

# THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 33

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL  
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER.]

Price Threepence

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### The Rise of Christianity

THE subject-matter of the rise and evolution of Christianity throughout its early formative centuries is a subject which has engaged the attention of some of our most eminent modern historians and specialists in literary criticism; the outstanding contributions of such men as Gibbon, Renan, Burckhardt, and Loisy, have illuminated many aspects of a tremendous historical drama. However, it must be confessed that, despite the libraries of specialised books devoted to the subject, the whole subject has been and, for that matter, still is involved in considerable obscurity: the many conflicting opinions which still exist upon the subject-matter and dates of the books in our New Testament and even with regard to the historicity of the alleged Founder of Christianity Himself, obviously indicate that this is actually the case, virtually, it is still premature to state that the creative era of early Christianity, an epoch broadly equivalent to its first century and a half, remains a *terra incognita*, a dark age as far as exact historical research is concerned. Naturally, hagiography and edifying religious fiction have been at hand to people this mysterious age of Christian origins with apocryphal saints, martyrs, and other legendary figures.

Certain facts emerge definitely from the historical haze. That Christianity actually originated in Palestine seems to be quite definite, though the intriguing speculation of Albert Kalthoff that it may have actually originated in Rome, can find some arguments in its favour. The rest is almost entirely either fiction or unproved speculation. There does appear to be some evidence that the new religion arose from the fusion of several already existing cults, though this is far from certain. Even the names of the early Christian itinerant preachers are not beyond doubt. Perhaps from the persistence which a whole literary school demonstrated for at least a century after his alleged dates, identifying their "Epistles" as those of Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles," we are justified in assuming that Paul was an actual Christian propagandist who left a powerful memory behind him, which finally forced an obviously suspicious orthodoxy to canonise this originally heretical saint. As for the rest, Peter, James, and John, apart from interested ecclesiastical fiction, they merely represent names of doubtful authenticity and the same seems to be true of the alleged Founder, Jesus Himself. No critical historian to-day, whatever he may call himself, believes in that oriental wonder-worker who was "The Jesus of the Gospels," nor is the Galilean moralist depicted in our Gospels much more credible as an historical figure. That some of the sayings and doings reported in the Gospels may be actually historical in the sense that they were actually said or done by someone in the Palestine of the first century A.D., is about the utmost that can be reasonably asserted. Whilst as for saying that they were said or done by an

ancient Jew named Jesus, it is neither more nor less probable than that there is in our 20th century Wales a local preacher bearing the name of Jones! Both names were about equally common in their respective localities.

So much for what we may, perhaps, term the originating epoch of Christianity which may be said to have ended with the formation of our New Testament Canon soon after the middle of the second century. From that time on we have rather more data at our disposal and emerge, if not into daylight, at least into twilight. However, it is not really until the age of Constantine, another century and a-half later, that we are upon really firm, historical ground. For, down to the fourth century, Christianity still represented quite an unimportant religious phenomenon. It was indistinguishable from a dozen other oriental creeds, several of which were much more powerful than itself. The references to the Christians in the contemporary pagan literature of the age of Marcus Aurelius are few, and are concerned chiefly with their fanaticism and their credulousness. Even the third century, which marked the final collapse of the old classical culture, did not seem at first likely to benefit Christianity. For it was the Roman army which dominated that century of perpetual civil war: the army was predominantly Mithraist and the military emperors of the later third century whom the army placed upon the Imperial Throne were fanatical adherents of the sun-cult of Mithra and, as such, persecuted rival creeds, including Christianity. Indeed, the present writer once advanced the hypothesis that the eventual victory of Christianity in the fourth century may have been at least partly due to a reaction on the part of the civilian population against the excesses of the Mithraist army.

Be that as it may, it is quite certain that Christianity rose to power in competition with a whole congeries of contemporary cults at least as superstitious as itself. The old idea that Christianity rose to power by vanquishing an age of reason and of a scientific and rationalist Græco-Roman culture, cannot bear a critical investigation. In ancient, as in modern Europe, there were, of course, critical thinkers of the first rank who ruthlessly exposed their contemporary superstitions, but Epicurus, Lucretius and Lucian were no more typical of ancient popular paganism than Paine, Bradlaugh or Haeckel were typical of modern popular Christianity. In his fine book, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, Jacob Burckhardt has recorded some of the doctrinal formulae characteristic of representative pagan cults of the period: one can comment accurately that the Athanasian creed represents an exercise in *simple* arithmetic by comparison! Actually, we very much doubt if any Christian Father, even the most credulous, ever produced such a hotch-potch of absurdities as that "classic" of pagan theosophy, Abammon's famous treatise "On the Egyptian Mysteries" (c. 350, A.D.), perhaps the most celebrated work of later pagan theology—the "Isis Unveiled" of an ancient "Madame Blavatsky."

Christianity, then, did not rise to power upon the ruins of a defeated rationalism. At the utmost, it merely assisted a dozen other equally credulous oriental cults to extinguish the last remnants of classical rationalism which was virtually extinct already before Constantine's "conversion" put Christianity in control of what was left of the civilisation of the ancient world. The old rationalist philosophical schools, the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics had already died out in the storms of the third century, and the last militant champion of paganism, Constantine's nephew, the Emperor Julian "The Apostate" (361-3), was nearly as superstitious as the Christians whom he opposed and, as one of his biographers puts it, "sacrificed hetacombs of animals to legions of gods."

