

THE FREETHINKER

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Vol. LXXI—No. 37

[REGISTERED AT THE GENERAL
POST OFFICE AS A NEWSPAPER]

Price Threepence

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Exploring the Universe

A FASCINATING book of, apparently, American origin was recently published in this country entitled *The Conquest of Space*. The theme here elaborated was the solar system in general and, in particular, our solitary satellite, the moon. Such investigations have, of course, often been undertaken before by astronomers and historians of astronomy: such well-known authorities as Camille Flammarion and Sir Robert Ball can be recalled in such a connection. However, the American authors of *The Conquest of Space*, Messrs. Willy Ley (author of the actual script) and Chester Bonnestall (who painted the many weirdly beautiful pictures of the planets with which the book is adorned), are not solely concerned with merely writing just another academic text-book on solar astronomy. Their book is a manual of practice as well as of theory: as its title implies, their work is not only an up-to-date text-book of solar astronomy but, equally, a practical guide-book to *The Conquest of Space*, which it is the authors' intention both to assist and to promote.

For our authors, like so many of their countrymen, are super-optimists: habitually in this volume they talk of visits to the moon and planets as events destined to be realised in our lifetime, whilst they go out of their way to describe the projected "space-ship" which the present century, or so they affirm, will see successfully bridging the, up to now, insurmountable gulfs of space which separate our earth from the other members of the solar system. For *The Conquest of Space* is not only a book but a practical programme shortly to be realised. Naturally, from the nationality of the authors, it is the United States, which already rules this dollar-struck world below, that is to take the lead in "opening up" the planetary system to earthly penetration. However, our technically-minded authors do not stop to consider any possible political problems which might result from such inter-planetary imperialism. Perhaps they intend to leave it to the "State Department" to proclaim its own inter-planetary "Monroe Doctrine."

Our authors, however, not only combine the role of "space-ship" technicians and prophets of extra-terrestrial human flight. They are, also, philosophers: their analysis of the evolution of astronomical science is both original as well as optimistic. For they divide the history of the science of the stars into three sequential epochs characterised specifically by radically different techniques of inquiry: they may be defined, successively, as the era of the naked eye, of optical aids to observations and—in the near future according to the authors—the actual exploration of the solar system by means of their projected rocket-missile or "space-ship." Of the above eras, the first dates probably from the old priestly astrologers of Chaldea, who first searched the skies in order to discover the will of the gods and the secrets of the Future; the second, from Galileo and his contemporaries who invented the telescope in the early 17th century; whilst the third

will, of course, begin when the first "space-ship" first lands upon the moon and, presumably, plants the star-spangled banner upon our satellite. Very neat and not, perhaps, quite impossible, though we do not, of course, forget the nationality of the authors!

However, whatever may be the actual facts relevant to the Future, it is, at least, certain that the idea of space-travel has a long history adorned with many eminent literary names. It is, no doubt, not an accident that most of them have been Freethinkers though, in fairness, one Anglican bishop also wrote *A Voyage to the Moon* (Bishop Wilkins, one of the founders of the Royal Society) nor, in this connection, would it be fair not to admit that it was another Anglican clergyman, though a most peculiar one, Dean Swift, who "discovered" the two moons of Mars on paper in *Gullivers Travels* a century and a-half before astronomers actually located them in the sky.

However, it was amongst the critics of theology that most of the prophets of "space-ships" are to be found: Lucian of Samosata, the last great Freethinker of antiquity, who satirised declining paganism and rising Christianity with equal boldness, first described a human visit to "the shining island" of the moon. In medieval times, the great heretic, Roger Bacon, dreamed of inter-planetary flight in the monastic prison to which the bigotry of his clerical colleagues had confined the daring inventor. In modern times we have the great Cyrano de Bergerac writing his *Voyage to the Moon*; and Cyrano was not only the romantic swordsman of Edmond Rostand's celebrated drama but was, also, a brilliant and daring free-thinker who defied the all-powerful Catholic Church at the very court of the "Sun-King" Louis Quatorze. And in more modern times, there were Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and a host of others, mostly not particularly noted for religious orthodoxy.

Our authors' thesis has, moreover, a direct bearing upon the age-old "conflict of science with religion." For, in that "conflict," perhaps, the most shattering blow ever dealt to traditional beliefs by scientific discovery was represented by the discovery of the heliocentric theory which, as demonstrated theoretically and practically by, respectively, Copernicus and Galileo, dethroned the earth and, by inference, mankind from the central and dominant position in the Universe with which Jewish legend and Christian theology had endowed our planet and species. It was, we recall, with Galileo that our authors' "second period" in the evolution of astronomy actually started: an evolutionary advance which soon demolished the very foundations of the traditional Christian dogma of an anthropocentric universe. If, as our optimistic prophets of "space-ships" imagine, their advent will start a "third period" of first-hand observation of the solar regime, its resulting impacts upon an already disintegrating Christianity are scarcely likely to be any less devastating.

