

# THE FREETHINKER

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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### Christian Origins in the New Testament

SOME little time back, the present writer alluded briefly to the various and conflicting conceptions of Christian origins, of how it all began, in the New Testament. In the following paragraphs we propose to amplify our treatment of this intriguing and complicated question. Christian origins resemble an intricate cross-word puzzle. However, we are not left entirely in the dark: the critical history of the New Testament, which now goes back continuously for about two centuries, whilst itself not free from absurdities, has, at least, established certain facts as basis for further investigation.

Christianity did not, of course, start with any written account of its own origins. All the available evidence indicates that the earliest Christian movement was a "revivalist" movement which impatiently awaited the end of the world and the coming of the Messiah in Glory. In so far as the first Christian congregations had a "Bible," a Holy Book, it was the Hebrew "Bible," our "Old Testament."

Our "New Testament" came into existence round about the middle of the second century, when the existing canon, which at first, was not identical in all the churches, first came into existence. Moreover, the "New Testament" did not originate in, or with, the orthodox Catholic Church. It originated with the heretical sects upon the fringe of Christianity. The "Gnostics" were the first Christian theologians. The actual "first edition" of the distinctively Christian Bible, our "New" Testament, was produced about the year 140 A.D. by the Gnostic arch-heretic Marcion, the founder of a rival dualistic Church which lasted well into the Middle Ages. In reply to Marcion, the Catholic Church, which excommunicated Marcion in A.D. 144—the first *certain* date in the history of the Christian Church—produced its own orthodox "New" Testament, at first with some local variations. The new Christian "Bible" included, as I suggested in my previous article, at least four interpretations of Christian origins all of which are flatly contradictory with each other.

The original "New Testament" of Marcion, the actual first Christian "Bible" has not survived, no doubt not by accident, but its contents are known: ten "Epistles" of Paul and one Gospel. The character of Marcion's Gospel has been hotly disputed. Was it a bowdlerised—or rather Marcionised—version of "Luke," which is the majority view of present-day critical opinion, or was it actually written by Marcion himself as, for example, Dr. Couchoud, the eminent French critic has persuasively argued? Unless and until some eminent archaeologist stumbles upon a copy, the controversy is not likely to be very conclusive.

With regard, however, to the rest of Marcion's Bible, the Epistles of "Paul," we are on firmer ground. One of the most revolutionary and, in our submission, one of the most probable results of modern critical research into Christian origins may be summarised by saying that "Paul" was an early heretic, in the unexpurgated original

perhaps a pre-Marcionite "Marcion," whom the heretics succeeded in forcing upon orthodox Christianity. Our "Paul" is a legendary figure, first presumably "edited" by Marcion, then "re-edited" in the interests of orthodoxy by the Catholic Church. Even in the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr, the leading apologist of the Church of Rome, never refers to Paul nor ever quotes his writings; as late as A.D. 200, Tertullian refers to him as "the apostle of the heretics," and our canonical "second Epistle of Peter," a post-Marcion forgery, warns its readers against his dangerous heresies. So much for "The Apostle to the Gentiles"! "Our"—viz., the orthodox Catholic New Testament, which the Church produced in reply to that of Marcion, consisted of our Four Gospels—that of "John" seems to have been included rather later than the others—plus a, no doubt, much "edited" version of the Marcionite "Paul," with the addition of several orthodox forgeries, put in to make "the apostle of the heretics" talk like a good Catholic saint! (In one of these forgeries—Timothy, vi., 20, "Paul" is made to denounce by name Marcion's heretical book entitled "The Antitheses.") After a good deal of controversy, the Apocalypse (our "Revelations") of John, plus a number of minor controversial epistles, mostly directed against current heresies and ascribed to primitive apostles, were also included in the canon.

Such is our New Testament. Now let us glance at its contents.

Chronologically perhaps older than the Gospels, the Epistles of "Paul" are intricate theological studies written by Gnostic theologians; for they seem to be the collective work of a school rather than the frequently self-contradictory assertions of one individual writer. (Who "Paul" actually was, whether he had any hand in composing the works that bear his name is a perhaps insoluble question in the present state of the evidence. If our above hypothesis is correct, the eagerness of subsequent writers to usurp his name could be used as an argument for his historical existence and celebrity in the circles which originally read the Epistles attributed to him.)

Be that as it may, the "Pauline" Epistles indicate two main characteristics: they are completely cosmopolitan in their outlook and conception of their Deity "in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised." And in their original unexpurgated form they probably knew nothing of any historical Jesus—in our present "edited" text such references have, of course, been rather obviously and clumsily inserted by their Catholic editors. That "Paul," "the second Founder of Christianity," never quotes from the Jesus of the Gospels is, of course, common knowledge.

When we turn from the Epistles to the Gospels, we are immediately confronted with an initial and a fundamental disharmony between the first three "Synoptic" Gospels compiled from common sources and the "Fourth Gospel" of "John." The first three represent the biography of a man or, more exactly, of a man in process of being turned into a God. Whereas the "Fourth Gospel" is the work exclusively of a theologian who describes a God paying a

passing visit to this mundane world below—the original Greek has a transitory sense—the Logos is, essentially a bird of passage who comes and goes in accordance with a pre-arranged plan and for the achievement of certain predestined ends. Those who seek for “The Jesus of History” in the pages of our New Testament will have to make the best they can of the material provided by the three Synoptic Gospels; they will get none from “Paul” or “John.” “Extremes meet:” “John the Theologian,” as the Church styles the author of the Fourth Gospel, agrees entirely with the modern mythical school! For he gives us a God, a God pure and simple, a God who was never anything else but a God even when he appeared in the flesh and blood of human existence.

