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## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### "The Jesus of History"

TOWARDS the middle of the eighteenth century, that meteoric figure, now so undeservedly forgotten by modern historians, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, presided over a brilliant intellectual circle in London in which many daring ideas were advanced. Amongst these was the at that time apparently unknown theory that there was no foundation in actual history for the Jesus of the Gospels who was purely mythical or, in more polite language, an "Ideal" figure, not an historical person of actual flesh and blood.

Bolingbroke's daring hypothesis made some converts in both his contemporary England and France, but was rejected by the leading Deistic writers of the day, besides, of course, by all Christians, including the heterodox sects, such as Unitarians. Both Voltaire, the leading Deist of Bolingbroke's generation, and Paine in the succeeding generation, rejected the novel conception, and stood staunchly by and for the historicity of the "Carpenter of Nazareth" as a human moralist and religious reformer.

However, what is now termed the "mythicist" theory, did make some distinguished converts on the Continent, including Volney and Dupuis, both of whom wrote in favour of the "mythicist" theory. These writers succeeded in securing at least one eminent convert, no less a person than Napoleon, who expressed his surprise when Goethe informed him that in Germany they still believed in an historical Jesus.

The 19th century was no less revolutionary in its approach to the traditional concepts of history than it was in the realm of the natural sciences: the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible, in particular, that of the New Testament, was virtually the creation of that century. From the time of Strauss onwards, the imposing fabric of Christian tradition began to dissolve under the sledgehammer blows of successive critics: Epistles, Gospels, and all went into the melting-pot. Most of the "higher critics," however, explicitly recognised a "Jesus of History" behind the façade of myths and legends superimposed upon what was conceived as an historical nucleus, by uncritical or self-interested "editors." Indeed, two of the most eminent 19th century Biblical scholars, Strauss and Renan, actually added to their popular notoriety, and, no doubt, to their bank-balances!—if not to their scientific eminence, by writing "lives" of Jesus which became international "best-sellers."

Even in the 19th century, however, there were a number of rationalistic "heretics," who included the Englishman, Robert Taylor, and the best-known of whom was the eminent Danish literary critic, Georg Brandes, who stoutly maintained that the story of Jesus was entirely mythical. In general, however, this view was too extreme both for the critics and for the popular secularism of the period. The figure of Jesus, along with those of Paine, Voltaire, and Socrates, which still stands outside the Secular Hall in Humberstone Gate, Leicester, the head-

quarters of the oldest Secular Society in England, undoubtedly represents what we may perhaps term the "orthodox" view regarding the Founder of Christianity entertained in English rationalist circles in the 19th century: a moralist, a religious reformer, in brief, a man posthumously exalted to Godhead by his credulous followers.

The "mythicist" view, which holds that "The Jesus of History" is not an actual man subsequently transformed into a mythical god, but, contrarily, is a mythical god brought down to earth in a fictitious "biography," only really attained its hey-day in the present (20th) century. The very nature of the bold hypothesis, that mankind has been worshipping a myth for nineteen centuries, inevitably aroused much hostility, not, by any means, wholly scientific in character. However, a number of scholars, pre-eminent among whom was (the late) John M. Robertson in England, and M. P. Couchoud in France, advanced elaborate theories backed by detailed investigations, to explain Christian origins without any reference to an historical Jesus. Such books as Robertson's *Pagan Christs* and Couchoud's *Creation of Christ*, have undoubtedly made a deep impression upon modern critical scholarship. Some remarkable concessions have been made to the "mythicist" theory by Rationalist and even by Christian scholars who still contend that there was an actual personal Founder of Christianity.

The latest champion of the "mythicist" theory is one who needs no introduction to readers of *The Freethinker*, Mr. Herbert Cutner. In his latest book, *Jesus, God, Man, or Myth, an Examination of the Evidence* (The Truth-seeker Company, New York, 2½ dollars), Mr. Cutner summarises the position which, during the past generation, he has put over in successive articles in the columns of *The Freethinker*. The author's name is a sufficient guarantee of his wide reading and painstaking "examination of the evidence" involved in his survey. Whilst it is also really superfluous to add that his learned arguments are lucidly conveyed in that forthright hard-hitting style which has won for its author an enthusiastic international following amongst militant secularists and which, or so we are informed, causes Mr. Cutner to be not altogether *persona grata* amongst, say, the credulous readers of spiritualist journals, and even amongst some "reverent" rationalists still possessed, perhaps, by a nostalgic longing for their religious past! It is much to be hoped that this most recent argument on behalf of the "mythicist" case will soon appear upon this side of the Atlantic where it would undoubtedly cause consternation in theological circles and controversy amongst rationalists.