The actual causes for the victory as for the original appearance of Christianity are still only partly explored. To our present imperfect knowledge it seems to have been largely an historical "accident" that a disintegrating civilisation passed into a dark age under the aegis of Christ rather than of Mithra, Mani, Isis, or of some other of an army of competing deities. One may safely guess that the general results would have been similar. Burckhardt, it is true, was of the opinion that none of these rival cults could have stood up to the rise and subsequent expansion of Islam. But Christianity was changed out of all recognition by victory. Presumably, Mithra or Isis would have adapted themselves to circumstances as well as Christ.

F. A. RIDLEY.

#### THE STORY OF A RELIGIOUS RATIONALIST

A MEMBER of the once celebrated Arnold family, Mrs. Humphry Ward, made a wide Victorian reputation as a novelist, translator and social reformer. Thomas Arnold, her grandfather, made a deep impression on the teaching and administration of our public schools, especially at Rugby. The apostle of sweetness and light, Matthew Arnold, was Mary Ward's uncle. The author of *Culture and Anarchy*, he ranked not only as an eminent man of letters in humanist circles, but as a philosophical Rationalist devoted to the ethical aspects of the Anglican Church. On the other hand, her father, Thomas Arnold the younger, forsook the Anglican faith and entered the Roman fold. Ever unsettled, he later returned to Protestantism for a time, but ultimately rejoined the Catholic Church and died in that communion.

Mary Arnold married Humphry Ward, who joined the staff of *The Times*. He and his family then left Oxford for London. Previously a journalist, Mrs. Ward had been one of the founders of Oxford's Women's College, Somerville Hall. She was diligent in her studies and these, as with so many other intellectuals, led to doubts concerning the truth of the Christian creed. Also, at Oxford, she was broadened by the influences of the humanists and latitudinarians, Mark Pattison, J. R. Green, the historian, Hill Green, the metaphysician, Ruskin, Jowett, and other modernist apostles.

As early as 1876, Mrs. Arthur Johnson, while engaged in painting Mrs. Ward's portrait, was startled by her subject's heretical declarations. "I was surprised," she states, "at the full extent of her vague religion, Jowett is her great admiration and Matt Arnold her guide for some things. She is great on the rising Dutch and French and German school of religious thought, very free criticism of the Bible, entire denial of miracle, our Lord only a great teacher. I felt as though I had been beaten about. . . . And yet it is all a striving for righteousness and truth."

Apart from her independent studies of early documents relating to Christian tradition, Mary Ward's mental emancipation was inspired by the revolution in thought which characterised the nineteenth century. As she herself avers in her *Writers Recollections*, published in 1918, the tranquil experiences of her personal surroundings during her early married life at Oxon coincided with intense controversy in scholastic circles. "The Oxford of thought was not quiet," she testifies, "it was divided by sharper antagonisms and deeper feuds than exist to-day. Darwinism was penetrating everywhere; Pusey was preaching against its effects on unbelief. Balliol stood for unfettered history and criticism, Christ Church for authority and creeds; Renan's *Origines* were still coming out, Strauss's last book also; my uncle [Matthew Arnold] was publishing *God and the Bible* in succession to *Literature and Dogma*; and *Supernatural Religion* was making no small stir."

Mary Ward saw very clearly that the truth of any creed is entirely dependent on testimony and that conclusive evidence for theological claims is completely lacking. These and kindred facts induced her to compose her first successful novel, *Robert Elsmere*. This is a work of considerable merit, and whatever may be thought of its failings, it played a pronounced part in liberalising religious thought and feeling in the late 'eighties of the Victorian era.

Mrs. Ward also distinguished herself as the translator of *Amiel's Journal*, an achievement highly appreciated both in Britain and America. This remarkable confession of mystical faith had made small impression in France, although it is still studied and admired in the English-speaking world. Dr. Jowett praised Amiel's splendid style as that of a man of genius, but his mystical outlook Jowett deemed visionary. To him, "Amiel was a neo-Platonist and sceptic in one." Walter Pater, another eminent Victorian, appeared to sympathise with Amiel's emotional expressions, but his verdict is so vague and inconclusive that its real meaning remains conjectural.

Among the numerous penmen and publicists who were known to Mrs. Ward were John Morley, Lord Acton, M. Clemenceau, Gladstone, the Webbs, Browning, Goschen, and many others. She opines that Acton's published correspondence, invaluable as it is, quite fails to fully reveal his highly complex personality. His unswerving Catholicism appeared utterly at variance with his Liberal and freedom-loving convictions. As she contends: "Oppression—tyranny—persecution—these were the things that stirred his blood. He was a Catholic, yet he fought Ultramontaniam and the Papal Curia to the end; he never lost his full communion with the Church of Rome, yet he could never forgive the Pápacy for the things it had done, and suffered to be done; and he would have nothing to do with the excuse that the moral standards of one age are different from those of another, and therefore the crimes of a Borgia weigh more lightly and claim more indulgence than similar acts done in the nineteenth century."

In truth, Acton remains a psychological puzzle, and his attitude and convictions, despite all the abundant evidence to the contrary provide some support at least to the Jesuit Father Thurston's assertion that Acton was not really a Catholic at all. Indeed, as our authoress reminds us, Acton rebuked Anglican writers who minimised the infamies of which the Roman Church had been guilty in the past. Yet it seems certain that Acton, however astounding the paradox, never wavered in his belief in the divine inspiration and mission of the Church, and clung

to the last to Catholic doctrine, however preposterous it must appear to Protestant or secular observers.