Lastly, but by no means least, among our sources for Christian origins we have the Apocalypse also ascribed—heaven only knows why, for no two books could be more dissimilar in style or content—to the author of the Fourth Gospel. In this strange book we obtain an entirely different angle upon Christian origins; one which is absolutely unique, for the Apocalypse represents (what would now be termed) a Manifesto of revolutionary “Zionism” directed against the persecuting Roman Empire, which is soon destined to be overthrown by the terrifying intervention of a celestial Messiah, a Warrior-King, who bears absolutely no resemblance to any Jesus depicted anywhere else in the literature of early Christianity and whom the author does not appear to regard as an historical person. Here, if one penetrates the bizarre oriental imagery (about which so much has been talked) one gets a fascinating glimpse of an otherwise vanished chapter in Christian origins; a “Zionist” anti-Roman origin which a later respectable Christianity has allowed to fall into oblivion.

Our New Testament describes Christian origins from several angles; angles so varied that it is not even certain if what they describe is the same set of events.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### CHINA'S PREHISTORIC CENTURIES

THE mysterious land of China is now exceedingly topical. Innumerable descriptions of that Far Eastern domain have been published which contain much myth and legend and, even now, there is considerable uncertainty concerning its past. An important, if incomplete *History of China* penned by Wolfram Eberhard of the University of California (Routledge, 1950), is primarily a sociological study, but the unending invasions and civil conflicts which have convulsed China since the dawn of history are unavoidably surveyed. We are now assured by despondent thinkers that the world has gone mad, while the revolts, encroachments, assassinations, wars and treacheries in the Orient, confirm the fear that mankind was never sane. In any case, Chinese history proves that armed conflicts, whether civil, defensive or aggressive, have most severely smitten the peasantry who bore the brunt of the taxation, and shed their blood in these conflicts.

Recent research has rendered many of the earlier European accounts of Cathay obsolete. As our author, who writes as an expert, avers: “Now that we have a better knowledge of China's neighbours, the Turks, Mongols, Tibetans, Tunguses, Tai, not confined to the narratives of Chinese, who always speak only of ‘barbarians,’ we are better able to realise how closely China has been associated with her neighbours from the first day of her history to the present time; how greatly she is indebted to them and how much she has given them.”

Eberhard opines that the antiquity of Chinese civilisation has been greatly overrated, and that fairly reliable testimony dates back to circa 1400 B.C. Still, many millenia since, China was the habitat of an extinct people—*Sinanthropus Pekinensis*—whose remains have been found near Peking. They were quite distinct from living races and resembled the ape-man of Java. Anthropologists, however, think that even in the far remote period in which they lived, they betray characteristics special to the yellow race.

Peking man was a cave dweller acquainted with the art of making fire, but using very rude stone artifacts in his hunting expeditions and also in his home life. Thus far, no unbroken skeletons have been found and apparently he deposited certain bones in separate graves. Our author notes that: “This custom which is found among primitive peoples in other parts of the world suggests the conclusion that the Peking man already had religious notions. We have no knowledge yet of the length of time the Peking man may have inhabited the Far East. His first traces are attributed to a million years ago, and he may have flourished in 500,000 B.C.”

Evidently in Peking man's time, the climate of North China and Mongolia was warmer and moister than it is to-day. The old river courses and lake beds may still be traced in now arid regions, while rhinoceroses, elephants and several extinct species have left their remains in strata some 50,000 years old. In later deposits, the implements of a hunting people have been discovered, but no indisputable human remains of this period have so far been found.

At a later period, approximately assigned 25,000 B.C., the remains of a different human type have been revealed in deposits resting above those that yielded the relics of Peking man. These prehistoric people were apparently not Mongolian, and it is suggested that they were probably akin to the hairy Ainu who still survive in Northern Japan. They were still in the Stone Age, but some of their implements had improved. Then, we gather, they disappear. “probably because they were absorbed into various populations of Central and Northern Asia. Remains of them have been found in badly explored graves in Northern Korea.”

Judging from the accumulation of loess—loamy deposits in ancient river valleys such as those in the vicinity of the Rhone and Rhine—indicate that once well-watered regions in Asia have become arid. But our knowledge of this period is little more than a blank, but about 4,000 B.C. a distinctly Mongolian people of Neolithic culture emerge into view. These primitive people were cattle breeders who also raised crops. This, Eberhard observes, appears remarkable at so early an epoch. “It is a fact, however,” he declares, “that pure pastoral nomadism is exceptional. That normal pastoral nomads have always added a little farming to their cattle breeding in order to secure the needed additional food, and above all, fodder in winter.”

At this time, other areas of what is now China and its environs, in the then Neolithic or New Stone Age, cultures have come to light which are widely divergent in character. The axes and other implements revealed as far as the coasts of Korea and Japan, display clear evidence of independent evolution. Remains of these cultures show that they penetrated to Eastern India, Australasia, Indonesia and Melanesia. Indeed, about 4,000 B.C., there seems to have been “an extensive mutual penetration of the various cultures all over the Far East, including Japan, which in the Palaeolithic Age was apparently without or almost without settlers.”

At about 2500 B.C., recent researches make Eastern history less problematical. The long accepted tales of philosopher kings who instructed their subjects in the elements of civilisation have been discredited by the discovery that a considerable number of local cultures, each evolved more or less independently. One culture was centred in North-East China and South Mongolia. This comprised hunters, potters, perhaps rude agriculturists and swineherds, while a northern culture in the Shansi district was nomadic, and its tribes were the ancestors of the Mongolians.