Briefly, the "mythicist" case, as presented with great skill in the pages of *Jesus, God, Man or Myth*, can be summarised, we hope accurately, as follows:—

The "evidence" for an actual Jesus can be sought either in the New Testament itself or in Secular literature, pagan (Roman) and/or Jewish. Properly examined under a critical microscope, the New Testament the "Canonical"



books of which were, in any case, written by unknown authors long after the events which they purport to describe, yields no reliable information. What are usually regarded as the oldest Christian documents, the Epistles of Paul, appear to know nothing of any earthly Jesus, and are absolutely ignorant of "The Jesus of the Gospels." The "Christ Jesus" of Paul is a wholly Divine creation, the creation, perhaps of Gnostic theologians; as is, also, in a somewhat different context, the Jesus of the Apocalypse, "the Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World." Neither was conceived as an historical Palestinian Jew.

When we turn to the Gospels, we are in no better contact with ascertainable historical fact. Apart from their repeated internal contradictions which stultify them as historical documents, it has been proved unanswerably, by Walter Cassels in his masterpiece, *Supernatural Religion*, that "our" Gospels were unknown in and to the Christian Church prior to about A.D. 150, and that they show every sign, as the old pagan controversialist, Celsus, aptly put it, of having been "written, once, twice, thrice, many times." In fact our Bible is a symposium of literary frauds, fakes, and deliberate forgeries. What confidence is it possible to have in documents which have been so recklessly tampered with? (For example, Jesus is made to speak in the past tense of the death of a Sadducee whom we know from Josephus to have been actually killed A.D. 69—fory years after Jesus is supposed to have died!)

When we turn from the New Testament to the "evidence" provided by secular authors, the case is no better. Josephus' reference to Christ is an admitted forgery; Tacitus and the rest of the Roman historians wrote—if genuine—from hearsay, and it is not even certain that the people they refer to were actually Christians. The same applies to the Talmud.

That some things reported in the Gospels were historical in the sense that they were actually said and done by someone, though not necessarily by the same person, is about the most that may be plausibly admitted. For the rest, we await new arguments in place of the old discredited ones, and it looks as if we shall continue to wait. For never surely, to paraphrase a now historic remark, has so much been based upon so little, so much theology upon so little history, so much fiction upon so little fact, as in the case in the Christian Gospels.

F. A. RIDLEY.

### RELIGION AND SCIENCE

IN his article, "Religion and Science" (*The Freethinker*, February 3), Mr. Rowland repeats at greater length the substance of his letter of November 18 last without making any attempt to meet my arguments in reply to it. He tells us that he cited "Einstein, Millikan, Plank and others" to show "that recent developments of science have not confirmed the idea held by many that there is a necessary contradiction between the religious and the scientific point of view." This is an indefinite statement. If such developments have not confirmed the idea in what way do they deny it?

Mr. Rowland persists in arguing from "authorities" though I had, in my last article, pointed out the inconclusiveness of such a method of proof. He says that "Many of the greatest figures drawn from the contemporary world are more religious than would have been thought possible in the 1890's." What degree of belief is meant by the words "more religious" he leaves uncertain: but whatever it means it is of no value to his argument; for it

would be easy to point to many great "figures" who, since the 1890's, have remained without any religion at all. To oppose authority to authority on the question gets us nowhere. We merely arrive at a controversial *impasse*. As belief in religion is a matter of faith, not reason, the belief of the "greatest figures" affords no criterion of its truth.

After quoting "Einstein, Millikan, Planck and others" in support of his "contention," he tells us, somewhat inconsistently, that he has little to say on the question whether scientists can be accepted as authorities on religion, "for it is, after all, Freethinkers and Rationalists who have for so long held up the scientific thinkers from Huxley to Haldane as the real authorities on religious questions." This is to misstate the case. Freethinkers do not confuse science with theology. They are quite aware that the object of science is neither to prove nor disprove religion, but to discover by observation and experiment the laws which govern phenomena. Its disproof of religion has been merely a by-product of its research in other fields. In discovering truth it has *unavoidably* exposed falsehood. If the Freethinker recognises this fact, and uses it as an argument against religion, is he not justified?

