issa (Jesus) was converted to Buddhism in Tibet, and preached first in India and then journeyed West again to Palestine, where he met the end portrayed in our Gospels.

The Essenes! Srinagar! Tibet! No mere man could have been so versatile? What we have here are evidently the migrations of a God. For it is the prerogative of Deity to by-pass Time and Space, history and geography, not to mention reason and probability.

F. A. RIDLEY.

\* "The Unknown Life of Jesus" is translated into English by Alexina Loranger. There is a copy in the British Museum Library.

### "IS PSYCHO-ANALYSIS A DELUSION?"

IN the article appearing under the above title in last week's issue of *The Freethinker*, H.E. states that "if science needs an answer to a question it looks to experiment and empirical fact to supply it." Experiment and empirical fact may supply the answer, but, before we know definitely that it is the answer, we need something more. We need above all to be shown that there is a causal nexus. It is not sufficient merely to show that one thing follows another; we must also be able to show that it necessarily follows before we can confidently state that one is the cause of which the other is the effect. Even if cures invariably followed a certain treatment, which they never do, the mere fact of sequence alone could never establish a single scientific fact.

I am in agreement with H.E. as regards the term "psycho-analyst." "This," he says, "means, or properly used should mean, a psychotherapist who follows the rigid Freudian technique and subscribes to the Freudian psychopathology and doctrine." It is with this meaning that the term is used in the book that has given rise to this discussion. The bulk of the work is taken up with Freudian doctrine, and I have clearly

indicated where departures have been made. I admit that it might have obviated some slight misunderstandings if I had stated this specifically in the introductory chapter of the book. As H.E. states that neither he nor Hadfield are psycho-analysts in the sense referred to above, and that neither of them subscribe to the Freudian tenets that I attack so heavily, they are, to that extent at least, on my side.

From the foregoing it follows that H.E.'s criticisms are directed, not so much against my attack on Freudian psycho-analysis, as against the materialistic theory on which I chiefly rely for its refutation. Consequently, the discussion is diverted from psycho-analysis à la Freud to the merits or demerits of materialism as applied to human behaviour.

When H.E. states that he thinks there are such things as aims and purposes and the like which are beyond the power of mechanism to explain, it is evident that he has not taken into account the mechanistic experiments that have already been made in this direction. J. Loeb has shown that animals with phototropisms are simply machines responding to the stimulus of light. When he adjusted two lights so that the light fell equally on both eyes, the creature would move straight forward; any inequality in the intensity of the lights inevitably pulled the creature into the brighter light. The caterpillars of the goldtail moth, *Porthesia chrysorrhoea*, hatch in autumn and hibernate in nests on the stems of the shrubs on which they feed. In early spring they leave the nests and crawl up the shrub to feed on the buds on the tips of its shoots, and move back again when their hunger has been satisfied. At first glance this action would appear to be in the nature of a purposive searching for food. Loeb has, however, experimentally proved it to be nothing more than a phototropism. The caterpillars were placed in a glass tube with a light at one end, and when hungry they would move towards the light, even when food was placed at the dark end; and when their hunger had been appeased they would become negatively phototropic and move towards the dark, the whole action being determined by the creature's physical and chemical condition.

Eels display hydrotropic movement in making cross-country journeys towards the water. Positive hygrotropism is shown by the spider that "selects" a moist atmosphere, and negative hygrotropism by the one that "selects" a dry. The vast amount of work that has been done in the study of tropisms provides fairly convincing evidence of the physico-chemical nature of the behaviour of the lower organisms, and it does not seem too much to suppose that the evolved complexity of the human organism is sufficient to account for the greater complexity of its manifestations. Aims and purposes, both immediate and remote, from the simplest to the most complex, are still but manifestations of the continuous adjustment of the organism to its environment—of inner to outer relations—on which the continuance of life depends. Much more might be said on this aspect of the subject did space permit, but I must now pass on to H.E.'s final point.

H.E. says that when I look forward to physiology to give us the answers to our psychological questioning, it does not seem to occur to me that if and when such a psychology comes about "there will be no 'welcome' anything but just a mass of reflexes, plain or conditioned as the case may be." But a new approach does not alter the thing approached. The facts of consciousness remain whatever theories we may hold respecting them. The question at issue is merely

one of interpretation; whether we are to accept a natural explanation of all human activities, including the conscious processes, as conditioned by structure and environmental influences; or whether we are to accept the antagonistic explanation that these activities owe their manifestation to some kind of immaterial entity, unconditioned and arbitrary in its decrees.