Further west were communities more advanced who cultivated wheat and millet, domesticated horses, and were seemingly the ancestors of the later Turks. Even further west dwelt the forerunners of the Tibetans whose flocks of sheep, grazing on the uplands, made their owners a people of wandering shepherds.

Four further cultures flourished in the south. One, the Liao, seems never to have risen above the hunting stage. The Yao, resided further east and were originally extremely primitive, but later they blended with the agrarian Tai in the south, cultivated rice, and became the preponderating part of the Siamese population.

The Yang Shao culture is distinguished by its highly superior pottery and its class divisions. Only recently recovered, its artifacts were of bone and stone; metal to them was quite unknown. This culture was confined to the mountainous regions of Northern and Western China. Another culture dating from about 2000 B.C.—the Lung Shan—was only revealed by archæologists about a decade ago, and its people appear to have been the predecessors of subsequent Chinese civilisation.

The successive dynasties of historical times and their literature and art are all surveyed in Eberhard's volume. Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are also adequately described, while the sketch maps and illustrations add to the value of this excellent study.

T. F. PALMER.

### "WALKS IN LONDON"

IF anyone thinks he knows his London, he should beg, borrow, or—well, borrow for keeps, Mr. William Kent's latest book on the Great Metropolis, *Walks in London* (Staples Press, 7s. 6d.) and learn a little more of the fascinating story of its great historical and literary associations.

Mr. Kent is a guide who appears to have let nothing slip by his minutely observant eye. Armed with his own archæological knowledge, which is pretty extensive, he quotes where necessary from a hundred and one other keen London lovers, and on these intensely interesting walks, he makes the very stones tell their history and, in many cases, an amazing story it is.

He has confined himself mostly to London proper, and has divided his excursions into eight walks, beginning with St. Paul's Cathedral and its vicinity. The second walk is "a Circular Tour from Ludgate Hill to Ludgate Circus" and those of us who have had, in the course of our work, to traverse almost all the ground Mr. Kent covers, will be astonished at how much we have missed. Every corner, every building, has wonderful associations, all duly recorded by his indefatigable pen. We are apt to forget that the bare mention, for example, in our histories of English literature that Oliver Goldsmith wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield* tells us, in actual fact, very little. After all, the book had to have a publisher as well—and for those who love (as I do) bibliographical details, there

are many pages devoted to this kind of out-of-the-way information that only a book-lover as well as a London lover can provide. Mr. Kent must have gone to immense trouble and pains to record these details, and one stands amazed at his wide and extensive reading.

Round about the Temple, too, everything is of the greatest interest. For example:—

"We enter by Tudor Street, which runs west off New Bridge Street, Blackfriars. The gate, dated 1887, shows Pegasus, the flying horse with two wings, the badge of the Inner Temple. It was its predecessor that Dickens introduced into *Great Expectations* (Chapter XLIV). Pip was stopped here and shown a note endorsed "Please read this here." Inside, by the light of the watchman's lantern, he read, in Wemmick's handwriting, "Don't go home!" Dickens says that Pip seldom came in at Whitefriars Gate, which makes it surprising that he was successfully stopped. Perhaps, however, Wemmick had left a similar note at the other entrances to the Temple—one in Devereux Court, and two in Fleet Street."

The book is packed with such observations, and they show how keenly Mr. Kent has read, determined to let nothing slip by. With every step, one gets an extraordinary grasp of almost everything in these walks behind which is so much of London's literary and historical story; and those who have had the pleasure of following Mr. Kent as a guide have always marvelled at his nearly infallible memory.

And it is the same with so many other parts of London. Visitors from abroad or the provinces will find *Walks in London* their best friend if they want to explore it. Step by step, Mr. Kent conducts his readers in thought or (if you like) in person, through the wonderful story of London—Blackfriars to Cornhill, around Holborn Viaduct, into Gray's Inn and out of Lincoln's Inn, round about Trafalgar Square, and the glorious river Thames, with the entertaining talk of an antiquary for whom there is nothing greater than the heart and soul of the great city of London.

There are, in addition, twenty beautifully produced illustrations, and the book is extremely well printed and in a handy format.

For visitors to the Festival of Britain who have time to explore it, *Walks in London*, under Mr. Kent's expert guidance, would be what I should call, if this were not a Freethought journal, a "godsend." They will learn more about the Great City in a week than most Londoners appear to know in a lifetime.

H. CUTNER.

The Jew is an old trunk which has produced two branches that have covered all the earth; I mean Mohammedanism and Christianity. Or rather, she is a mother who has brought two daughters into the world, who have overwhelmed her with a thousand wounds, because in matters of religion the nearest are the greatest enemies; but, however badly she has been treated, she cannot cease to boast of having given them birth.—MONTESQUIEU.

**PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION.** By Frank Kenyon. Price 5s.; postage 3d.

**ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today.** By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

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**WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD?** By C. G. L. Du Cann. An inquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 6d.; postage 1d.

### ACID DROPS

A pitiful cry comes straight from the heart of "a Priest" in the *Guardian*—he wants to know how to reply to a Rationalist who claims that the Atonement is "absurd"—for how could God Almighty sacrifice himself to God Almighty? And even if it was as a mere man that Christ Jesus sacrificed himself, this meant that Christians were accepting a human sacrifice "to propitiate God." We fully sympathise with this "priest," especially as it is quite impossible rationally to answer the Rationalist. He ought to come over to us—or swallow Roman Catholicism. Like Newman, he will find no answers but perfect rest in the bosom of the Church of Rome.