Moreover, Acton was intimately acquainted with the most extreme conclusions of Biblical critics. "I had many talks with him," states Mrs. Ward, "while I was writing *Robert Elsmere*, and was always amazed at his knowledge of what Canon Liddon would have called 'German infidel books.' He had read them all, he possessed them all; he knew a great deal about the lives of the men who had written them; and he never spoke of them without complete, as it seemed to me, sympathetic tolerance."

That a scholar so magnanimous and so genial in his general outlook, despite his scorn for certain Roman ecclesiastics, should have remained a practising Catholic to the last, is one of the marvels of modern intellectual life.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded)

### THE GREATEST OF ALL ASTRONOMERS

WHO is the greatest of all astronomers? Copernicus? No. God. Copernicus merely laid the foundations of modern astronomy; God laid the foundations of the earth. God made the earth "by His power." "He stretched out the heavens by His discretion"; they are "the work of His fingers." He made the stars—how, is not divulged.

Now astronomers count the stars, "weigh" them, find their distances and velocities, study their spectra, determine their parallaxes, find their size sizes, masses, and temperature, speculate on their ages and origin, but stop short at making them. God makes stars and "seals them up," but stops short at the astronomer's jobs except that of counting. "God telleth the number of the stars." It doesn't say where; nor is a number given. Astronomers tell the number as approximately 20 followed by 24 zeros, "God telleth them all by their names." *All*, note. Where are these 20,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 star names? The Bible mentions Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades—three.

Astronomers estimate the vast stellar distances in light-years, parsecs, and mega-parsecs; but God never gets beyond the trivial measurements of handbreadth, span, and mile. When Job exclaims, "Behold the height of the stars, how high they are!" God never corrects Job saying, "You are wrong, Job. Stars are not *high*, but *distant*. The nearest star, Job, is over four light-years distant, even six million million miles."

Compare the Biblical "The sun shall be darkened in his going forth," and no year or day given of this eclipse, with the astronomer's "There will be an eclipse of the sun visible in Cornwall in 1999, August 11." Could God have computed that? God never attempts more than a vague forecast such as "The sun shall be darkened *after the tribulation*" (a pretty safe assumption as there are eclipses every year), or "the moon shall not give her light in *those days*," or "in *that day* the sun shall go down at noon." The astronomers give the *exact day* of the solar eclipse referred to in Amos viii, 9, as *June 15*, B.C. 763. "The moon shall not cause her light to shine" is a pitiful example of ignorance; it is the *sun* that causes the moon to shine. "The sun shall not smite thee by day" looks as though God never heard of sunstroke! Or did He intend this as purely a nocturnal visitation? "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun" and "The light of the sun shall be sevenfold." What does that mean? When the brightness of a sun increases, as it does in the pre-nova stage, it is 25,000 times; and in

the case of a super-nova, 40,000,000 times. "Sevenfold" seems a bit out! Perhaps Isaiah referred to these two examples when he said: "The moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed."

And what of Daniel's fanatical outburst: "A goat's horn waxed exceeding great and cast down some of the stars to the ground and stamped upon them. Yea, he magnified himself"—and well he must have done to perform such a feat with feet. When Joshua stopped the sun apparently to lengthen the day, God didn't warn him, "Joshua, it's no good your stopping the sun. You must stop the earth's rotation, even its diurnal rotation. The sun's movement along the ecliptic is only *apparent*, Joshua, being the reflex of our earth's *real* axial rotation, even the axis which passeth through our earth." But there! God couldn't have said that, as He plumped for a two-ended, four-cornered, pillar-supported fixed earth. He had supported His thesis by "looking to the ends of the earth and the four corners thereof"—which wants a bit of doing on an oblate spheroid.

The Bible explicitly states that "the earth cannot be moved," though the astronomer has proved many of its motions such as:—

1. Rotation on its axis.
2. Revolution round the sun.
3. Movement through space with the solar system.
4. Precessional movement of the axis.
5. Change in the axial inclination.
6. Movement round the Milky Way.

But the Bible also states that "The earth shall be removed out of her place." The news is rather belated. And this is what will happen:—

1. The foundations of the earth will shake.
2. The earth will be utterly broken down.
3. The earth will be clean dissolved.
4. The earth shall move exceedingly.
5. The earth shall be removed like a cottage.
6. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard.

Well may the Psalmist have written: "He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh."

God made the moon "as a light to rule the night." What a pity it is so often in the day-time sky, while uninhabited Jupiter has eleven moons to rule her night! "The moon is established for ever"—a debatable point. What will God do with an indestructible moon on His hands when "the heavens shall be no more?"

God gives Job a set of questions. Here they are:—

1. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
2. Whereupon are the foundations fastened?
3. Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth?
4. When did the morning stars sing together?
5. Canst thou guide Arcturus with her sons?
6. Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades?
7. Canst thou loose the bands of Orion?
8. By what way is light parted?
9. And darkness, where is its place?

Jesus's astronomical knowledge seems limited to calling Himself the Morning Star, a term reserved for a planet in the morning sky, and to mistaking a "falling-star" for "Satan falling like lightning from heaven."

"Who can understand His errors?" says the Bible. If this means His astronomical ones—who indeed?

RUBY TA'BOIS.

**HOW THE CHURCHES BETRAY THEIR CHRIST.** An Examination of British Christianity. By C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

### ACID DROPS

The spectacle of a great and proud nation like France being without a Government is not a very nice one—but it is all the more disquieting to learn that the deadlock is due more to the problem of religious education than to anything else. The Catholics are strong enough now to prevent the formation of any Government which does not pledge itself to give State aid to Catholic schools, though the actual law at the moment is “the lay principle.” Until that law is abrogated, the lay principle ought to remain but religious pressure may be too strong.