For what, in actuality, would the crew of our trans-planetary air-ship actually see and report, upon their return? Basing themselves upon both the latest astronomical research and upon the well-informed artistic

representation afforded by the brilliant lunar and planetary illustrations with which *The Conquest of Space* is profusely illustrated, our authors present us with a terrifying panorama of the actual solar system. They remind us of the famous definition of our own satellite as "a world where there is no weather and where nothing ever happens," airless, arid, and uninhabitable. Then follow successively and with terrifying illustrations, the molten heat, alternating with freezing cold, of Mercury and Venus; the arid deserts of Mars, a vast "Tibet" capable, at most, of supporting only the most primitive forms of plant life; and the huge storm-swept globes of the giant outer planets, bitterly cold and racked by volcanic upheavals on a scale not remotely approached by our mundane chemistry: Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune; and, finally, Pluto, only discovered as recently as 1930; a dark and frozen waste marooned in illimitable space. (Even our super-optimistic authors admit that the outer planets will never be trod by human beings and, even on their own showing, it is not easy to see how the crew of our hypothetical "space-ship" could hope to survive upon any planet here depicted except, doubtfully, the Moon and Mars.)

However, "hope springs eternal in the human—and, apparently, astronomical breast." Despite the terrifying difficulties, our authors are definitely of the opinion that, to paraphrase the well-known slogan of Judge Rutherford: "Many now living will never die"—until they have seen the "space-ship" and, presumably, read about the "voyage to the Moon" in a special lunar edition of the Press! However, since adventure is the life-blood and science the ally of Freethought, we feel sure that our readers will join us in wishing *bon voyage* to the projected voyage and to the daring mariners.

We will merely add that, we hope, a few theologians will be included in the crew so that, having actually seen "the works of the Lord" at first hand in a succession of derelict, uninhabitable worlds, they may then give us their reconsidered opinion of the "argument from design"!

F. A. RIDLEY.

(NOTE.—*The Conquest of Space* is published in England by Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson, 44, Gt. Russell Street, London, W.C. 1—18s.)

MAGIC AND AN ANGEL

REFERENCES in the Bible are taken to indicate that leprosy was prevalent among the ancient Israelites. There is, indeed, a most circumstantial account of it in Leviticus XIII. Unfortunately for that account, one medical authority states that any one reading it would be convinced that the disease there described as leprosy was of a different nature.

I am no expert in the matter, but the chapter mentioned does not sufficiently allow for the fact that leprosy has a protracted period of incubation (two to ten years), with indefinite malaise and irregular fever, associated with sweating, somnolence, weariness and mental depression. The ancient Israelites reveal nothing of these incubation symptoms. Even if Leviticus refers to the disease only when acute, the symptoms narrated are not regarded as distinctive of leprosy.

It is probable that the ancients, Israelites and others, confused the disease with many others where ulceration and nodular disfigurement were conspicuous features.

The Leviticus account increases in confusion as it continues, for leprosy is asserted to be visible in clothes and houses. Then, in Chapter XIV, rules are laid down for the ritual cleansing of lepers, which, however, owing to the almost incurable nature of the disease, although it

seems sometimes to disappear, even without treatment, underline the probably erroneous diagnosis of Chapter XIII.

Further evidence of the confusion of leprosy with other diseases is, it has been asserted, to be found in II Kings, Chapter V, where Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria is cured of leprosy by washing, on Elisha's advice, seven times in Jordan. Then, on Elisha refusing a reward for his services, his servant, Gehazi, obtains one from Naaman by fraud. As punishment for his fraud, he is cursed by Elisha, and departs from his presence, a leper as white as snow. The whole chapter seems, however, to be a tale of magic, and so no evidence of a mere confused diagnosis.

Leprosy was once called the Phoenecian disease, which points to Asia as its original home, but, since syphilis was called, severally, the English, French, Italian and Spanish disease, the evidence from the name, Phoenecian, is not strong. Asia has, however, many important leprosy centres, there being a very great number in China and India.

The latter country has been considered as the original home of the disease, a condition corresponding to it having been described in the Rig Veda, 1400 B.C., but, as a similar condition has been described in the Ebers papyrus, of date about 1300 B.C., others attribute its home to Egypt.

It is well established that it was introduced into Europe from Egypt in the first century B.C., by the returning legions of Pompey. As a result of the Crusades, it was spread widely over Europe, so that in the 14th century the disease was so prevalent, that it required about 20,000 leper asylums to house the lepers. In France alone there were about 2,000 of such leprosaria.

No doubt in all the countries where leprosy manifested itself, numerous offerings were made to the gods to eradicate it, but amid the erroneous ideas about it, there seemed at least one rational one, that it was contagious, and, perhaps as a result of the most drastic measures of isolation, it began to decrease in Europe in the 14th century, and had practically disappeared from this continent by the 15th century. To-day there is treatment for leprosy, but it does not consist of washing in Jordan.

There seems no mention in the Bible of another disease, malaria, from which the Israelites must have suffered, but, presumably, it was not specifically recognised, being confused with other fevers. The Greek physician, Hippocrates, who lived about 460 to 350 B.C., wrote a lot about it, and seemed to have distinguished the malignant type, which he regarded as a fever of the summer and autumn. He and other Greeks made careful note of their cases, and the occurrence of malaria near marshes was observed. It was known to be prevalent in Egypt, whence it was thought to have come. The Greeks never seemed to have suspected its cause, which is not surprising. They are said to have invented the microscope, but I have not read anything in proof of this supposition. In any case van Leewenhoek seems to be the one from whom our modern use of the microscope stems, for he it was who, in 1683, first noticed, in the tartar from his own teeth, the animalcules which the microscope can reveal. The microscope was necessary, not, indeed, to suspect the cause of malaria, but to prove the cause.

The connection between mosquitoes and malaria was noticed by David Livingstone, who recorded that African fever, as he called the disease, followed the bite of an insect, while, in his Narrative of the Expedition to the Zambesi, he wrote that myriads of mosquitoes showed,

"as probably they always do, the presence of malaria;" but it would seem that Hindu physicians of the 5th century had made the same guess.