He tells us that "The Freethinker is a man whose thought is circumscribed by certain dogmas laid down when science was very different from what it is to-day." Mr. Rowland is once again in his element of vague assertion. In what way does the advance in modern science contradict the first principle of Freethought, viz., that Christianity is a myth? Have the several theories of "Einstein, Millikan, Planck and others" the slightest adverse bearing on this particular "dogma"? Since he has relinquished reason for religion he seems to have given himself up to wishful thinking. Freethinkers do not, as he asserts, "go on pretending that scientists are men convinced that the religious attitude to the universe is nonsense." They are quite aware that, as individuals, scientists have no special immunity from inconsistency and self-deception. What Freethinkers do claim is, that the religion of such is incompatible with their science, and that science, viewed *per se* as a system of knowledge based on natural law, has shown conclusively that the religious attitude to the universe *is* nonsense.

That many scientists are, as he says, religious men "all depends," as Joad would say, "on what you call religion." The word is vague and embraces a wide field of credulity from belief in a personal God to a metaphysical abstraction. In his articles, written since his *volte-face* from fact to faith, Mr. Rowland has frequently quoted the casual non-committal statements of a few scientists on religion without telling us what their particular beliefs are. If, as he contends, there is now no contradiction between the religious and the scientific point of view, can he inform us how many of these religious scientists believe in the God of Genesis and "Christ and Him crucified"?

As far as I can see there is only one way in which a man can be a religious scientist, and that is by eliminating everything in his religion that is incompatible with his science. It is the only method of ensuring that there shall be no contradiction between them; and most of those whom Mr. Rowland quotes have practised it.

A. YATES.

### THE HOLY LAND

"People in Israel must pay 30 per cent. more for bread, 50 per cent. more for meat, and 80 per cent. more for fish from to-morrow, because of the devaluation of the pound in Israel."—*The Daily Express*, March 4, 1952 (Despatch from Tel-Aviv).



**LOGOS, THE WORD**

WORDS are keys to understanding, they are mental means to know what things are, but in the English language, orthography presents many difficulties, because of alterations caused by change of times in civilization and introduction of foreign elements. But, pure English, named "King's English," with its "lofty phraseology," we are told, is in the Bible, which has never been understood, because the "Holy Book, God's living word," is made up of dead languages; and, what there is of its "originals," no scholar can read. To corroborate this truth, read the "Preface to the Revised Version of the Holy Bible," and learn the Translators' confession of their ignorance and mistakes, hundreds of them, through inability to translate, and the Company of Translators, in order to determine what words mean in the blessed book, they "cast lots," i.e., "tossed-up for it!" so that the tree "algum," should become "Al-mug!" also, Baalam's talking ass, signifies "prophet." Word-names are of two classes, proper and improper, and many of the improper type are included in the Bible, unsuitable for females or children.

However, curiously-minded readers can help themselves to a surfeit of ticklish, divine, purple phraseology, which Captain Sir Richard Burton, K.C.M.G., said could be found in the Bible, "an immoral book." Let Free-thinkers tell their religious friends to read and *think* for themselves of these words. Biblical exegesis, the interpretation of the scriptures, proves the composition of the Old and New Testaments to contain old Greek, Hebrew, Chaldaic, Syriac, Phœnician, Arabic, Aethiopic, Persian, Armenian, Egyptian and Aramic words which Jesus is said to have spoken, many of them raise difficulties. Here is an erudite study, and no wonder that persons, in surprise, ejaculate, "my word!" Hence, with this conglomeration, there are obscured such names as Thomas, changed to Didymus; then Tabitha and Dorcas are the same person; tabby for cat; Dorcas, in Greek, female, dear or deer.

Jews, Hebrews and Gentiles wrote different words for the same thing; Justus is Jesus, Bar-Jonah, son of a whale; Bar-tabbacha, son of a butcher; Bar-saphin, son of a sailor; "son of a gun" and "son of a whore!"

Such improper names become so perplexing, although Christian searchers of the Bible profess to understand them; but the wise writer of the apocryphal *Book of Wisdom*, refused to use such words, consequently throughout his book not a single proper name is included. Agrippa, to be sure, was named Agrippas because he was born upside down, feet first, a help to salvation, sure footed!

Another word-name refers to Herod, whom an Angel of the Lord inflicted with a lousy disease, being Peter's friend, imprisoned by Herod for using "strange words." A mighty-sounding name, meaning "helper of men," recorded in "The Acts," acting as cross-bearer for the Saviour, is Alexander, of the Gospels, a chief priest who prosecuted the Apostles for swearing, a Jew stoned at Ephesus, a maker of brazen-pots who spat in Paul's face, and none other than Alexander the Great, suffering from diarrhoea and who died of that complaint.