One interesting point does emerge from the bitter quarrels between the various parties—the M.R.P., which is fighting so hard for Catholicism, also violently attacks General de Gaulle and his followers, most of whom are, of course, Catholics themselves. What a beautiful picture of religion emerges from all this squabbling—the same old religion which has for nearly 2,000 years been responsible for more bloodshed, torture, and imprisonment, than almost anything else in history!

At a “Conference Education” meeting (whatever that is) in Sheffield, Dr. C. A. Coulson, who is Professor of Theoretical Physics at King’s College, must have made his fellow Methodists shudder. He told them bluntly that “until as Christians we know how we stand in relation to the present scientific movement, we shall not be able to present our gospel in an effective way to all men. We have to accept and weave into our philosophy everything that has been discovered.” And this, after nearly 2,000 years of Christianity and about 200 years of Methodism!

If what Dr. Coulson said has any meaning, he was asking Methodists to accept Evolution, the impossibility of miracles, to recognise that a “revelation” was nonsense—to admit, in fact, that Christianity was not true. The *Methodist Recorder*, which reports his speech, does not say, however, whether the earnest Methodists listening were in the least influenced by him. The sting was actually in the last sentence of the report—“Prayers were led by the Rev. R. Wilson.” Anybody who can be “led” by prayers has a long long way to go towards accepting science.

Far more famous than Dr. Coulson is Mr. J. Arthur Rank, though his field is the cinema. We have an idea that Mr. Rank would put his trust far more in a secular drama in which religion was completely ousted than in propaganda films for the spread of Methodism; but as a good Methodist himself, speaking recently, he said that there were “signs of a religious revival just around the corner.” It depends which corner. If he means the corner is somewhere in England, we can only advise him to leave religion alone and stick to his cinemas; he is far less likely there to utter pious twaddle.

The Rev. Peter Gordon of Torquay appears to have just discovered that Communism is a religion. And, as a good Christian, he cannot abide rivals. Mr. Gordon claims that under Communism man is only “a cog in a machine,” but that under Christianity “it is man who matters.” He seems to have forgotten the history of his own religion. Under the Golden Ages of Christianity, unbelievers—that is, men who thought for themselves—were hounded to destruction with torture and the stake. When did Christianity teach that “men matter”?

Roman Catholics are very fond of chuckling over the difficulties of Anglicanism or Protestantism, but every now and then they let out a large number of cats from the bag themselves. It looks as if Romanists have also many difficulties. One of their most urgent is “Leakages.” Another is—we quote from the *Catholic Herald*—that in a “very Catholic area” not more than 5 per cent. of “practising Catholics realise the connection between their religion and their daily lives.” The *C.H.* finds all this very “distressing,” and appears to be able to do very little about it but to reiterate the place God and the Church has in a Catholic’s daily life. Perhaps even Catholics are at last beginning to find out how they have been duped!

To fulfil the requirements of the 1944 Education Act, Catholics are telling the world that they have to face a bill for £50,000,000, and for this reason, the R.C. Bishop of Brentwood, Mgr. Beck, told the *Catholic Herald* that politicians are now more willing to listen to Catholic electors who are going to bombard prospective candidates for Parliament with many questions. Catholics, in short, have made up their minds that, at least as far as religion is concerned, it is going to be taught in their schools at the Government expense and that the Government will not be allowed to interfere. We wonder what our parliamentary candidates will say in reply?

Ever since the Red Dean got £8,000 from Russia for his herculean efforts for Peace, he has been a target as much from his own Church and from Socialists as from Tories—some of whom want his removal now from the Deanery because he is teaching “subversive and heretical doctrines.” The plain fact is that on Christianity he is rigidly orthodox, and he cannot be removed because of his political opinions only. It is, however, quite amusing to find the Dean so hated by his Christian brothers who spout “love” at every turn. Perhaps they don’t like Dr. Hewlett preaching “Love ye one another,” when they themselves seem to loathe him.

A writer in the *Church of England Newspaper*, commenting on the Wesleyan Evangelical revival, claimed that it failed mostly because of its inherent “emotionalism” thus letting in Secularism—“a religion primarily emotional can never turn back the tide of Secularism”—and the only way in which unbelief can effectually be combated is through theology. Secularism can always thus be beaten by theology, though it is only fair to state that so far it is theology which has retreated and Secularism which has advanced. Perhaps “D.R.D.,” the writer in question, can tell us where, if at all, Secularism has been beaten by theology?

We recently read a most intriguing dissertation by a learned father of The Society of Jesus, an Order which is nothing if not subtle, as it certainly needed to be upon this occasion. For the question at issue was this: What happens at the resurrection to the body of a man who was eaten by a cannibal who, in his turn, was eaten by a tiger? God is, presumably, capable of—shall we say—disentangling the devoured human from the internal organs of the cannibal, but what is to be done about the tiger who “stays put” and is not raised upon the Great Day? It is all very perplexing, and we must be duly grateful that there are holy fathers both able and willing to tackle such knotty points.

# "THE FREETHINKER"

Telephone No.: Holborn 2601.

41, Gray's Inn Road,  
London, W.C. 1.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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, 19s. 2d.; half-year, 9s. 7d.; three months, 4s. 11d.