The confusion that prevails on this subject is chiefly due to the fact that the terms "bodily" and "mental" have been used, and are still continually used, as terms conveying totally distinct and separate ideas, as though in fact mental phenomena were totally apart from, and bore no relation to, bodily phenomena, instead of being, are they really are, included amongst bodily phenomena. Both indigestion and lunacy are bodily ailments, the one being a disorder of the alimentary, and the other of the nervous system. This being so, there is nothing irrational in looking to physiology to explain them both.

FRANK KENYON.

### CONTINENTAL FILMS AND RELIGION

THOSE who are fortunate to be able to see Continental films more or less regularly must have been struck by the cynical attitude adopted by many foreign directors towards organised religion. In some cases it amounts to burlesque. It seems to indicate a greater freedom from film censorship on the Continent than obtains here. A similar attitude of cynicism and mockery in British or American films would be unthinkable. Yet these films, most of which are acknowledged masterpieces of the cinema, are shown in select cinemas here and in America, where the more discriminating filmgoer can maliciously enjoy these taunts of hypocrisy and humbug in organised religion, knowing that no harm will be done to "the masses," who, poor mutts, wouldn't understand the language anyway, and certainly not the subtlety and sophistication of some of the criticisms.

A good example occurred in "Bicycle Thieves" which has been a big box-office success. The hero, a poor Italian worker, is trying to recover his stolen bicycle, to obtain which he had pawned all his and his wife's belongings, including the bedding. He chases an old tramp, who knows the identity of the thief, into a big church which offers certain personal services to "down and outs" in return for holding cap in hand with bowed head and muttering a few prayers. The "down and outs" are being shaven when suddenly the frantic ringing of a bell announces the church service. All are unceremoniously whisked off (shaving soap and all) to perform their devotions in an already crowded church, where middle-class ladies wearing strong corsets and patronising smiles are pompously distributing programmes of the service. Our hero manages to locate the old tramp in devotional attitude and looking decidedly uncomfortable in the ecclesiastical surroundings. The struggle that ensues for the name and address of the thief in the holy atmosphere of incense, candles, shaving soap, tramps' body-odour and middle-class ladies' powder and perfume is really something to remember. But the underlying irony of the Church offering asylum to the criminal, quite oblivious to human injustice, is excellently contrived.

What is incomprehensible to me is that a film like "Monsieur Vincent," which is a scathing criticism of conventional religion and makes abundantly clear the director's contempt for Catholic officialdom, should have been such a roaring success among Catholics. The Continental cinema in my area was positively invaded

by priests and Catholic laity during the whole period of showing. Is it that they too enjoy a dig at their religion? Or is it rather that the Church still manages to cash in on the courageous and heroic lives of humanists? The latter is probably the case. But I confess I came away very puzzled when seeing this very fine portrayal of St. Vincent's life, because he represented in this film the ideal of a humanitarian—and a very materialistic one at that. Still, it is true that he did mutter a few words from time to time about the Almighty (which was not unusual in the Middle Ages), so, no doubt, our good Catholic filmgoers went home thoroughly satisfied with yet another victory for the beneficent religion.

S. POSTLETHWAITE-SMYTHE.

### CYNICS' POLITICAL GLOSSARY

A is for Apathy—don't blame the voter,  
He's sunk anyway, so he just stays a floater.  
B means the Ballot—it's Britain's bright gem.  
It's cheaper by far than assault and mayhem.  
C is the Carve-up the cynics suspect.  
If it's called Compromise, then it gains our respect.  
D means the Data the Gallup Polls give,  
But the tipster says: "'Ere, can't you live and let live?"  
E denotes Enterprise, private or not,  
They'll put the thing down in the House, like a shot.  
F finds the Facts and then keeps 'em quiet.  
If the House heard 'em there'd soon be a riot.  
G means the Government—not very strong,  
So hope keeps the other lot tailing along.  
H is the Horror the ballot-box saves,  
Hatred and hopelessness—spite, serfs and slaves.  
I—Independence—the Party hack's screen,  
The crack o' the whip brings him back on the scene.  
J means the Journal, "Hansard" they call,  
Howe'er long the speeches, it records 'em all.  
K—Koalition—but best spell it right,  
Or it may mean Kollusion—a Party sham fight.  
L stands for Laws—several new ones per day—  
If you don't know 'em all, then you just have to pay.  
M is the Makeshift, they call compromise,  
It's also a good word for dust in your eyes.  
N means the Nothing that Poll pledges mean,  
We've been had once or twice, so we're getting less green.  
O is the Odium speakers will spread,  
To catch their "Right Honourable" foes in the red.  
P means the Planners—they won't catch a cold  
If Time, Tide and Good Luck together will hold.  
Q for the Quorum—these good men and true—  
Who sit there and see all the absentees through.  
R means the Right—looking rather forlorn.  
Distinguished from Wrong, where the Party line's drawn.  
S—Secret Session—the matter's hush-hush,  
A curtain of silence to soften the slush.  
T means the Tuppence our man doesn't care,  
Till he gets to the House and stands up near his chair.  
U for Unsettlement, when voters think  
There'll be a new House in the space of a blink!  
V is the Vote, which takes losers aback,  
They never heard Nemesis close on the track.  
W—the Will of the people (perhaps)—  
They really imagine it is, the poor saps.  
X—Xpectations, when you've cast your vote,  
It takes all your time just to keep them afloat.  
Y—Yellow Peril, now Asia's gone Red,  
The same one kept Grandpa awake in his bed.  
Z—the whips Zoom, when Divisions occur,  
If one bloke is missing, they dig in the spur.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