Several investigators of the 19th century worked on this theory. Ronald Ross is probably the one most known to people in these islands.

He seemed to have very diverse interests, for he wrote poetry and novels, devised original systems of shorthand and phonetic spelling, studied philosophy, mathematics (inventing a new system of geometry), and astronomy. He seemed somewhat religious; but perhaps this was only an effect of his poetic fancy, for God is a word that fits well into verse. He wrote of the day on which he discovered malarial parasites in the stomach of a mosquito, that the "Angel of Fate," then "fortunately laid his hand on my head." Verses by him talk of God revealing the knowledge he sought.

God might have acted before, for, probably no disease in the world has caused more sickness and death than malaria.

A work I consulted mentions that Ross's discovery was no accident, implying that it was due to his continuous efforts. As there are about 2,000 species of mosquitoes, Ross realised that his search was a stupendous task. He was undismayed by the extent of his self-imposed burden. Added to this many obstacles were placed in his way by the vagaries of officialdom. He had to continue routine duties and carry out his preferred investigations in his spare time. The writer of that work was fairer to Ross than the latter's own idea of divine revelation or the Angel of Fate laying a hand on his head.

Ross's philosophical insight was certainly defective, for he praised God for helping him to his discoveries about malaria, but he dropped the word "God" when he thought of how the disease was transmitted. He said that that was due to the cleverness of Nature; "men and birds," he said, "don't go about eating dead mosquitoes." Nature is too clever for that. She brings the mosquito and the infection straight to the man and puts the parasite nicely into his blood, so as to give it every chance.

Ross hoped to see malaria wiped from the earth, but to-day one-third of its population has the disease. The angels seem asleep.

(The late) J. G. LUPTON.

GIBBON'S SURVEY OF THE FALL OF ROME

THAT eminent historian, the late Prof. J. B. Bury, in his standard seven volume edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, states, in his learned introduction, that the Roman historian's accuracy is amazing. Despite the difficulties due to the paucity of documentary evidence that confronted Gibbon, his record still ranks as the authoritative survey of his subject, while the historical writings of his contemporaries, Hume, Robertson and Smollett, have been superseded. Bury's verdict is no mere eulogy, and he opines that Gibbon renders scant justice to Byzantium—the Eastern Roman Empire—which survived for a thousand years after the fall of the Western civilisation, until its capital, Constantinople, was taken by the Turks in 1453, and has remained in their possession ever since.

With all his pious prepossessions, Dr. Arnold Toynbee confesses that "One hesitates to question Gibbon's authority," although he thinks that Gibbon was mistaken in his conclusion that Graeco-Roman culture attained its apex in the Antonine period, and that its decline began "in the fifth century before Christ." For this view Toynbee furnishes little evidence, while the truth of

Gibbon's claim that the triumph of barbarism and religion was initiated with the death of Marcus Aurelius, appears overwhelming and conclusive.

The degradation that then set in, with slight intervals, continued for centuries until, in the 15th and 16th centuries, civilisation reappeared in Christian Europe, although it never died out in Southern Italy and Spain, where Arabian influences predominated.

It is instructive to note that the late Sir James Frazer, the profound author of the *Golden Bough*, in part iv, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Vol. 1, pp. 300-301, is in complete agreement with Gibbon. He states that Greek and Roman society reposed on the conception of the subjection of the individual to the well-being of the community. Indeed, the security of the commonwealth was deemed superior to the safety of the individual, either on earth or in Hades. From infancy onwards, to this fine ideal, the citizens willingly devoted their energies. Base were those deemed who disregarded their social duties and placed their personal interests before those of the community. "All this was changed," states Frazer, "by the spread of Oriental religions which inculcated the communion of the soul with God and its eternal salvation as the only objects worth living for, objects in comparison with which the prosperity and even the existence of the State sank into insignificance. The inevitable result of this selfish and immoral doctrine was the withdrawal of the devotee more and more from the public service, to concentrate his thoughts on his spiritual emotions, and to breed in him a contempt for the present life. . . . The earthly city seemed poor and contemptible to men whose eyes beheld the City of God coming in the clouds of Heaven. Thus the centre of gravity, so to say, was shifted from a present to a future life, and, however much the other world may have gained, there can be little doubt that this one lost heavily by the change. A general disintegration of the body politic set in."

In his curious essay: *Christianity and Civilisation*, in his volume *Civilisation on Trial* (Oxford University Press, 12s. 6d.), Dr. Toynbee does not seriously question the veracity of Frazer's indictment. He merely wonders whether that splendid humanist would have penned it, after two World Wars, and hailed Christendom's return to "native ideals of life and conduct." Yet, the Wars of Religion during the counter-reformation were not only among the most sanguinary on record, while even the Crimean War and the later conflict between France and Prussia had, partly at least, a religious character. Catholic pressure on Napoleon III played its part in determining his policy towards Protestant Prussia.

Toynbee tells us that for many years he held the view that Christianity, like other higher cults, "is a transitional thing which bridges the gap between one civilisation and another." This theory he now regards as somewhat patronising, but his present position seems equally vague and indefinite. His mystical reference to the Mass and his fondness for institutional religion lead one to suspect that his strange apologetics and his inveterate pietistic predilections will ultimately entangle him in the cobwebbery of Catholicism, if he has not already fallen a victim to ultramontane wiles. Christianity, he thinks, may bring important social benefits in our mundane sphere, but "its true test is the opportunity which it brings to individual souls for spiritual progress in this world during the passage from birth to death." Yet the fact remains that ethical advance has taken and still takes place, in entire independence of creed.