Speaking on religious education at the Aberdeen Training College, the Rev. Dr. W. M. R. Rusk insisted that the most important thing in religious education was "at what age it was put over." For example, he claimed that no child understands the Lord's Prayer under eleven—and he might well have added that most people, including the Rev. Dr. himself, do not understand it either. We are always intrigued at some bright young teacher trying to explain to a perplexed child what is meant by "lead us not into temptation"—in language which ought to be intelligible. Still, there is one way which brings outstanding success. Deliver the Lord's Prayer in a reverent, parsonic voice, and look as miserable as possible. This never fails with Christian audiences.

What is the finest proof of God's existence? This was the poser put by the Rev. L. Redfern, B.D., the other day, and the answer is—"What follows when men deny it." Unfortunately, we cannot gather from his sermon exactly what does follow except that the materialist "is alien to the profoundest experiences of human life." Exactly how Mr. Redfern infers this considering he is not a Materialist we do not know; still, it always sounds well in church or chapel and the pious no doubt feel a glow of exultation that they at least are not Materialists.

The real truth is, of course, something quite different. If Christians—and Unitarians—really believe, then it is they who are completely stultified in "profound" human experience. They are so often uttering drivel while grovelling on their knees that they miss the cheerful things in life. Like "Our Lord," who was never known to smile, they constantly dwell on what is going to happen when they die, and wonder if their fate is going to be Heaven or Hell. But fortunately most people are not too religious.

Congratulations to Batley, Yorkshire, the residents of which voted in favour of Sunday cinemas. The bigots got the usual big hiding and the Batley people can now enjoy "the pictures" on the Lord's Day in peace. We would wager, in addition, that 50 per cent. at least of the bigots will now take the chance of also seeing them.

We do not often deal with specific Baptist utterances, but one can only wonder how any people with the slightest reputation for sanity could have listened to Dr. Williamson's Presidential Address to the Baptist Assembly without laughing. It was, as one could expect, packed with Jesus, Jesus Christ, and Christ Jesus, to say nothing of the Cross, the Universal Saviour, the Holy Love of God's Son, and all the dear old clichés which have done duty for sermons for a thousand years. And the proof of Calvary—"Apart from Calvary we cannot be sure that God is as good as He is great"—settles the whole problem for ever.

The Pope and Dr. Williamson should shake hands for they make it difficult to judge which can beat the other in drivel.

The Archdeacon of Bradford has hit the nail on the head when he says it is not "the doctrinaire godlessness of Russia" which is Christendom's "deadliest enemy" but something nearer home—our own "practical Atheism." Yet all this militant Christian could advise against such a deadly enemy was "a knowledge of the Bible!" If he knew anything whatever about Atheism, he would know that in general, almost any Atheist could whack a Christian into smithereens when it comes to knowing his Bible. The Archdeacon must try again.

"Worship" should be the "operative" word in religious education, declared Mr. F. J. Wolfenden, the Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, recently. Not so much religious instruction, Church history, or doctrine, but *worship*. And this was because it required a good deal of concentration and effort properly and reverently to worship. "Teach the child to worship" he declared—see that he worships "at all stages." This would lead the children "to the glory of God." People were "worshipful beings"—and no doubt nothing would make gentlemen like Mr. Wolfenden feel more good than the whole nation grovelling in worship to his own imaginary Deity. Fortunately for our sanity, there is very little of his kind of worship in the country, and so long as history and science are taught there never again can be.

The first "new aided school completed since the war" is St. Wilfrid's Church Primary School, which cost £53,000—rather a lot of money to perpetuate primeval superstition and out-of-date theology. The money was raised in various ways but, according to the Rev. H. H. Tarrant, it was "God who has richly blessed our efforts"—though it is quite obvious the Almighty never contributed a penny. He let other people pay the piper and now wants, no doubt, to call the tune and get all the credit for both. The Bishop of Chichester naturally affirmed that "true education must always be founded on religion"—otherwise he and his like would lose their jobs. But, once again, we must insist that so long as science and history are taught, true religion won't have an earthly. Even children must guffaw to hear the science master trying to square his subjects with the Bible.

In proof of this take a long letter to the *Catholic Times* in which the writer tries to account for "leakages." She has nothing but praise for the way *general* subjects are taught, but when it comes to religion, it is quite another matter. And this applies "as much to nuns as to Catholic lay teachers." The writer complains that more emphasis is laid on "the horror of hell" and on the "hatred of the Devil" than on the "joy of Heaven" and the "love of God." Of course, for us the whole caboodle is just ignorance—that is, nobody, nun or priest or layman knows anything whatever of God, Devil, Hell, or Heaven; but when a Catholic (of all people) complains at the wrong way religion is taught it proves its utter futility—and humbug.

A "Grammar School Teacher" in the *Manchester Evening News* has sent out a howl of dismay. Only ten minutes are allowed for religion each day in most schools—how can we hope for decent children when religion is treated so badly! We wish this gentleman would explain why practically all prisoners in our gaols are religious? Where are the non-religious? Outside?

# "THE FREETHINKER"

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## TO CORRESPONDENTS

Many thanks to all correspondents who so kindly continue to send us useful cuttings.

Will correspondents kindly note to address all communications in connection with "The Freethinker" to: "The Editor," and not to any particular person. Of course, private communications can be sent to any contributor.