## ACID DROPS

Most of us think that Scotland has more than a bellyful of religion, but we notice that the Marquess of Aberdeen wants the B.B.C. to help to pile on heaps more. He wants plenty of religious broadcasts for Scottish schoolchildren and we learn that the "Broadcasting Council is not unsympathetic," an attitude easy to understand, of course. All the same, many of the schools appear to be satisfied with the religion they get and are in no hurry to increase it—and the poor old Marquess looks like being religiously disappointed, and we hope he will continue to be so.

Striking arguments are going to fly about in Farn Street Church between Fr. Christie and Fr. Broderick every Wednesday in November. Fr. B. will champion the Church, and Fr. C. will attack it with all the weapons at his command. That is, he will be supposed to attack it, but no doubt he will do it just as that doughty Anglo-Catholic, Canon Cockin, used to defend Christianity on the radio against an "infidel" whose script had been most carefully written for him by—Canon Cockin. Fr. B. will eventually win just as Canon Cockin always won. What a game!

Whatever success "Atheistic Communism" may have had on the continent and elsewhere, Oberammergau, it is reported, had 500,000 visitors. There were 88 performances, and 130,000 came from abroad to see the play. What percentage of all who saw it are believers it is impossible to say, but no doubt the big majority. And there is nothing like such "Passion" plays for strengthening the will to believe—or in other words, for carrying on the Christian tradition and belief. We wonder what would happen if public performances were given of the life of Jesus as seen through the eyes of Leo Taxil and his famous *Life of Jesus*?

In more primitive times, Christians used to consider thunder and lightning, tempests, floods, and earthquakes, as God's expression of anger, and no doubt many think so even now. In any case, how can they understand the awful ravages afflicted recently on the elect in the East—the tremendous damage done by "nature" in this way on churches and other holy buildings? Various Oriental bishops like the Bishop of Antigua, Bishop Yashiro, and others, have harrowing stories of the damage done to churches and they want plenty of money for repairs. But it is extraordinary that they never seem to pray to the Almighty for it—or at least it is never the Almighty who sends them any. Only the mugs here.

That doughty champion of the Assumption, Father John Heenan, let himself go the other week. It appears that the other Churches are jealous of Rome. They are not so much opposed to such a Holy Dogma as the Assumption of Mary as they are to the success of Roman Catholicism and its "authority" from the Lord direct, an honour quite impossible for any other Church. The *Church Times* feebly replies to this by asserting that its Church is free from such "continental type of dictation." But it is a fact, of course, that Protestantism on the whole, and Anglo-Catholicism have been completely defeated by the wily Church of Rome. We now have no anti-Rome controversialists of the type that flourished in the last century.

The "Church Times" in a leader on "unwholesome literature" tells us, as if it were indelibly true, that the Church "has never feared the truth nor sought to forward right by fairy tales." *Never feared the truth* is quite good, and as for "fairy tales"—perhaps it depends on what is meant here by the Church. Is the "Ascension" a "fairy tale?" Is not the Virgin Birth a "fairy tale?" And what about the "Assumption of Mary" and Fatima and Lourdes—all believed in anyway by a "Church?"

According to Fr. A. Andrew, the Church of Rome should step it with those other two Dictators, Hitler and Stalin. "Hitler would not have been Hitler and Stalin would not have been Stalin," he declared the other week, "without the Radio." Fr. Andrew wants the Church to ponder well over the advantages the Radio gives to all Dictators—"It enables men to sway millions . . . we must re-examine our modes and methods," he continued; and he wants the Westminister Catholic Evidence Guild to carry on even "if it has never made a convert."

Of one thing he was very sure. "There is no sign at all of the impending conversion of England"—a confession which will be received with the greatest joy by our Archbishops. Prayers seem to have failed (which really means that God Almighty has failed) so the only way to reach the 15,000,000 people who are supposed to listen in, is through the Radio. We would bet a copy of our *Bible Handbook* against a *Missal* that most of these inferred 15,000,000 prefer a straight music-hall show.