T. F. PALMER.

ACID DROPS

We have made an important theological discovery. Hell exists. In fact, there are two and, if the theologians are to be believed, three hells. There is, firstly, the old firm the home of Old Nick—temperature, boiling; latitude and longitude unknown. Secondly, there is Hell, a small town in Norway near Trondhjem, to and from which we have actually seen a *return* ticket. (As is well known, Old Nick only encourages one way traffic to *his* hell). Finally, there is a mountain in the moon entitled Hell, which is appropriately called after Fr. Maximilian Hell, S. J., sometime professor of astronomy in Vienna University. A hell of a lot of hells!

Many people have expressed surprise that the "Red Dean" of Canterbury, Dr. Hewlett Johnson, manages somehow to combine belief in Christianity (Anglican version) with "atheistic Communism." However, in the frozen north we have discovered a still more remarkable combination: the famous Icelandic novelist, Halldor Laxness, is, simultaneously, an active Communist and a practising Roman Catholic; as it is well known that the Roman Pope is infallible and the Russian dictator is always right, what is the poor man to do when these two unerring pontiffs disagree? The resulting dilemma reminds us of the famous query as to what happens when an engine that nothing can stop runs into a wall that nothing can break.

A recent issue of our contemporary, *Everybody's Weekly* informs us that "to combat the moral and spiritual degeneracy so apparent to-day there has been formed in Manchester a committee of business men whose objective will be the dissemination of Christian propaganda. It is hoped that this may lead to a resurgence of Christianity and prove to be an antidote to the present widespread paganism." We used to be told that, "what Lancashire thinks to-day, England thinks to-morrow." The above, however, seems to indicate that what Manchester is thinking to-day, England was thinking the day before yesterday.

As is well known, the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan "pope," is always a reincarnation of Buddha. At least, this has always been the case in the past. However, at present it looks as if a contested reincarnation will follow the decease of the present occupant. For now that the Chinese Communists are in control of Tibet, it is alleged that the next supreme Lama will be a reincarnation of Lenin or, if deceased by that time, of Stalin or Mao-Tse-Tung. There is, also, an American party amongst the Tibetan Abbots, for Mr. Lowell Thomas tells us in a recent book on Tibet that "the senior Abbot of Drepung Monastery expressed the hope that America would eventually go entirely Buddhist while another suggested smilingly that President Truman must undoubtedly be the Living Buddha." Isn't Tibet already cold enough without a further extension of "The Cold War"?

The "Daily Mirror's" huge circulation will almost certainly decline if it prints "Freethought" explanations of the sacred beliefs of Christianity. Someone actually asked the origin of the Trinity and instead of handing the matter over to a priest, the staff said: "It is comparatively new to the Christian religion"—not found in the O.T., anyway—and "every mythology had a three-fold Deity." After this, we expect that the *Daily Mirror* will lose most of its Catholic readers—Anglo as well as Roman—and it will be put on the R.C. *Index*. And serve it right!

The Rev. Frank Martin says in *The Sunday Graphic and Sunday News*, "We of the churches ought to feel intolerably uneasy about the increasing deformation of young minds." That must not be taken as repenting over the teaching of Bible nonsense to young minds in schools as actual truth, the Churches intend to continue with that; the uneasiness is over encroachments on their speciality where children are concerned.

From the Unitarianism of the *Inquirer* to the Baptism of the *Baptist Times* is not a long step, and no doubt Mr. J. Rowland may one day go a little further and be seen contributing to the *Catholic Times*. However, his article in the *Baptist Times* is written to prove that science now is "not anti-religious." It may have been so "up to comparatively recent years," but thank God, not now. The scientist has found out the "rules according to which the material Universe works," and such "rules indicate the existence of a Ruler" (with a capital R in all due reverence).

These "rules" used to be called "Laws" and always implied a "Law-giver," but after all, what's in a name? We may go a step further. A Ruler cannot live alone, he must have had a Son, and the Son must have had a Mother. This has been recognised by a much maligned Church, and it is right in putting forward Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Mary as the Mother of God, the Pope as God's Vice-Regent on earth, and the Holy Church as his Body. And, after all, look at the great authors who have become Catholics—Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Compton Mackenzie—we are in very good company, are we not?

The supporters of our old friend, Mr. Misery Martin, in his endeavours to get the Lord's Day properly back into our weekly life, are now perhaps gnashing their teeth, dressing in sackcloth and ashes, and bewailing the hard lot of Christian informers. For these gentlemen and ladies, who made a fine living as "Common Informer," always ready to scotch any Sunday enterprise for money, are now completely wiped off the mat. What are they going to do now? We suggest that they do a little fishing for money like Peter. The Lord could never let them down.

St. Stephen's Church, Hampstead, is to hold a special road safety service in October. Before and after that date all accidents will be at owners' risk.

We sometimes wonder whether a Christian clergyman can say something original, so have much pleasure in repeating the slogan with which the Rev. F. Martin has thrilled the readers of *The Sunday Graphic*. It is, "share your holiday with God." Well, we are sure many Christians would be only too pleased to do so—if God shared the expenses. How would the Almighty like to fork out £2 2s. a day merely for hotel charges?