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

The Burnley Branch N.S.S. and Mr. J. Clayton had a field day in the local Market Place on August 5. In the morning and evening Mr. Clayton debated with the Rev. Billington, and lectured in the afternoon. Several hundred people were present at the evening session of the debate, and the local saints were in high spirits over the day's work. It was a very hard day for Mr. Clayton, as those who have also experience three sessions in one day will appreciate, and we offer him our congratulations and thanks.

Here is an opportunity for readers wishing to spread our message of Freethought among those likely to be interested. The Pioneer Press will despatch a set of seven Freethought readings to each name and address supplied and accompanied by 4½d., which includes the postage on despatch. Names and addresses should be sent to the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C. 1.

## AN ANGRY CRITIC

SOME months ago I wrote here a few articles on Joseph F. Rinn's *Sixty Years of Psychical Research*, a book which shattered any idea of "survival," as far as Spiritualism was concerned. Mr. Rinn set out as a young man to find proof of "immortality," if that were possible, and examined the claims of all the prominent Spiritualists he could find—whether they were just mediums—like Mrs. Piper, or the Fox sisters, or writers like Sir A. C. Doyle, or professors like Prof. Hyslop. He did more than this. He constantly offered big sums of money for "evidence" of survival, and similar sums if he failed to produce "psychical phenomena" by physical means exactly as produced by mediums helped by "controls" from Summerland (or whatever the other worlds are called).

During the whole of the 60 years in which he issued his challenges or investigated the claims of "genuine" mediums, he never discovered any evidence whatever for survival, and he unearthed about the biggest bunch of crooks it would be possible to do in the time. He showed quite clearly that our psychic "investigators," especially those who could boast of degrees, or who had made names for themselves in the scientific world, were the most easily bamboozled of any group of investigators, most mediums

## The Freethinker Fund

Cheques and Postal Orders should be addressed to

**THE FREETHINKER**  
41 Gray's Inn Rd., London, W.C.1.

To find space for the numerous articles awaiting publication we shall acknowledge all contributions by post instead of printing lists.

**is now open**

having the greatest contempt for their credulity. This is not surprising, as anybody who has studied modern conjuring would know how easy it is to "misdirect" an audience. Even seasoned conjurers often fail to penetrate into the secrets of their own craft.

Needless to say, such a book as this was bound to be almost boycotted by Spiritualists, and even by "psychic investigators." As far as I know, our own Spiritualist journals carry on as if they had never heard of Mr. Rinn, the exception being the *Journal of the Society for Psychic Research*. This paper was in duty bound to review *Sixty Years of Psychical Research*, and I have rarely read a review in which the critic squealed so hard.

It will be found in the May-June number, and Mr. W. H. Salter, the writer of the "review," would be hard to beat for angry expostulation. He was the President of the Society in 1947-8, and is supposed to have subscribed to the "purpose" for which the Society was formed—"to examine without prejudice or prepossession, and in a scientific spirit, those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable on any generally recognised hypothesis." Now, if Mr. Salter has come to the conclusion that "survival" is proved, he has, of course, a perfect right to say so; but angry denunciation of people who differ from him leads nowhere.

Mr. Salter thinks himself. I suspect, an "authority" on Mrs. Piper, and Mr. Rinn's exposure of the lady who, on her own confession, disbelieved in "spirits," was really too much for an ex-President to stand. How dare Mr. Rinn, for example, cite "Clodd the Rationalist author" who quoted a long letter from the brother of "G.P.," the "control" of Mrs. Piper, in proof of the fact that, whatever the explanation may be of controls or familiars, when a medium was in a trance this particular "phenomenon" was plainly twaddle. How dare Mr. Rinn publish a communication from Mrs. Piper which he calls a "confession" when, says "Salter the Spiritualist," "it will come as no surprise to the reader to learn that Mrs. Piper never made a 'Confession' at all." As very few of the readers of the *Journal* will ever see Mr. Rinn's book, it was quite easy to write like this. I gave the "confession" of Mrs. Piper in one of my articles, but here again are some of the relevant passages:—

"I must truthfully say that I do not believe that spirits of the dead have spoken through me when I have been in a trance state. . . . I have never had any convincing proof of spirit return. . . . I cannot see how it can be scientifically proved that we hold communication with the so-called spirit world. . . . At first when I went into a trance state . . . it was all gibberish, nothing but gibberish . . . there is no evidence of sufficient scientific value to warrant acceptance of the spiritistic hypothesis. . ."—*New York Herald*, October 20, 1901.

Mr. Salter considers this no "Confession at all." Some of us, I fancy, prefer the usual meaning of English words which we learn in our childhood rather than his insolent nonsense.

However, our very angry Mr. Salter puts in his "review" a "statement Mr. Rinn does not quote," from Mrs. Piper.

It is from the *Boston Advertiser*, October 25, 1901: ". . . Spirits of the departed may have controlled me and they may not. I confess that I do not know." I suspect that Mr. Salter would have said this also was not a "confession" if Mr. Rinn had quoted it, in spite of the fact that Mrs. Piper actually used the word "confess."

Whatever may be the explanation of Mrs. Piper's trance utterances, the fact remains that Frank Podmore, the then Secretary of the S.P.R., and one who was more or less in sympathy with Spiritualism—unlike myself—speaking of Mrs. Piper, clearly said that "I cannot point to a single instance in which a precise and unambiguous piece of information has been furnished of a kind which could not have proceeded from the medium's own mind working on the materials provided and the hints let drop by sitters." Frank Podmore is now almost forgotten, and what he says about Mrs. Piper I am sure Mr. Salter has long since relegated to "antiquity"; and in any case, who cares what Podmore said, these days? Mr. Salter himself published last year *Trance Mediumship: An Introductory Study of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Leonard*, which, no doubt, puts everybody right who differs from himself. I haven't read it, so do not know exactly what he thinks of "survival" except, judging from this "review," I should say he is an out-and-out believer.