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

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.

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.

Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the Office by Friday morning.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Readers may see this notice just in time to be present at Wanstead House, The Green, Wanstead, E. 11, on Thursday evening, May 24, when Mr. J. M. Alexander will lecture on "Psychology and Religion" at 7-30. The proceedings are under the auspices of the West Ham Branch, N.S.S., which has a promising contact in Wanstead, and solicits the support of all readers within range.

The Annual Dinner of the Rationalist Press Association, which took place on May 17, at the Connaught Rooms, was a very happy affair. There was an excellent dinner, and the speeches by Mr. R. H. S. Crossman, M.P., Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner, and Mr. Beale, together with that of the Chairman, Prof. A. E. Heath, were both witty and provocative. In the dancing which followed, both old and young proved how enjoyable such a function could be. We noticed a number of members of the N.S.S. present, including Mr. R. H. Rosetti, Mr. Frank Kenyon, Mr. E. W. Shaw, Mr. P. C. King, and Mr. H. Cutner.

It is passing strange that people who want to get married in church are now complaining that the fees are too high. Our contemporary, *Picture Post*, has published a few letters from very disgruntled bridegrooms who want all the limelight they think that they ought to have from a church ceremony—for nothing. They expect the vicar, the organ, the choir, the bells and the verger to be at the appointed time ready to help make the wedding as spectacular as possible for the "love of God," and they shudder at the "inescapable" church fees. Perhaps if the fees were all much stiffer, prospective brides and bridegrooms would find there was literally no advantage in a church wedding and go over to a registry office. After all, it is the civil marriage which is the legal one, not the religious ceremony.

## SPECIAL—TO READERS OF "THE FREETHINKER"

IN 1890 in Victoria Park, London, I gave my first lecture from a National Secular Society platform. The story is told in more detail in my "Almost an Autobiography" and I am here concerned with the other end stretching from 1890 to 1951. That covers over sixty years, the major part of any man's life—with the exception of Bible heroes.

Thus sixty years of my life have been spent on active service, in the cause of Freethought as lecturer, author, organiser, and successor to G. W. Foote since 1915 as editor of *The Freethinker*, President of The National Secular Society, and Chairman of The Secular Society, Limited.

My sixty years of active service have been packed with the common experiences of leaders in a great but unpopular cause; there have been ups and downs, sunshine and storms, rejoicing and disappointments, but never for a moment have I regretted having given of my best to Freethought during those sixty years. I have made many very dear friends and colleagues during my work in the movement and although I must now return my sword to its scabbard, I hold a rich store of happy memories in the grand fight with the army of human liberation against ignorance, superstition, and priestcraft.

Two years ago I resigned the presidency of the National Secular Society, and now I have decided that my editorship of *The Freethinker* must close. From now onwards The Secular Society Limited will take over the G. W. Foote Company which owns The Pioneer Press, and *The Freethinker*. I leave it in good hands with colleagues from whom I have received loyal and ungrudging voluntary help. Without that help I could not have played an active part for so long and I feel I owe it to them, to the movement and to readers of *The Freethinker*, to place certain facts before you. In 1925 I founded The Freethinker Endowment Trust and collected a sum for investment to produce interest sufficient to meet the annual deficit on *The Freethinker*. The Trust achieved its purpose for many years until the enormous increase in prices and the lowering of interest rates after the second world war made the interest on the Trust investments totally inadequate to meet the steadily increasing deficit on *The Freethinker*. The cost of paper is now 6 to 7 times more, printers' wages rise higher and higher, in fact production costs have reached such a pitch that the big London dailies, journals, and periodicals, with their great circulations and financial resources have been compelled to substantially increase their prices, and something must be done to meet the increased difficulties of *The Freethinker*. Steps in economy will be taken at the head office. It is not proposed to raise the price of the paper, it will be kept as a weekly, but it must remain at eight pages until production costs fall appreciably. That will help but not remove the difficulties and it is proposed to make an appeal to readers as follows: A, there will no doubt be some who will give us permission to apply to them once a year for an agreed contribution towards *The Freethinker*. B, that a fund be opened for those who prefer to contribute how and when they wish. Contributions would be sent to "The Freethinker," 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1. A receipt will be given in every case so that names need not appear in print, but contributors would have the right to ask for any details concerning the sum collected and its expenditure. Contributions would be used for *The Freethinker* only.

The last appeal for *The Freethinker* was made twenty-five years ago and the response was worthy of its readers. What was done then can be done now. A new generation of readers now mingle with the older school and this appeal

provides the opportunity for fostering a personal connection and responsibility for maintaining the paper which I hope has helped them, and which I hope will help many others to see the light of Freethought. I ask nothing for myself, but in my retirement from active service there is nothing I wish more sincerely than to know and feel that the paper I have piloted for 35 years in the face of religious boycott and Christian malice is firmly established for carrying on its work for Freethought with the minimum of anxiety to those who will be now in control; that wish can be fulfilled by the generous support of readers towards the appeal now made.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of the Annual Conference

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society for 1951, held in London, was preceded by an enjoyable reception of delegates and friends on Whit Saturday evening in The Yorkshire Grey. The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, welcomed all present, after which the evening was given to introductions, a capital conjuring performance, light refreshments, and conversation.