Sometimes also we rather pity the poor parson. In that hotbed of true Christianity, Ayrshire, the inhabitants of Barrhill have been criticising the Rev. W. D. Hutcheon for preaching "contrary to the Word of God" because his fiancée wears nylons and because of other dreadful abominations in the sight of the Lord. The "elders" of the church appear to be horror-stricken—but can one expect much else from Presbyterian elders?

"THE FREETHINKER"

41, Gray's Inn Road,
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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.
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.
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

Mr. J. Clayton, who has been carrying on his lecture tour in and around Lancashire, reports some very successful meetings during which he has met a varied assortment of opponents; really the present heavenly selection committee needs replacing. Mr. Clayton had the good fortune to be challenged by a clergyman to debate and it took place at Preston last Sunday. Our case was in very good hands. The lecture tour is under the auspices of the Executive of the N.S.S., and operates during the whole year when conditions allow for meetings to be held.

The Nigeria Branch N.S.S. is very much alive and active. On July 15 the Branch Secretary, Mr. A. T. Amiebi debated with a representative of the God Kingdom Society. The subject, "The Bible was not written by God-Inspired Men" gave Mr. Amiebi an excellent opportunity for using his thorough knowledge of the Bible; and from a report just to hand we gather it left a definite mark upon the audience. Our congratulations to Mr. Amiebi and his supporters.

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY

OF the more or less outrageous frauds connected with Spiritualism, the worst is Spirit Photography. That there are people who really believe in it is, of course, no more astonishing than that there are people who believe in the miracles of Jesus—but at least we can examine for ourselves spirit photographs, while the miracles of Jesus are lost in the dim and misty past.

I have no record who it was who commenced the art of recording invisible spirits on a photographic plate, but it was certainly in the era of what were called wet plates—when photographers prepared their own sensitive solutions with collodion and the plate was exposed wet in the camera. These generally gave very beautiful results, and the glass plate could be used over and over again. It had, however, to be thoroughly cleaned, and this is where some bright genius must have got hold of a great idea. If the plate was not thoroughly cleaned, some "ghostly" remains were left of the old negative and when a new one was

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is now open

prepared and printed this "ghost" could be faintly seen and the uninitiated in wet plate photography could easily be kidded that it was a genuine ghost; or else how could it appear?

Later when the art of copying photographs or pictures began to be better known it was soon found how easily a photo "extra" could be added. There are many ways of doing this—one of them being pinning the photo on some black material and under-exposing the copying plate. This can then be used to take the proper photograph and, being developed, will show the "spirit" quite clearly. Of course, this trick was soon exposed, so it was up to the spirit photographer to invent new ways of assuring a genuine spirit to appear on a plate.

The gullible "investigators," people like Myers, Lodge, Stainton Moses, Conan Doyle, and crowds of others who were already convinced believers, were always ready to accept any spirit photographer. After all, there were spirits, and if there were spirits they obviously could be photographed. People like the late William Hope and Mrs. Deane were experts in the gullible, and they must have convinced hundreds of sorrowing relatives that their beloved ones could easily be photographed; and so they were, and when the spirit appeared on the photograph it was always a perfect likeness—just like the photo taken while the departed one was here suffering in this vale of tears.

If the dead person had never been photographed there never was a spirit photographed. It simply couldn't be done. And the real test is in this. If any reader hears of a genuine spirit photographer, ask him if he can deny it.

But it may well be that there appears on the photo a likeness of the spirit quite unlike any known photograph of the dead person. How could that happen? Let me briefly give the story of how Prof. James Hyslop had his spirit photo taken—and it was certainly unlike any photograph known to his relatives.

Hyslop was a convinced believer, the President of the American Branch of the Society for Psychical Research, and when he died, the local photographer of a town through which the professor had passed decided to hold a seance, to take a photograph of it, and see what the gods or the spirit world had in store for the many believers attending.

With the aid of the committee chosen for the purpose, every precaution was taken to see that the plates were not "switched," and the spirit of the dead Hyslop duly appeared. Moreover, no known photograph was like the "spirit"—which was instantly recognised, of course.

Without going into details, I may say that, in spite of the committee, the plates were switched—and the likeness? Well, it was one of a number discarded by the professor when he had his photograph taken by the local man—and it was, therefore, quite unknown. Yet that photograph of the seance with Hyslop hovering in the air, so to speak, would have been accepted as quite genuine by nearly all

of our own "investigators" especially those known as "scientists" who, when it comes to dealing with astute "mediums," are the most easily bamboozled of any class.

All the same, it is not easy always to account for what appears on a photograph. Houdini was completely puzzled at some streaks of light appearing on the photograph of a perfectly black screen which he had thoroughly examined beforehand. My own explanation of this would be a tiny slit in the bellows of the camera which might well have escaped his eyes if he had examined it, though perhaps he was more concerned with the screen than the camera.

It would take too long to give the many ingenious ways spirit photographers have invented to gull the gullible. I am quite ready to admit that I could be as easily swindled as anyone—though it happens that I do know some of the "ways that are dark" which, to the credulous, are infallible. Luminous paint is often used; plates are "accidentally" put on a luminous table containing portraits; a celluloid film on which is a face, is slipped in front of the plate in the dark slide—and many other ingenious ways have produced the "spirit."

It is a fact that one famous spirit photo which Sir A. Conan Doyle was ready to swear as being genuine was actually taken from a *half-tone* print of Gladstone. A half-tone is a process block made for printing in a journal, and if examined under a magnifying glass will be seen to consist of a series of dots, the dots providing the printing surface. Did this disturb the famous creator of Sherlock Holmes? Not in the least. It must be genuine because Spiritualism is genuine.