Needless to add, Mr. Salter has at his finger ends the usual "clichés" so beloved of the "serious" investigator. "Just what are Mr. Rinn's qualifications to pose as a judge of psychical researchers?" he scornfully asks. Most of us have heard that one before—and those who have read his book are convinced that Mr. Rinn has ten times the qualifications of people like Mr. Salter. I could fancy nothing more easy, if I had the space and confined myself to this review, to prove that up to the hilt.

Whether there are or there are not "psychic" phenomena is a matter, of course, for investigation; but so far it can be fearlessly said that no real evidence has ever been produced which proves "survival" or the existence of Summerland. And that is all that matters to Free-thinkers and convinced Materialists. It is we who are winning all along the line.

H. CUTNER.

## SCIENCE AND CATHOLICISM

(Concluded from page 287)

The first sign of the appearance of angiosperma was during the Jurassic period, namely, about 135 million years ago, but they were very scanty and it was not until the beginning of the Cretaceous period, namely, about 120 million years ago, that they began to appear in any considerable quantities, but they ultimately succeeded in dominating the plant life of the world (Seward, *ibid*, at p. 253), with the result that there only remained comparatively few of, not only the primitive land plants of the Palæozoic era (Cambrian to Permian), but also of the cycads of the earlier part of the next era, namely, the Mesozoic era (Triassic to Cretaceous) which had been the predominating gymnosperms. As all fruit trees known to the authors of Genesis were angiosperms, and there was no fossil evidence of such fruit trees in the Jurassic period, it follows that similar fruit trees did not come into existence before the beginning of the Cretaceous period.

Consequently, because Genesis describes the making of the sun after the appearance of fruit trees, it follows that, according to that sacred book, the sun was not made until after the beginning of the Cretaceous period. There is considerable calcerous and fossil evidence that types of at least some of the Palæozoic algæ, especially the chloro-

phycæ, or green algæ, have existed in every geological period since early Palæozoic times (Seward, *ibid*, at pp. 101, 102); consequently, according to Genesis there must have been complete darkness for some of the algæ, similar to the Palæozoic algæ, during the whole of their successive generations from at least the middle of the Ordovician period to the beginning of the Cretaceous period, namely, for about 255 million years.

It is obvious from what I have shown with regard to the pre-Cretaceous land plants which I have mentioned, that according to Genesis they must also have been in complete darkness throughout their successive generations for immense respective periods, extending, in the case of those which first appeared during the Devonian period, to at least 100 million years.

To show how fantastic it is to suppose that plants should have been propagated and have grown to enormous sizes in complete darkness, generation after generation, throughout such immense periods of time, I should like to explain some of their physiology. All plants require carbon in order that they may obtain food and energy. Except in the case of fungi and saprophytes which respectively obtain carbon from other plants and decaying organic matter, all plants obtain carbon from the carbon dioxide in the air solely by means of sunlight shining on the green substance chlorophyll which they contain and which causes such plants to be essentially green plants, although all of them may not appear to be green externally. The carbon which is thus produced is turned into starch and sugar. It is upon these substances that the plant depends for its food and energy, the supply of which is absolutely necessary for its growth. In short, no sunlight, no carbon; no carbon, no growth. As Dr. D. H. Scott, F.R.S., says in his work, *Structural Botany (1912), Part I* at p. 211: "A green plant kept in the dark cannot decompose carbon dioxide, and therefore under these circumstances it forms no new organic substance."

I have based my calculations of the relevant geological periods on the figures given by Professor Arthur Holmes, F.R.S., in his work, *Principles of Physical Geology (1944)*, at p. 105, but except where I have definitely stated otherwise, I have, on the basis of those figures, given the respective number of years from the present day to the middle of the particular geological period. No claim to mathematical exactness is made for these figures, but the modern method of arriving at them is, in the opinion of all modern scientists, a most reliable one. That method consists of calculating the age of a sedimentary rock from the known rate at which a radio active metal in it, such as uranium, breaks up into helium and lead. All scientists, however, agree that there must have been enormous periods of time for the formation of the respective sedimentary rocks, some of which have attained thicknesses as great as 64,000 feet, the maximum thickness of the Cretaceous rocks, and 40,000 feet, the respective maximum thickness of the Cambrian, of the Ordovician and of the Carboniferous rocks. For the purpose, however, of proving the falsity of the story in Chapter I of Genesis, it would not be necessary to show that there were these immense periods of time, because even if the exact figure for each particular period had represented even a small part of its present estimated duration, the absurdity of that story would remain.

Apart from the question of what number of years should be assigned to these immense periods, there is definite fossil evidence in different parts of the world of several groups of forests, which existed during the coal age, each group, one above the other, having sunk down with the subsiding ground. In the coalfields of Sydney,

Australia, fifty-nine fossil forests occur in superposition (Draper, *History of the Conflict of Religion*, etc., Watts & Co., 1927, at p. 159). According to Genesis all the gigantic trees of these forests successively grew and attained their enormous size in complete darkness and must have thus remained throughout the whole of their respective lives, and this must have gone on for an aggregate period of immense duration, which is absurd, as our old friend Euclid used to say.