At the business sessions on Sunday, held in the Holborn Hall, Gray's Inn Road, the following Branch delegates assembled: Blackpool, A. C. Rosetti; Bradford, H. Day; Birmingham, E. W. Henstridge; Blackburn, J. Sharples; Glasgow, G. Colebroke; Kingston, A. E. Whittaker, H. Michael, G. Hamilton; Manchester, Mrs. M. McCall; North London, L. Ebury, W. Fraser, J. Alexander; Nottingham, T. M. Mosley, A. Elsmere; South London and Lewisham, E. W. Shaw, A. S. Gibbins, J. Tiley; Sheffield, A. Samms, J. Rawson; West Ham, Mrs. E. Venton; West London, R. Woodley, C. H. Cleaver.

The proceedings opened with a few words of welcome from the President, the reading of apologies for absences, and a greeting to the Conference from Mr. C. Bradlaugh Bonner.

To allow more time for dealing with other items on the Agenda the minutes of the last Conference were taken as read.

The Executive's Annual Report was read by the President, and was adopted by the Conference after some suggestions and questions had been put. The report will be printed and circulated among Branches and members in due course. The Annual Balance Sheet, covering the past year, was also adopted after a few questions had been asked and answered.

For the election of President, Mr. L. Ebury, a Vice-President, occupied the chair. He spoke of the traditions and responsibility of the office, and said that the confidence of the Executive, including himself, was behind the nomination of Mr. R. H. Rosetti. Mr. E. W. Shaw (South London and Lewisham Branch) moved the resolution which was seconded by J. Tiley. The motion was put and Mr. R. H. Rosetti was elected unanimously. Messrs. J. T. Brighton and L. Ebury were re-elected as Vice-Presidents of the N.S.S.

There was no opposition to the motion to re-elect Mr. Seibert to the post of Secretary of the N.S.S., which was duly carried. A vote of sympathy was extended to Mr. Seibert in his long illness. Mr. W. Griffiths was re-elected as Treasurer, and Mr. H. L. Theobald was re-appointed as Auditor.

The following Executive was elected:—

*N.E. Group.*—Mr. A. C. Rosetti and Mr. F. A. Ridley.

*Midland Group.*—F. A. Hornibrook.

*Yorkshire Group.*—Mr. V. P. Morris.

*South London Group.*—Mr. E. W. Shaw.

*North London Group.*—Mr. L. Ebury.

*East London Group.*—Mrs. E. Venton.

*West London Group.*—Mr. R. J. Woodley.

A motion by Halifax Branch regarding issue of death certificates was briefly discussed, but as it was not clear as to what particular circumstances this referred, Mr. Rosetti proposed writing to Halifax to confirm its construction. This suggestion was agreed.

South London and Lewisham Branch drew attention to the encroachments of the Roman Catholic Church into the spheres of Politics and Secular Education and urged that this be opposed by all constitutional means at the disposal of the N.S.S. Mr. Shaw drew particular attention to the action of the L.C.C. in their approval of purchases of land and buildings by the Roman Catholic Church, of which he and others gave instances. Mr. Rosetti suggested that full particulars be furnished for the further consideration of the Executive.

The Executive's motion protesting against the Government's decision to close the Amusement Park of the Festival of Britain at the bidding of a minority of primitive-minded Sabbatarians, and thus excluding a large number of citizens on Sundays from one of the amenities of the Festival provided by public funds was passed unanimously.

The motion by North London Branch deprecating the irresponsible statements for use of the atom bomb made by people in responsible positions gave rise to much discussion. This eventually led to the reaffirmation of the Principle set down in the Society's Immediate Practical Objects, i.e., "The promotion of peace between nations, and substitution of arbitration for war in the settlement of international disputes," and the motion was passed unanimously.

The Executive's motion regarding the curriculum in State schools gave rise to considerable differences of opinion, especially as to the desirability of the teaching of comparative religion. Finally the motion was amended to read: "That this conference is of the opinion that the State should provide a purely secular curriculum in its schools, and that religious denominational schools are detrimental to society as a whole," and in this form the motion was passed unanimously.

Kingston Branch affirmed that the philosophical nature of Freethought enabled the National Secular Society to deal with all sociological subjects without adopting any party political label, and urged that this point be stressed in the Society's propaganda. Mr. E. W. Shaw seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

The threat to civil liberties under the pretext of national security was the subject of a motion by the North London Branch which was proposed by Mr. J. Alexander, seconded by Mr. E. W. Shaw, and passed unanimously.

A resolution from Mr. G. H. Taylor to rescind the extension of Rule 17, 10, was ruled out of order on the grounds that the wording of the resolution was inaccurate, and that Mr. Taylor had no mandate to submit it.

The Conference agreed that the subsidy of 5s. per lecture for the first 20 open-air lectures between May and September, 1950, be made to apply during the same period of 1951.

It was agreed that a motion by Mr. C. McCall, regarding closer contact and fuller interchange of information between Branches and Head Office, be passed to the Executive for consideration.

A motion regarding the design of N.S.S. Badge was considered to be inappropriate at the present time.

Before dismissing the Conference the President made a statement on behalf of Mr. Chapman Cohen in which he

said Mr. Cohen had decided to retire from the editorship of *The Freethinker*, and that The Secular Society would take over the Pioneer Press and *The Freethinker*. Mr. Cohen, who was present with Mrs. Cohen, made a short speech at the close. This brought the sessions, which had throughout been conducted in the very best traditions of Freethought principles, to a close.

At the evening public demonstration in the Conway Hall, a team of speakers, consisting of Messrs. H. Day, T. M. Mosley, J. M. Alexander, G. Colebroke, L. Ebury and F. A. Ridley, put various aspects of Freethought before an interested and substantial audience. Mr. Rosetti was in the chair.