Somebody really should put Fr. Gordon, S.J., right. He declared that "the scientific materialists . . . are Communists. This is just ignorant nonsense. There are millions of declared Materialists who are not Communists or even Socialists. And there are millions of good earnest and even Catholic Christians who are fervent Communists. What Fr. Gordon is really up against is *Atheism*—and these Fathers in God do their utmost to confuse Communism with the hated *Atheism* they so strongly fear. Dictators have always hated rivals.

The "Universe" wants to know—if Rome is wrong about the Assumption, who is right? As far as Christianity is concerned no one is right. If the stupid assumption of the existence of an Almighty is accepted, if this biggest of all absurdities is granted, we have never been able to see why anything in the Bible and other volumes of fairy tales should be rejected. The Assumption of Mary is just as true as the Ascension of Jesus, or his Miracles, Devils and Angels. Granting a God and a Pope, there is no absurdity which cannot wholeheartedly be accepted.

American hymn writers are, if nothing else, piously topical, and they have managed to put over many such titles as "Jesus is God's Atomic Bomb," and "Our Lady of Fatima." These and similar drivel have caused a shock to other devout Christians, one of them declaring "They are cheap and vulgar and bordering on blasphemy." Even a spokesman for the Salvation Army thought that "Jesus is God's Atomic Bomb" conveyed nothing at all "of a helpful nature." But they are sure to be lustily sung for all that.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

A. G. BEDANE.—Many thanks for suggestion. To you and the many other kindly inquiries, we are pleased to say that Mr. Seibert is rapidly improving in health.

Will correspondents please write on one side of the paper, and keep their letters brief. This will give everybody a chance. Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

The following periodicals are being received regularly, and can be consulted at "The Freethinker" office: THE TRUTH SEEKER (U.S.A.), COMMON SENSE (U.S.A.), THE LIBERAL (U.S.A.), THE VOICE OF FREEDOM (U.S.A., German and English), PROGRESSIVE WORLD (U.S.A.), THE NEW ZEALAND RATIONALIST, THE RATIONALIST (Australia), DER FRIEDENKER (Switzerland), DON BASILIO (Italy).

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, 17s.; half-year, 8s. 6d.; three-months, 4s. 4d.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, John Seibert, giving as long notice as possible.

## SUGAR PLUMS

A meeting to the memory of Adam Gowans Whyte, for over fifty years a director of the Rationalist Press Association Ltd., will be held at Conway Hall on Thursday, November 16th next at 3 p.m. The speakers will include Prof. A. E. Heath, the President of the Rationalist Press Association, Marjorie Bowen, H. J. Blackham and Hector Hawton, with suitable music arranged by G. C. Dowman.

The Merseyside Branch N.S.S. will have a visit from Mr. R. H. Rosetti this evening (November 5). He will speak in Cooper's Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool 6, on what promises to be an interesting subject, "Man's Animal Ancestry." There is no reason why a Christian should not get an insight into his pedigree and readers should get them to come along. The lecture begins at 7 p.m.

W. MacKee, a member of the N.S.S., succeeded in getting a debate arranged in the Stokehill Guildhouse Discussion Circle premises at Binley, Coventry, between the Rev. Father Malone, S.J. and Mr. F. A. Ridley, on "My Faith," on October 24. From reports, Mr. Ridley handled his part of the proceedings with marked efficiency, and impressed the many Roman Catholics in the large audience. There was an all-round agreement as to the high standard of the debate, and we congratulate Mr. MacKee, who worked hard behind the scenes to bring off the debate.

The new Lewisham Branch N.S.S. has acquired accommodation for Sunday evening lectures at The London and Brighton Hotel, 139, Queen's Road, Peckham, London, S.E.15, and Mr. L. Ebury, a Vice-President of the N.S.S., will give the opening lecture this evening (November 5) at 7-15. Mr. Ebury's subject is "The Rag and Bone Religion"; 54, 66, 72, 40 and 35 trans pass the door, also the 36 bus. There are some real good workers in the Branch, and all good Free-

thinkers within easy range should consider it a duty to help by giving their support to the Branch efforts.

The Birmingham Branch N.S.S. had an excellent meeting in Sati's Café last Sunday. There was a packed house, and Mr. R. H. Rosetti's lecture on "Man's Animal Ancestry" was closely followed and drew a long string of questions afterwards. Next Saturday evening the Branch holds a Whist Drive in the same building, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street, at 7 p.m. Tickets 2s. 6d. each, including refreshments.

The address on "Sex Worship" by Mr. H. Cutner last Sunday, at the Cosmopolitan Debating Society, Nottingham, attracted a crowded audience. It was listened to with the closest attention and elicited a very lively discussion. The lecture on "The Jesus Myth," given to the N.S.S. Nottingham Branch in the evening, also attracted an excellent audience and a lively discussion. Credit is due to Mr. Tom Mosley for the hard work he put in to make both meetings a success.