From what I have already shown it follows that the Roman Church must hold that the sun was made after the appearance on the earth of fruit trees known to the authors of Genesis. I have now shown that science has proved that it is utterly absurd to suggest that the sun was made after the time when such fruit trees appeared on the earth. Consequently, I say that as long as the Roman Church continues to exist, there must always be a warfare between science and religion.

In some future article I hope to show that the other Christian Churches are really in as hopeless a position as that of the Roman Church with regard to this matter of the inerrancy of the scriptures. I shall here, however, put my reasons for this proposition in a summary form as follows: In Matt. XIX, 4, Jesus, who, according to the belief of all Christians, was God, really quoted from Genesis I, 27, when he referred to the creation of man and woman "in the beginning." As science has proved that the whole of that chapter is scientifically absurd, it is impossible to suppose that a God who was both omniscient and truthful would quote from it. Therefore, Jesus could not have been a God who was both omniscient and truthful.

J. H. G. BULLER, L.L.B.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### COMMUNISM

SIR.—Will you please make it known to your readers, either in the "To Correspondents" column, or in some other manner, that my letter in *The Freethinker* of July 29 in reply to C. G. Anger does not, in its published abbreviated form, correctly represent my views.

You can say the letter was too long, but as I feel strongly on this matter, I think I am entitled to this slight consideration. Much as I resent being dubbed the "slavish follower of a Party line," I equally resent the implication (which my letter would now seem to imply) that I am scared stiff of the accusation that I have some connection with Communists or Communism and am rushing in to reassure all that army of fools who think that any attack on American or British institutions at this time of day is proof positive of Communist Party affiliation. The object of my letter was to make it plain that it is not so, but also to point out how stupid are they who make such charges. If I am entitled to any consideration, please make some short reference to my repudiation. I would not ask without good and sufficient reason.—Yours, etc.,

L. EBURY.

Vice-President N.S.S.

[We regret we were obliged to shorten Mr. Ebury's previous letter from consideration of space.—EDITOR.]

### "ACID DROPS"

SIR.—I enclose cheque for £2 19s. 2d. being my sub. to *The Freethinker*, the balance to go to *The Freethinker* fund.

Please give us more "Sugar Plums" and "Acid Drops," that's the first thing I read, then the editor's article. I was going to bring your attention to the articles in *Picture Post* but on reading this week's I notice you have seen them, and in this week's number on page 42 we Freethinkers have a very good chance of getting in some truth to the R.C. Parson and the other letter re *Taticus*, that's the name the parsons always mention to me when I ask them for historical proof of Jesus Christ, so please reply or get Mr. Cutner to at my expense: if we could get a lot of our members to write on the subject to *Picture Post* it would do our cause a heap of good. If you would like to send me a letter I would copy it out and send it under my name. Please send me 50 or 100 each of your National Secular Tracts, I send these

on to the right people. I hope to call on you in September. Kind regards to you and all at 41, Gray's Inn Road.—Yours, etc.,

A. G. BEDANE.

SIR,—

Don't be so flipping-well funny,  
*The Freethinker* ought to be "bound";  
 The shady side mocks the more sunny,  
 Sound sense we need, no sense of sound.  
 Take a leaf from the Man of all sorrow  
 And wear a sad, pondering look;  
 Remember, a hanky to borrow.  
 When you browse o'er a bright, beaming book.  
 For someone has started a rumour  
 (And rumour will run for a while);  
 That headaches are nicer than humour—  
 (Tho' BAD humour's hardly a smile).  
 So don't ram facts in with a mallet,  
 If you've tried it, you're bound to agree—  
 An "Acid Drop" sharpens the palate,  
 So, dear comrade, suck it and see!

Yours, etc.,

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

### Report of Executive Meeting held August 9, 1951

The President, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, in the chair.

Also present: Messrs. Griffiths, A. C. Rosetti, Ridley, Hornibrook, Morris, Shaw, Ebury, Johnson, Cleaver, Barker, and Mrs. Venton. Minutes of previous meeting read and adopted. Financial statement presented.

New members were admitted to Nigeria, Merseyside Branches and to the Parent Society.

In reply to the Executive's resolution of protest against the use of public funds for the conveyance of children to a United Church Exhibition in Windsor, the Divisional Executive of the Berkshire Education Committee decided to re-affirm their decision to use public funds when necessary for the conveyance of children to the Exhibition on the grounds that the Exhibition is of educational value.

Correspondence between the Executive, the Registrar General and the Home Office on the refusal to grant a certificate for marriage under Section 35, paragraph A of the Marriage Act of 1949, was read and further action decided.

To avoid competition with the Glasgow Secular Society it was decided to dissolve the N.S.S. Branch there.

Reports of lectures given by Messrs. Brighton, Clayton, and Ridley were noted.

Merseyside Branch reported police interference with meetings on a blitzed site in Liverpool resulting in Police Court proceedings. The Branch had been advised and a further report was awaited.

The office had been advised of a legacy of £50 under the Will of the late C. F. Budge of Nottingham, to be paid over in due course.

The next meeting of the Executive was fixed for Thursday, September 20 and the meeting then closed.

JOHN SEIBERT, General Secretary.

## LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

### OUTDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.
- J. CLAYTON'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS: Worsthorpe, Friday, August 17, 7-30; Enfield, Saturday, August 18, 6 p.m.; Blackburn Market, Sunday, August 19, 7 p.m.; Hapton, Tuesday, August 21, 7-30 p.m.
- Kingston-on-Thames Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: J. 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: J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER. Sunday Evening, 7-30 p.m. (Highbury Corner): J. M. ALEXANDER, W. G. FRASER and J. CALVERLEY. Friday Evening, August 24, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park): J. M. ALEXANDER and F. A. RIDLEY.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, August 18, 7 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).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: A Lecture.
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: C. E. WOOD and F. A. RIDLEY.