Spirit photographers have many ways of obtaining photographs of the dear departed—just as they have of obtaining information about would-be sitters. I should advise readers, if they have any doubt of this, to read *Revelations of a Spirit Medium*, edited by the late Harry Price. It is a devastating exposure. And any reader who is in the least impressed by what he sees at a seance and who imagines that the spirit explanation is the only one because he cannot explain it, has a lot to learn. One of the things he may have to learn is to be ashamed of his own credulity.

I should like to add that I have repeatedly challenged Spiritualists to produce an "extra" on a *film* in my camera. The challenge has never been accepted.

H. CUTNER.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

Islam

CHRONOLOGY. Birth of Mohammed at Mecca in 570 (or, perhaps, 571) in "The Year of the Elephant" when an Abyssinian army was besieging Mecca.

C.610—Mohammed marries Cadijah, a rich widow, prior to which the (future) prophet had been a commercial traveller (in modern parlance) and had travelled all over Arabia, where he seems to have acquired the rudiments of his later doctrines from Jewish and Christian communities scattered throughout the Arabian sub-continent.

C.612—Mohammed proclaims that he is the prophet of Allah, the only God. Meets with persecution.

622—The Hegira, or Flight of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, the year one of Muslim chronology.

622-30—Mohammed makes war on the pagan Arab tribes. Probably the Koran was actually written (or dictated) by Mohammed during these years.

630—Mohammed enters Mecca and makes it his capital. Abolishes idols, but makes the (originally pagan) "Black Stone" the centre of the new creed.

632—Death of Mohammed.

632-661—Era of the first four Khalifs, Abu Bekr, Omar, Othman, and Ali. The Arab followers of the new religion conquer a vast empire which extended from India to the Atlantic. Jerusalem taken in 637; Persia conquered by 650. Islam becomes a "world religion."

661—Civil war; assassination of Ali and accession of the semi-pagan Ummeiades, the Meccan aristocracy.

661-750—Rule of the Ummeiades at Damascus. Origin of the great split in Islam which still continues, between the Sunni (or orthodox) Muslims and the heretical Shiah, or followers of Ali, and the hereditary dynasty of the prophet.

681—Hussein, grandson of Mohammed and son of Ali, killed at Kerbela by the Khalif's army, an event still commemorated as a kind of "Good Friday" in Shiah communities.

711-2—Conquest of Spain by Muslims. The (classical) "pillars of Hercules" renamed "Jebel Tarik" ("The Mount of Tarik"—*anglice* Gibraltar) after the invading general.

750—Fall of Ummeiade dynasty — succession of Abbasids.

750-1258—Abbasid dynasty, "The Golden Age" of Islam. Haroun-al-Raschid, composition of "Arabian Nights," important scientific discoveries. Ummeiade escapes to Spain and founds an empire there, also the scene of a cultural renaissance.

1099—Christian crusaders capture Jerusalem and conquer Palestine. 13th century sees destruction of Asiatic Islam by the Tartars under Genghis Khan and of Muslim Spain by Christian Spaniards. Hulagu Khan takes Baghdad in 1258 and puts an end to Abbasid Dynasty. Last Arab stronghold in Spain, Granada, falls in 1492.

In modern times, Turkish ascendancy in Islam, the Mogul Empire in India, and the recent formation of the Arab League, have represented, perhaps, the most important events. The Khalifat was abolished by Mustapha Kemal in 1925.

Religious doctrines.—Mohammed named his religion "Islam," or "submission," to Allah, the Unique God. Mohammed is the last and greatest of God's prophets, but is not himself regarded as God. The Revelation of Allah, which is final and unalterable, is contained in the Koran (or Quaran) which Muslim orthodoxy holds to be the eternal, uncreated, and unerring word of Allah and to have been divinely dictated to the prophet. Islam is, more even than Christianity or Judaism, "the Religion of the Book." Like Judaism, Islam is rigorously monotheistic and rejects the Christian ideas of the Trinity and the Incarnation as blasphemous. All representation of the Deity is forbidden as "idolatry." The Muslim doctrines of Heaven, Hell, and the Last Things are generally similar to those of Judaism but are, perhaps, more materialistic; Islam developed a complicated system, in theology, of which Al Ghazali, "The proof of Islam," is the Muslim equivalent to Thomas Aquinas in Catholic theology. Islam preserved Jewish rites like circumcision and animal sacrifices.

Ethics and organisation. — Islam is not, strictly speaking, a Church. It has no hierarchy and no priestly caste. The Khalif, or "successor" of the prophet, was, actually, a political leader rather than a Muslim "pope." The Muslim community all over the world is bound together by common religious duties and obligations incumbent upon all its members. The first of these is represented by the statutory pilgrimage to Mecca, which is obligatory upon every adult Muslim unless unavoidably prevented. The pilgrimage, conducted according to a

rigid, prescribed ritual, is a most strenuous affair and cannot be legally (or safely) made by a non-Muslim. Every Muslim is bound to pray five times daily and the hour of prayer is proclaimed from the Mosque with the ritual cry: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet."

Islam is a "totalitarian" creed and claims jurisdiction in legal and in ethical matters. It permits polygamy (up to four wives apiece simultaneously!), easy divorce, and chattel-slavery. It condemns secular education, and the emancipation of women. As in other religions, modernist tendencies have developed, particularly in the advanced countries in the Islamic fold, like India and Egypt.