## THE SUPERSTITION CALLED SPIRITUALISM

### I.

ALTHOUGH most Freethinkers have been anti-Spiritualist, it must be confessed that quite a few have been taken in by "phenomena" they were unable to explain, and they therefore accepted "survival" in some shape or form. This is even the case with prominent conjurers—like the late Will Goldston who wrote a book about his "conversion," but failed therein to explain anything but his inability to fathom how certain things he saw were done.

Anyone who has a lingering doubt, that is, who believes that there is "something" in Spiritualism, should beg or borrow—best of all, buy—Joseph F. Rinn's\* devastating exposure of spiritualistic claims. I have been lucky enough to read a good many other exposures, but it is only fair to say Rinn has out-topped them all.

In the first place, he was a prominent business man with ample funds and time to devote to psychical research. Secondly, he was not like so many of us, an out-and-out believer in immortality. On the contrary, he was anxious to find genuine proofs for survival if there were any. Thirdly, he bearded the lions in their den. He went to their seances, he helped to investigate their claims, he joined the necessary Societies like the American Society of Psychical Research, the Society of American Magicians, and many others. Fourthly, he was a highly trained amateur magician, in some ways the equal of his great friend, the late Harry Houdini. Like Houdini, Rinn had iron courage, for without courage of the highest order, it would have been impossible to unmask the many expert "mediums" who often carried on their profession so successfully that they succeeded in humbugging numbers of famous scientists and men of letters. And lastly, Rinn constantly offered big money prizes to any medium who could produce genuine evidence of survival or even of such things as telepathy.

For something like 60 years, his name, often coupled with other keen investigators like Houdini, Proskauer, Dunninger, and others, was constantly before the public

\* "Sixty Years of Psychical Research" by Joseph F. Rinn. Introduction by Woolsey Teller. pp. XX-618. The Truth Seeker Co., New York, 35s. net.

as the arch-exposer of fraudulent mediums; and in this book he gives a fully documented story, thrilling and vivid, and one which will take the place of all previous exposés like those of Podmore, Abbott, Carrington, and even Houdini's famous *A Magician Among the Spirits*.

A year or so ago marked the centenary of what was called the Modern Spiritualist Movement, when two little girl named Fox startled the world with their mysterious rappings and with other phenomena. Their portraits were prominently reproduced as the two Great Heroines—I believe that they were even compared with Joan of Arc, Mme. Curie, the Brontes, and Florence Nightingale. Only a little more and they will emerge as the equal of the Mother of God.

Podmore and many other investigators, annihilated their claims to serious consideration, but it was of no use. Even when they confessed that they had completely hoodwinked everybody (except the elder sister who exploited them) they were not believed. It is true that they retracted their confession of humbugging the public, but that is about all most of us knew of the sordid business.

Mr. Rinn gives the authentic details. When he saw Kates Fox Jencken in 1888 giving one of her seances, "she was so drunk that the seance was an absolute failure." Drink also helped to ruin Margaretta Fox Kane, but it was when she was sober that she gave a story to the *New York Herald* of September 24, 1888. She—

purposes to deliver just one lecture, and no more, which shall shame and dumbfound all Spiritualist frauds who have not repented of their nebulous ways. She will reveal, one after another, the methods by which willing believers have been briskly duped and robbed, and will demonstrate how simple, natural and easy are most of their methods. . . . "Another sister of mine," said Mrs. Kane, "Leah, damn her, made me take up with it. She's my damnable enemy. . . . Yes, I'm going to expose Spiritualism from its foundation. . . . I loathe the thing I've been. I would say to Leah when she wanted me to give a seance, 'You're driving me to Hell.' Then the next day, I would drown my remorse in wine. I was too honest to remain a medium. . . . I was driven again into Spiritualism. I gave exhibitions with my darling sister Katie. I knew then that every effect produced by us was absolute fraud. . . . I have sat alone on a gravestone that the spirits of those who slept underneath might come to me. I have tried to obtain one sign. No! the dead shall not return. . . . God has never ordered it. . . ."

She was asked by the reporter what she was going to expose? "First the rappings." Miss Kane smiled, and he heard the rappings apparently from under the floor but could not determine from where they came. "Is it all a 'trick'?" she was asked. And her answer was, "Absolutely."

And what did Katie Fox Jencken say? She was asked whether she denied what her sister said about Spiritualism? "No," was her reply. "Spiritualism was a humbug from beginning to end. It is the biggest humbug of the century." She was asked, "And the finding of the bones in the cellar at Hydesville?" "All humbug, every bit of it."