## REBEL OR RELIGIOUS REFORMER ?

## II

[Mr. Roy's two articles on Mazdak—"Rebel or Religious Reformer?"—arose originally out of a controversy with the present editor over the terminology of the game of chess.—EDITOR.]

IT was stated in my previous article, that our information on Mazdak comes from hostile sources only. We cannot suppose that they have altogether obscured the essential character of his doctrine, however they may have misunderstood or misrepresented it. Says Tabarî:—

"The Mazdakites asserted that God placed the means of subsistence (arzâq) in the world in order that His servants might share them in common. But men had wronged one another in this respect. The Mazdakites said that they would take from the rich for the benefit of the poor and give back to those who had little their due portion at the expense of those who had much; and they declared that he who possessed more than his share of wealth, women and property had no better right to it than anyone else." They became so powerful that "they used to enter a man's house and forcibly deprive him of his dwelling, his womenfolk, and his property, since it was impossible for him to offer resistance."

If God wanted every man to have his proper share, the Mazdakites could not have deprived any one of all his property, etc.; there is no trace in any writings that they waged war against the rich in particular. Obviously they intended merely redress by a return to pre-historic social conditions; otherwise they were nothing else but gangsters who sheltered behind a religious façade when they took advantage of the existing social insecurity.

Khusrau, in his address to the priests and nobles after his crowning—after Tabarî—dwells upon the ruined state of religion in general and the heavy losses which the ruling classes in particular had incurred. The systematic regulation which he made for the purpose of compensating these strata of society, establishing the position of children of doubtful origin, etc., does not necessarily mean to show that some kind of social revolution had taken place. The general state of affairs in Persia prior to Khusrau's reign had been bad enough, accentuated through continuous invasions of barbaric hordes and endless warfare.

Tabarî asserts that:—

"Among the commands which he (Mazdak) laid upon the people and earnestly enjoined was this, that they should own their property and families in common; it was, he said, an act of piety that was agreeable to God and would bring the most excellent reward hereafter."

Mazdak was not a philosopher, he was, it seems, an idealist whose panacea happened to contain the germs of a sort of social programme. Nöldecke has remarked that what distinguishes Mazdakitism from Socialism is its deeply religious character. Mazdak's asceticism—he is said to have forbidden the slaughter of cattle for food—gave offence to the orthodox who saw in him "the ungodly fasting Ashemaogha." According to some accounts, Mazdak never claimed to be the founder of his sect but to be merely a prophet, or preacher, whose boss was Zarâdusht, the son of Khurragân.

*Shâh-nâmah*, Firdausi's epic narrative which reflects the sentiments of the priesthood, brings out quite clearly the fact that Mazdak identified his doctrine of equality and fraternity with the creed of Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) in its original, uncorrupted form; he demanded a return to

its antique simplicity, so that "the pure religion may be made manifest and raised from obscurity."

"Women and wealth must be in common,

If thou desirest that the good religion should not be harmed:

These two produce jealousy and covetousness and need

Which secretly unite with anger and vengeance."

(Edition Turner Macan, Calcutta, 1829).

If women and wealth are owned in common, there can be no jealousy, no desire (the Buddhist trishna) any longer, and no need amongst mankind. Thus Mazdak considered his scheme to be the only sure means of enabling man to obtain the object which Zoroaster had set before him, namely the defeat of the powers of darkness:—

"The demon (div) is always turning the heads of the wise,

Therefore these two things must be made common property."

The Reformation in the West, in its turn, also professed and intended to restore the purity of original Christianity. And it is exactly this intention which seems to explain the astonishing, if only temporary and short-lived, success of Mazdak's propaganda owing to the force of his appeal to Persian idealism.\* As Nicholson sums up:—

"He would not have gained extensive support for his socialist programme unless it had been, ostensibly, for . . . the instrument by which he hoped to accomplish a just religious reformation."

I believe that Mazdak was much less of a Socialist than a religious reformer.

P. G. ROY.

\* Cp. also John W. Waterhouse, *Zoroastrianism* (Epworth Press) who states on this score: "In the fifth century A.D., Mazdak . . . endeavoured to reform the Zoroastrian religion. . . . For a while Mazdak was extremely successful in his mission, which he claimed was to teach the true faith of Zoroaster. Mazdak, however, together with many of his followers, was treacherously massacred and the new reform came to an end" (p. 109/10), as it was bound to owing to his endeavour to reintroduce outlived social conditions.

## TO THE POET

(After A. S. Pushkin)

Poet, count not upon, nor hug, the people's love.  
The noise of praise ecstatic speedily will fade;  
That which succeeds, the crowd's chill laugh, let you not  
move,

Nor the fool's sneer: be quiet, firm, and unafraid.

You, poet, are a king, and kingly you must prove.  
A monarch dwells alone, not lets his thought be swayed;  
Follow your thoughts' free flight, as freely flies the dove;  
Demanding no reward, improve the verse you made.

Thoughts from yourself arise. You are their chiefest judge;  
Your court severe will know good work, and which is  
fudge.

Are you content? Is't worthy of your highest Muse?

If you are satisfied, then damn the crude mob's spurning.  
Spitting upon your altar, where your fire is burning:  
Your incense tripod shaken will not you confuse.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.