FRANK KENYON.

CORRESPONDENCE

SCOTTISH ARCHBISHOPS

SIR.—Will Mr. F. A. Ridley pardon me? Lang was not the only "non-Anglican" Scot to be Primate (May 6, 1951, *The Freethinker*). Archbishop Campbell Tait, born Edinburgh, 1811, of Presbyterian family, declined York, 1862, and became Primate, 1869. Randall Thomas Davidson, born quite near Edinburgh, 1848, was Archbishop of Canterbury, 1903-1928. Primate Lang, 1928-1942, had succeeded, in 1908, Dr. Maclagan as Archbishop of York. Dr. Maclagan was another Presbyterian born in Edinburgh in 1826.

"William of Malmesbury confesses three Scotsmen were successively created Archbishop of York, and the Earl of Forth was in the late wars the successful General of the English Army" (quoted in De Foe's *History of the Union*, p. 718).

What does Mr. Ridley think of nine Scots as Masters of nine of Cambridge's eighteen Colleges in 1927, namely, M'Lean, Mollison, Spens, Giles, Anderson, Ramsay, Chalmers, Scott, Murray? What of Gladstone (born Liverpool, both parents Scots); Rosebery, Balfour, Campell-Bannerman, Bonar Law, MacDonald as Prime Ministers?

I have so many evidences of the great and important fact of the great intermixture between English and Scottish men of distinction or ability.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE ROSS.

DICKS' ENGLISH LIBRARY

SIR.—I was indeed very pleased—and rather surprised—to find that Mr. A. W. Davis used to take in dear old Dicks' "English Library," through which so many of us must have first made acquaintance with early English fiction. He is quite right, the first volume contained Lytton's *Earnest Maltravers*, *Alice*, and Lever's *Charles O'Malley*, and also Theodore Hook's *Jack Brag*, and Thackeray's *Great Hoggarty Diamond* and *Shabby Genteel Story*. In addition, there were a large number of quite forgotten stories by young Charles Dickens, M. H. Barker, and many others, all illustrated by original illustrations, or reproductions of many by George Cruikshank, John Leech, and Phiz. The date of the first number is, however, June 27, 1883. Each number consisted of 16 quarto pages, and the price was *one halfpenny!* Later it became one penny. John Dicks was a pioneer of cheap reading—and has never been given his due. By the way, does anybody know anything about him?—Yours, etc.,

H. CUTNER.

DISTRIBUTISM

SIR.—I was very interested in Mr. P. C. King's discussion of Douglas Hyde's book, *I Believed*, for it so happens that I have just finished reading that book myself. On the whole, I think that Mr. King has been very fair to Mr. Hyde. There is only one point which seems to me to show a lack of the qualifications for considering a book of this kind, and that is where Mr. King discusses Distributism. He admits that this is a new one on him, and then goes on to say that it is apparently a "shabby and dishonest racket." Most political policies are shabby and dishonest rackets, I would agree. But Distributism (in which, I may add, I do not believe, since I do not think it is practical politics in the twentieth century) is a policy of small proprietorship and peasant ownership. It has no connection at all with priestly dictatorship, but it so happens that it was first advocated in this country by G. K. Chesterton. I may perhaps also say that I am not in any way defending the policy; but I do think that before calling it a "racket," Mr. King should have made some effort to discover what it was.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN ROWLAND.

OBITUARY

ALICE HEAL

It is with sorrow that we announce the death of Alice Heal which took place on May 13 in her 74th year. Strong in mind, character, and opinions, a humanitarian in every phase of her life, she and her husband, who shared her beliefs, lived in an atmosphere of mutual trust and affection through a long period of married happiness. Both were loyal and generous members of the Parent Society, N.S.S., and readers of *The Freethinker* for many years. Our sincere sympathy is with her husband, who has suffered a grievous loss, and surviving members of the family. The last scene took place at Golders Green Crematorium on May 18 where, before a large gathering of relatives and friends, a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

R.H.R.

HEAVEN

Between the rise and setting of the moon  
Death greeted him and brought a dubious boon:  
At any rate, to Death he genuflects,  
And off to Heaven flies, which he inspects.

One look at it, then dolefully he said,  
"One does not gain, I think, by being dead.  
In life my friends were honest, if but few;  
These righteous humbugs are a loathsome crew."

BAYARD SIMMONS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Market Place.—Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.
- J. CLAYTON'S Engagements: Friday, May 25, Crawshawbrook, 7-45 p.m.; Saturday, May 26, Enfield, 6 p.m.; Sunday, May 27, Blackburn Market Place, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.; Tuesday, May 29, Higham, 7-45 p.m.
- Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. W. BARKER.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site).—Lunch-hour Lectures every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. WOODCOCK.
- Also Lectures at Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m.; Alexandra Park Gates, Wednesday, 8 p.m.; St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site, Sunday, 8 p.m.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY. Sunday Evening, 7 p.m.: L. EBURY (Highbury Corner).
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool)—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A. SAMMS.
- South London and Lewisham Branch (Brockwell Park).—F. A. RIDLEY.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, May 27, 7 p.m.: "Socialism and Christianity."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 27, 11 a.m.: Professor G. W. KEETON, M.A., LL.D., "Disarmament."
- West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead House, The Green, Wanstead, E.11).—Thursday, May 24: J. M. ALEXANDER, "Psychology and Religion."