This is particularly interesting to me, for in a debate I had some years ago with Mr. M. Barbanell, who was then, I believe, the Editor of *Psychic News*, he was furiously angry with me for saying that the story of the bones in the cellar was sheer fraud. He actually asked me for my evidence! Well, here it is—from the mouth of this great pioneer of Modern Spiritualism.

Katie's fellow Spiritualists were horrified at the exposure, and tried to buy off her silence, but "she scornfully refused." Margaretta appeared on the stage in October, 1888, and read out, "There is no such thing

as a spirit manifestation. That I have been instrumental in perpetuating the fraud of Spiritualism upon a too confiding public, many of you already know. I hope God Almighty will forgive me and those who are still silly enough to believe in Spiritualism. It's a trick. There's no truth in it!"

Mr. Rinn gives copious details of the whole affair, and it seems to me that this ought to smash for ever the claims made for the famous sisters. But will it? Not on your life. The average Spiritualist will carry on as ever—he will even repeat the usual lies about the Fox sisters which have done duty for 100 years and are always repeated in the standard histories written by the orthodox.

I knew when I exposed the lying story about the return of the spirit of poor Irwin after the R101 disaster, that it would have no effect whatever among believers. Even a man like Ian Coster, who knew perfectly well what had happened, wrote an article about it in the *Leader* as if the spirit's return was a fact—or at least it read as if there was a mystery which we unbelievers had to explain. There was no mystery. It was sheer, undiluted fraud.

Mr. Rinn has done a service to the cause of truth in giving the details of the confessions of the Fox sisters, for they were not easy to get; but, of course, so long as Spiritualists will not read his book, they can snap their fingers at the exposure. Like the Roman Catholic sheep who are not allowed to read anything against their Faith.

The celebrated "mind reading" acts of Stuart Cumberland and Washington Irving Bishop, as well as of the Zancigs, are carefully dealt with by Mr. Rinn; and if any reader imagines that there must be "something" in what the Piddingtons did on the radio—something even a wee bit telepathic—he should study the careful explanations given in this fascinating book. The author ridicules most of, if not all, the conclusions of Dr. J. B. Rhine, who is accepted now as an authority of standing on telepathy.

But there is so much of interest in this book that I must devote two or three more articles to it.

H. CUTNER.

## CRIPPS'S THEOLOGY

THERE have been many comments in these columns from time to time, on the religious views of Sir Stafford Cripps. It so happens that his retirement from the political scene almost coincided with the publication in booklet form of a sermon that he delivered a few months ago in St. Paul's Cathedral; the time is, therefore, perhaps opportune for a brief consideration of the attitude of mind, and the line of thought, which Sir Stafford Cripps has long made his own.

The crucial passage in the sermon, which is entitled *The Spiritual Crisis* (Mowbray; 1s.), is, I think, this discussion of the present position of mankind, particularly with reference to the international situation that we are now facing:—

"I cannot myself imagine how anyone—even the most courageous and intelligent—could face such a responsibility with confidence and with hope if he were able to rely only upon himself. What human being or group of human beings has the power and quality, unaided, to emerge with safety and in wisdom from such a situation? Uncontrolled materialism, rising in a crescendo of power, must crash in self-destruction. So long as power is the

principal aim of competing groups of mankind, the tensions of uncontrolled power are too great to persist indefinitely without a tragic release. It is with this fundamental situation that we Christians are primarily concerned, rather than with its more detailed developments in particular technical, political, or social spheres."

That is a statement of a point of view. It is well, I think, that Freethinkers should understand that such a point of view exists, and is held by responsible, intelligent people. After all, many students of the political scene would hold that Sir Stafford Cripps was the keenest intelligence in the upper ranks of the Labour Movement, and his attitude to religious matters has always been (at any rate, in his own opinion) directly related to his political philosophy.

In the sermon which I am discussing, Sir Stafford went on to consider his own view of the nature of man. He suggested that the view that man is just an animal like other animals, "but living in a more elaborate kind of man-devised jungle," was a view that was tenable, but tenable with difficulty. He added that most men sensed that there was something within them greater and better than material strength and physical force. "We cannot prove it, and yet the fact is more real than the things we can see and touch." As an example of this, he instanced the fact that everyone must, time and again, have experienced a struggle within himself, between good and evil.

Note that I am not saying that Sir Stafford Cripps's theology necessarily provides answers to all the riddles of the universe. I do not think that it does. But when a public man, occupying an honoured position in political life, thus analyses his religious beliefs, I think that he deserves to be taken seriously, if only to be proved wrong. And, as I said at the beginning, the fact that the booklet appeared at the moment of Sir Stafford Cripps's political retirement gives a curious topicality to what he had to say in it.