Summary.—Islam extends from China and Indonesia to West Africa and the Balkans. It is a missionary religion, democratic up to a point, and is said to be gaining ground in Africa. It claims some 200 million adherents and is the only contemporary religion that can be compared in influence with the Roman Catholic Church. Politically, it has lost ground in Turkey, but has gained political influence by the Arab League and by the formation of Islamic states in Indonesia and Pakistan. Mohammed may be regarded as the successor of the Hebrew prophets, the Koran as the authentic successor of the Old Testament, and Islam itself as a kind of cosmopolitan Judaism, without racial barriers.

F. A. R.

CORRESPONDENCE

IS THERE A HELL?

SIR,—I consider Mr. A. D. Corrick is rather unfair to the *Observer* in his letter in the issue of September 2.

The letter from which he quotes was in reply to an excellent review, by Mr. Ivor Brown in the *Observer* (June 3), of "English Life and Leisure" (B. S. Rowntree and G. R. Lavers).

Mr. Brown wrote: "The report's belief that the questioning spirit of man will defeat Roman Catholic discipline, with its mixture of terrorism, guarantees of security, and release from troublesome speculation, seems to be optimistic. But there are in the case histories more examples of Catholic seceders than I expected. (If my use of 'terrorism' is questioned, one Catholic testified that the priest warned her that she would burn in everlasting Hell if she gave up her faith to marry a Methodist.")

The *Observer* should be credited with the contents of its own review. The letter quoted by Mr. Corrick was from a reader and appeared on June 10.—Yours, etc.,

J. HENSHAW.

THANKS

SIR,—Hearty congratulations upon *The Freethinker* this week; the issue is particularly good. I hope the circulation is increasing. If the production costs are exceeding the sales, I hope to send a subscription later on in the year.—Yours, etc.,

A. D. CORRICK.

FROM BERLIN

SIR,—Having recently returned from the World Youth Festival in Berlin, I feel sure that many of your readers will be eager to hear what impressions I, as a secularist, gathered whilst there.

I travelled with the main party (over 1,000 in all), which left England on August 4. We went by boat to Gdynia, Poland, where we were met by 200 or so young people, carrying flowers and singing their national songs; all very eager to make friends with us. We left for Berlin by train, which stopped at almost every station, so that we could meet and shake hands with the crowds waiting to greet us. This wonderful spirit of friendship persisted throughout the whole of our stay in Germany. We were all impressed by it.

The living conditions in Berlin itself are very similar to our own; they, too, are rationed for food, but all seem quite happy and healthy. Schools, sports and cultural halls and flats are being built at a tremendous rate; often by young workers in their spare time. The factories, schools and hospitals we visited were very well equipped, far better than our own in most cases.

And now, the most important aspect as far as we secularists are concerned, is the fact that religious teaching is almost extinct. I made a special point of finding out about this, and was told by everyone I talked to that the young people were not interested in religion at all. Only the older ones seem to cling to it; and, as

no religious instruction is allowed in any of the schools, it will soon become a thing of the past. Incidentally, most of the churches are in ruins and are not being rebuilt.

The people there are only afraid of one thing, and that is war. The whole emphasis is on peace. War songs, war films, and war toys are absolutely illegal.

The happiness and eagerness to build up was in evidence on all faces. I came away feeling more determined than ever to work and fight for peace, in order that the people can continue to do this. No one will ever be able to convince me that they are preparing for war. *Freundschaft* and *Friedon* (meaning friendship and peace) are the words on everybody's lips.—Yours, etc.,

DOROTHY V. SMITH, Bradford Branch N.S.S.

ACID DROPS

SIR,—The irony, wit and sarcasm of "Acid Drops" is to me a source of unqualified entertainment.—Yours, etc.,

P. ELLIS-LYONS.

THE MORAL QUESTION

SIR,—I would like, if I may be allowed to intrude upon your valuable space again, to add a note to my letter which appeared in your issue of June 17.

The tradition view of sexual life is that there is but one pattern it should follow, and he who departs from it must be wilfully vicious and corrupt.

In the light of modern knowledge this view is shown to be totally incorrect.

The sex urge is not a standardised thing; it is subject to countless variations, and seeks expression in diverse and unpredictable ways.

How can such a force be confined within the strait-jacket of repressive and arbitrary conventional codes and legal enactments?

We Freethinkers pride ourselves on our rationality; we should face up to the fact that the legal and conventional outlook on sex and its manifestations becomes increasingly irrational as more modern discoveries in this field come to light.—Yours, etc.,

S. W. BROOKS.

CONSUMMATUS EST.

Cruel is that race
Which now, by Westerns' foolish grace,
At the high-table takes its place.
Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow,
Who made these Yellow Dwarfs, the Easterns' woe:
Let not Pearl Harbour damn those statesmen vile
Who have forgotten in so brief a while.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn (Market).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.: J. CLAYTON.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park, Bradford).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

J. CLAYTON'S Lecture Engagements: Worstholme, Friday, September 14, 7 p.m.; Great Harwood, Saturday, September 15, 6 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., Platt Fields, Sunday, 3 p.m. Speakers: C. MCCALL, G. WOODCOCK and R. BILLING.

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): L. EBURY and W. G. FRASER. Friday Evening, September 14, 8 p.m. (South Hill Park): J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Saturday, September 8, 7 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.