FOR SALE: Books on Anthropology, Freethought, Pacifism, Anarchism, Book-collecting. Stamp for List. Brennan, 51, Mead Way, Bromley, Kent.

### REVELATION, FAITH AND REASON

"BUT my point seems to escape you," spluttered the Reverend Gentleman. "Your criticisms are valid in your laboratory where you deal with material things, but we are talking about intangibles, the Reality behind the sensible world. The Truth which Christ taught is not something you read in a text-book or discover in an experiment. It is a Revelation from God Himself, faithfully recorded in the inspired word of the New Testament."

"Now let us be precise about this," interrupted the Sceptical Young Man. "Christ experienced the Revelation, but the writers of the New Testament were inspired. Tell me, what is the difference between Revelation and Inspiration?"

The Reverend Gentleman assumed his ministerial role. "God revealed His Eternal Truths to Jesus Christ. That is Revelation. Actually we share that Revelation for those same Truths are revealed to us through Christ's teachings. Like ourselves the writers of the New Testament received the Revelation through Christ and were inspired by God to record the Revelation and the life of Christ."

"I am afraid," said the Young Man, "that by your own evidence we obtain our Revelation from the New Testament rather than from Christ. But perhaps our real problem lies in the word Inspiration. All people who write books or paint pictures, or who even build dog-kennels, know something of Inspiration. It is a driving force hurrying us towards a goal and acting independently of our ordinary motivations. It might be defined as the creative impulse, but does it necessarily always work for good?"

"No, of course not," protested the Reverend Gentleman, "but not all Inspirations are from God."

"I agree," replied the Young Man. "But if some are from God and some are not, how can we be sure which are which?"

"Why, by their character of course." The Reverend Gentleman spoke with dignified confidence. "If we are inspired to do good and act in accordance with Christ's teachings, then our inspiration is from God."

"But what about the Inspiration of the writers of the New Testament? How can we, some two thousand years removed from them, be sure that their Inspiration was from God? We cannot apply your test to them for it is from them that we derive our knowledge of Christ's teachings. We are in fact, my dear Sir, trying to prove our argument by anticipating the conclusion which, as you know, is a logical fallacy."

"You suffer, young man," declared the Reverend Gentleman pompously, "from that insidious disease which is a cancer at the heart of our civilisation, the disease of doubt. What this world needs is a strong and abiding Faith."

"Again I agree," replied the Young Man. "But it is a Faith founded upon Reason and Reality, not upon fantasy or authority. You talk of a strong and abiding Faith. Which Faith? What Faith? This world has been generating opposing Faiths for a hundred thousand years. What special claim has yours to Truth any more than the others?"

"Why," the Reverend Gentleman fumed, "because my Faith is the revealed Word of God. My Faith is founded upon Christ's Revelation of God's purpose for His Kingdom."

"And has Christ's Revelation any special claim other than its appeal to Reason? Buddha, too, had a Revelation, and Mohammed and a great many others; each claimed that his was genuine and the rest, except insofar as they agreed with his, frauds. For my part one second-hand Revelation is as good as another unless it can and will stand up to the test of empiricism."

"What do you mean by second-hand Revelation?" demanded the Reverend Gentleman. "Do you doubt that Christ had a Revelation?"

"No," replied the Young Man, "I don't. But yours, at best, is second-hand. In fact it is much further removed than that. Now if you had personally experienced this Revelation I should have a great deal of respect for your beliefs. Mind you, they wouldn't be mine, but I should certainly credit your sincerity, if not your rationality. For my part I will found none of my beliefs upon Revelation until I experience that Revelation myself, and even then I shall probably check up with a psychiatrist."

The Reverend Gentleman disposed of psychiatrists with a sniff and a wave of his hand. But the Young Man continued, "Let us examine the roots of your Faith, Sir. You were born into a Christian community of Christian parents at a time when Christianity was a popular, if somewhat neglected, belief. From the time you were old enough to understand anything you were impregnated with Christian principles, traditions and ideals. Thus you became a Christian. Except for that part of your Faith which you are prepared to defend with your reason, this is the entire basis of your Faith—that you were born at a certain time, in a certain place, of certain parents who held certain beliefs. Had you been born in Bombay of brown Hindus, in Peking of yellow Buddhists, or in Ancient Greece instead of modern Europe, your Faith would have been entirely different. And in the formation of your Faith you have followed the same pattern as that followed by almost all religious believers, whatever their Faith may be."

"The Devil," muttered the Reverend Gentleman, "hath ever a ready tongue."

The Young Man smiled. "Never over-estimate your antagonist. I am merely one who tries to think reasonably rather than wishfully about religion. It seems evident to me that religious Faith, far from being a rock of Strength and a foundation of Truth, is in fact a water-logged raft afloat on a sea of circumstance, sentiment and irresponsible authority. The only way in which it can achieve any stability is by submitting to the searching test of Reason."

"Young man." The Reverend Gentleman stood up. "Your Reason will be your downfall."

"On the contrary," said the Young Man, "it will be your salvation. No longer, to thinking people, does it appear likely that they, of all the multitudes throughout the world and the ages, have been favoured with a Revelation of God's Truth while the rest have been left in darkness. Democracy is afoot, Reverend Sir, in religion as well as in politics."

PAUL M. RODDICK.

### ON A RELIC

All over Europe, as by Atom shattered,  
The bones of sweet Saint Nonimus are scattered.  
Throughout our Christendom the relics lie—  
One for each church—and still they multiply.  
Scoffer! Pay heed, lest bolt of thunder fall,  
And thy departure leave not bone at all!

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

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