JOHN ROWLAND.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### A FOOTNOTE TO A RECENT CONTROVERSY

Sir,—May I be permitted a line or two of comment on your note ("To Correspondents") in the issue of the *The Freethinker*, dated October 22? You state that the many who have written to you regarding my recent changed point of view have, for the most part, tended to resent my depreciation of Spencer and J. M. Robertson. With regard to the dullness or otherwise of Herbert Spencer there can, in my opinion, be no doubt. Concerning J. M. Robertson it may be worth quoting a friend of mine (once a believer in the Myth Theory of Christian origins) who told me—years ago—that it was only when he had read Robertson's extremely bad Shakespearean criticism that he had the first twinges of doubt as to the validity of his Biblical criticism!

One other point. You say that many were puzzled as to how a belief in God could bring peace to the world. Surely the puzzled writers have neglected one point which I tried very hard to emphasise—viz., that what is needed is what I called a change of heart. Politics and economics will not, in my opinion, suffice. It may be that religion will not suffice either, in which case we are indeed in a parlous plight. But at least it seems worth while trying the one thing that may make men see the warning light before it is too late.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

### CHAPTER AND VERSE WANTED

Sir.—May I appeal to Mr. H. Cutner to play the game. He was asked by Mrs. Matson for the source of a quotation he alleged was from Karl Marx, and he answered with a quibble worthy only of a Christian Clergyman or a Democratic Politician.

Mr. Cutner is fond of airing his political prejudice, now let him give us evidence of his monastical erudition by answering

Mrs. Matson's question: "Chapter and verse?"—if he can. In fairness, please publish this short note.—Yours, etc.,  
A. V. MONK.

### FREETHINKERS, THE ATOM BOMB, AND THE CLASS WAR

SIR,—To judge by the congratulatory letters received on my letter on these issues, there are others who refuse to accept Mr. Cutner's apology for the atom bomb. Read my letter again, Mr. Cutner, and you will see I did not argue that you were "entirely in favour of the atom bomb," but only in certain "ideological circumstances." I quoted your own words. "The whole world" is a large place. The whole Asiatic world, all 800,000,000 of them, are aghast and indignant at the ruthless savagery of the American attacks on a small nation. The "muddy statement" referred to was not the one quoted in Mr. Cutner's reply. "Religion was replaced by the class war." The meaning of this still baffles me. Also, Mr. Cutner did not answer my challenge on the words of Karl Marx. Why not? Now frankly, I do not think that this way of retorting on a critic is worthy of a Freethinker. I think we should face our issues fairly and squarely, whether religious or political. I think that as Freethinkers we should acknowledge the freedom of any nation, as well as individual, to decide on its own way of life, and give a fair hearing to both sides in a dispute. This, in the case of Korea, has not been done. Although this is not a discussion on Communist principles, perhaps the editor will allow the following quotation from Marx: "Our task is to make the revolution permanent until all more or less possessing classes have been displaced from domination." (Address to the Comm. League, 1850.) And Lenin in *State and Revolution*: "We set ourselves the ultimate aim of abolishing all organised and systematic violence, all use of violence against man in general."

May I quote my own letter?—"An eye for an eye, and both are blind. We must find a better way and find it soon and Freethinkers should be among the pioneers."—Yours, etc.

(Mrs.) G. MATSON.

[Mr. H. Cutner writes: When Mrs. Matson quotes Marx: "Our task is to make the revolution permanent," she is confirming what I said. I strongly object to quoting me away from my context. With regard to Korea, she should write to the United Nations.]

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Platt Fields).—Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—7-45 p.m.: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (Alexandra Park Gates).—Wednesday: Messrs. C. McCALL, L. SMITH, R. BILLINGS and G. WOODCOCK. (St. Mary's Gate).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: Mr. G. WOODCOCK.

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

Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Science Room, Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: J. M. CAMERON, B.A., "Problems of the Philosophy of History."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall Library, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Tuesday, November 7, 7 p.m.: MARTIN DAVIDSON, D.Sc., F.R.A.S., "Has Christian Modernism Any Future?"

Glasgow Branch (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: H. O. V. HOPKINS, "The Importance of World Citizenship."

Kingston Branch N.S.S. ("The Fighting Cock"), London Road, Kingston-on-Thames.—7-30 p.m.: A Lecture.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: Mr. C. BRADLAUGH BONNER, "Free-thought—a Positive Guide to Living."

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12, Shaw Street, Liverpool, 6).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. R. H. ROSETTI (London), "Man's Animal Ancestry."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: ERIC A. WILDMAN, "Corporal Punishment: The Proven Antidote for Delinquency."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: H. L. BEALES, M.A., "The Survival of Privilege."