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

West London Branch N.S.S. (Hyde Park).—Sunday, 4 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY and C. E. WOOD.

INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, September 16, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Victorians and Ourselves."

W. C. FIELDS: FREETHINKER

THE biography written by Robert Lewis Taylor entitled *W. C. Fields—His Follies and Fortunes*, and published by Cassell's, is a gem of comedic writing. Fields was a natural comic on and off the stage. Nearly every page sent me into fits of laughter, and I recommend all Freethinkers to share in the great merriment which attended the actor all his life.

After his death some intimate friends testified that Fields was "the most authentic humorist since Mark Twain," and "the greatest heart that has beaten since the middle ages."

In its 283 pages the biography abounds in funny situations, and the recorded talks with clergymen and doctors are a veritable scream. I like the story of Field's first juggling engagement. He and a boy attended a Methodist Church Festival upon a promised payment of thirty cents. They arrived with their hats, tennis balls, and three cigar boxes. It was raining when they reached the church, and at the door the elder deacon said that the festival would be held indoors. Here is the comedy:—

"I'm sorry," said the deacon, "but you'll have to leave the cigar boxes behind."

"Why is that, my good fellow?" Fields asked.

"Because smoking is a sin," said the deacon.

"The boxes are empty," said Fields, opening the lids and showing him.

"That makes no difference to the Lord," replied the deacon.

"If you'll pardon us a moment, your worship," said Fields, withdrawing to the sidewalk, "my associate and I will confer." They put their heads together, and a few moments later Fields looked up and said, "If it will patch things up with the Lord, these boxes never contained tobacco—they were made especially for me."

The deacon thought it over, then admitted them. In the course of the evening, following recitations of "Crossing the Bar" and "The Gypsy's Curse" by a daughter of the organist, Fields did his juggling. Afterwards, catching the deacon loading up at the refreshment table, he asked for his thirty cents. "Not now," said the deacon. "Later." Four additional times in the next two hours, Fields caught up with the deacon, tugged at his frock, and requested payment. The answer was always "Not now. Wait till after the benediction."

Finally, a little impatient, and determined to limit his future church work to Baptists, Fields got his stooge (the boy) and went out to the foyer, which was filled with umbrellas. Nobody noticed the boys, as a basso was rocking the building with a rendition of "Asleep in the Deep."

"Let's collect our wages," said Fields, and began to load up. Between them they carried out thirty-one umbrellas, Fields was considering a second trip, but the stooge maintained that the head deacon, though overweight, had the rangy build of a stepper, and they decided not to take a chance. An hour later they sold the umbrellas at a downtown hockshop for a total of a dollar twenty cents. Then they boarded a streetcar, rode to the end of the line, entered a restaurant, and had the following meal for fifteen cents apiece: Steak, chicken, potatoes, beans, apple-sauce, peach pie, cheese, milk and coffee.

We have had many instances given in *The Freethinker* of Christians deliberately acting contrarily to the expressed wishes of unbelievers. A case very much in point was W. C. Fields. In his will he stipulated that his body was to be cremated, and that under no conditions was he to

have any sort of funeral. At his death, Mrs. Fields overruled cremation on the ground that such a procedure was contrary to her religious doctrines. No mention was made of Fields' doctrines! There were in actual fact three funerals. One, a good-sized public one, of a generally non-sectarian nature, at which Edgar Bergen officiated. "It seems wrong not to pray for a man who gave much happiness to the world," he told a large crowd of friends and film people. "But that was the way he wanted it. Bill knew life, and knew that laughter was the way to live it. He knew that happiness depended on disposition, not position. We simply say farewell."

After the first funeral, Mrs. Fields had another, a Catholic service. Then there was a third funeral, a spiritualist reading, presided over by a leading Hollywood practitioner. So you see, W. C. Fields was well and truly buried, and how he would have laughed!

A. D. CORRICK.

A GREAT FREETHINKER

DURING the last thirty years many young men and women have been enrolled as members of the National Secular Society, and it is quite natural to suppose that quite a number are unaware of the Freethinkers of 50 years ago who fought for the liberty which they are enjoying to-day. One of those valiant Freethinkers in the very front rank of our Society from the 80's of last century was John M. Robertson, until he died in 1933. He was a prolific writer as his books testify, and I strongly advise every young Freethinker from now onward to become acquainted with his works, as it is most imperative that to become thoroughly acquainted with the Christian and other religions and their superstitious creeds J. M. Robertson must be studied. A very important work is his *History of Freethought*. And what a great surprise I had recently. Some unknown friend presented me with 13 numbers of this valuable work of which the reading has given me great delight. Every number has a fine photo of some notable man and woman which greatly adds to their charm and to have been able to write this *History* the author must have read scores of books in not only his own language but others in French, German, Italian, Dutch, etc.

Not only his great talents were put to the service of Freethought but he was a politician who was able to debate on questions of vital importance. He became M.P. for the Tyneside Division and was widely known from Newcastle to Tynemouth as a man who could be trusted to do his duty. Soon after taking his seat in Parliament his ability was recognised and he became the Rt. Hon. John M. Robertson. And that honour he richly deserved.

"Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime,

And departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time."

JOSEPH CLOSE.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CHURCH. By Colonel Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

WHAT IS THE SABBATH DAY? By H. Cutner. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 2d.

WILL YOU RISE FROM THE DEAD? By C. G. L. Du Cann. An inquiry into the evidence of resurrection. Price 9d.; postage 1½d.