## SCIENCE, RELIGION AND MORALS V—THE BIBLE

(1) Most religions have some "sacred" literature which they regard as specially inspired and Christianity has its Bible.

(2) This is a curious anthology of very diverse sections which has been combined as canonical for many centuries past.

(3) It is not one single book, like the Koran, and some parts are accepted by one church and rejected by other churches.

(4) The Roman Church accepts the Old Testament Apocrypha while most other Christian churches reject it.

(5) The Greek Church has its own canons and translations, while all church reject the New Testament Apocrypha.

(6) It is difficult therefore for any enquirer to ascertain what is and what is not universally canonical.

(7) To this is added an extraordinary diversity of arbitrary decisions collectively by churches or individually.

(8) All that need be done here is to indicate quite briefly what seems to be the lowest common denominator.

(9) In doing this obvious contradictions and absurdities in these Bible narratives will be conveniently ignored.

(10) If some of the most important of these are referred to later it will be for purposes of illustration.

(11) It was to be expected that the Christian Bible would be the subject of a vast literature.

(12) This has been so ever since its inception and during the present century criticism has become intense.

(13) This has shown that a literal acceptance of its statements is not reasonable for those who study it.

(14) Nevertheless much Christian thought and popular teaching retains a quite unjustifiable literalness of statement.

(15) This has a psychical purpose in inculcating the acceptance of the Gospel Story in uncultured minds.

(16) One inquires, however, what is the attitude of the average educated and intelligent Christian to their Bible?

(17) The Old Testament is a heterogeneous collection of ancient history, prophesies, sagas, poetry and fiction.

(18) Through these records of "the Chosen People" there runs nationalistic egotism and Messianic hopes.

(19) It is in parts historic, in others loftily poetic, in others mythological, often crude and sometimes lewd.

(20) The thread running through it seems to be a passionate belief in national destiny for divine purposes.

(21) The God of the Old Testament is often a primitive, savage, revengeful God advocating wholesale slaughter.

(22) The characters depicted in these accounts are often crude, very erratic and frequently erotic.

(23) It seems that most educated Christians to-day agree that the Old Testament embodies primitive ideas.

(24) They admit that many of the stories are allegorical and that they should not be taken literally.

(25) Through it runs a persistency of racial and national egotism which has continued to the present times.

(26) In the Christian canonical Bible this Jewish Old Testament was linked up with the New Testament.

(27) This incongruity was noticed from the beginning but the connection was a concession to sentiment.

(28) Christianity was originated by Jews among Jews and the dominating national theme had to be continued.

(29) The Messianic aspirations of the Old Testament were developed into the Parousia of the New Testament.

(30) The incongruities of this conjunction are far more obvious to critics to-day than they were formerly.

(31) The New Testament is also a heterogeneous anthology in both its theology and in its doctrines.

(32) Historically the most important parts are the three synoptic gospels, herein called the Gospel Story.

(33) The Gospel of John is certainly later in date and introduces a large element of Gnostic theology.

(34) The Acts of the Apostles is the alleged history of the post-Jesus period but is open to much criticism.

(35) The Epistles are didactic rather than historical, while the quaint Revelation may be the earliest in date.

(36) Modern literature on the Bible is already far too voluminous and very much of it is mere repetition.

(37) All that need be considered for present purposes is the basic Gospel Story and the fundamental Teaching.

(38) Even to-day reputable historians seem to value a vivid and striking narrative higher than facts.

(39) One quite recent one states "History is the record not of what has happened but of what has mattered."

(40) He emphasises this attitude by continuing "It is not the facts we seek but their meaning for ourselves."

(41) This interpretative method seems to have been that of the unknown authors who compiled the Gospel Story.

(42) While the necessity of some interpretative bias has been already admitted here, facts seem of primary importance.

(43) This personal method of writing history according to the meaning events have for the writer is here called Subjective History.

(44) Paul, in his epistles, is more straightforward and boldly admits that his is subjective history (Gal. I, 12).

(45) He, however, claims for it a Theopneustic Authority and he was not the last of such claimants.

(46) The course for a reasonable and impartial inquiry is to find a basis of fact in this subjective history.

(47) As these notes are not primarily either historical criticism or interpretation, difficulties can be by-passed.

(48) Here what may be termed the broad basic outline of the Gospel Story will be granted for purposes of discussion.

(49) Even this basis is difficult to determine when critics demolish it and an acting bishop repudiates it.

(50) The didactic and ethical parts of the Gospel Story will subsequently be accepted more literally.

Books recommended: "Encyclopedia Biblica,"—A full detailed compilation edited by a Church of England canon (Cheyne).

W. EDWARD MEADS.

The Freethought Case simply and concisely put

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