The Biblical person named Apelles, might mean "his apple," as the apple of St. Paul's eye, a Christian, recommended by St. Paul to the Romans, who afterwards persecuted both Paul and Apelles; yet, that may not be so, for Apelles is translated, a black poplar tree; also, an effeminate person, having a dark countenance, perhaps caused by having "the pip!"

Parkhurst's famous dictionary, 900 pages of Biblical word-meanings from the Hebrew and other languages, explains that Akulas is the same as Aquila, a Christian Jew, if there be such, a tent-peg maker, an eagle, a native of Pontus, in Acts, 18, 2, expelled as a rogue, by Emperor Claudius.

Aquila's wife had the fancy name of Priscilla to conceal identity, as one of St. Paul's followers, when preaching the Gospel with Archippus, which means skilful in horse-riding, and died when his horse shied, throwing him into a ditch. The translators follow Bel and the Dragon, also Tobit and his dog, but these creatures were hidden under the altar tablecloth, hence, apocryphal; also, Astyages, King of the Medes, the name Astyages, according to the Armenians is god, and change the name to Astvades, signifying "god alone," which again is changed by the Persians to serpent-king, the first ruler of Æthiopia.

Spinoza states it was impossible for these translators to give in English what the natives of the Eastern countries wrote, when their different languages were not understood, so casting lots decided what to put in the Bible.

Much of this exegesis forms part of school teachers' study to obtain a pass certificate in religious knowledge; and, the clergyman-professor often squares his explanations to suit his case, sometimes causing laughter.

Canon Evan Daniel was Principal of a London college for training teachers, two years' residence. The Canon was author of good text books; one on the good English of the Prayer Book and Bible, the other text book, English Grammar, in which a chapter was devoted to the proper use of pronouns, and to give examples of their improper use, he quoted the well-known parts of the Bible as, "when they arose in the morning, they were all dead corpses"; also "and he said unto them, saddle me the ass, and they saddled him the ass!" etc.

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

**AN INVOCATION**

How can I write  
Great lines to-day?  
I feel that I must wait  
Until that angel, Inspiration, pass my way.  
For that celestial being  
Strengthens the poet's hand,  
Quickening his seeing  
Through the dim, dream-clouded land,  
The Land of Make-Belief,  
To where the Mount of Truth  
Stands forth in bright relief.  
Sweet angel, come,  
Dear Inspiration, come;  
Till with your aid I glimpse the truth,  
I folly write, or must be dumb.

B. S.

**FROM ONE WORLD TO THE OTHER**

Mr. F. A. Ridley, an experienced and widely-known author, who edits *The Freethinker*, now writes in his polemical notes under the heading "Acid Drops" about an even more widely-known author who has recently written a series of articles on his investigations over a period of months, in the following manner:—

"No one will be surprised that Mr. Beverly Nichols who, no doubt, thinks he is an 'infidel' slayer, has at last fallen for Spiritualism. At his first sitting, the medium—naturally—could get no evidence. At his second, the medium 'was uncannily accurate.' So, as 'comment on this would be embarrassing,' Mr. Nichols referred to the many well-known men who—like himself—had declared their belief in Spiritualism. 'They could not be all dupes or liars,' but why could they not be dupes? Just because a man is 'well-known' does not mean that he could not be easily bamboozled—as was, of course, even Mr. Nichols."

Riddle: What is Mr. Ridley?—*Two Worlds*, March 1, 1952.



### ACID DROPS

We note that an appeal for peace has recently been issued by the R.C. Bishop of Hiroshima, the ill-fated Japanese town which was devastated by the atomic bomb. We can quite understand the desire of the unfortunate citizens for peace, but if the Lord, who must have foreseen the atomic bomb when He first made the atom, could not or would not intervene to stop the first atomic missile, what reason is there to suppose that He will intervene on the second occasion?

Really, at the rate things are going at present, there will soon be no ascertainable difference between "Christian England" and "Darkest Africa." We are being positively overrun by "spirits of all kinds," from crockery-smashing "poltergeists," those rumbustious specialists in the art of house-decorating, down to spirits compounded of "pure evil"—which appears to our inexperienced view, to be a contradiction in terms. The latest manifestation of the monstrous regiment of spirits who—or should it be which?—have invaded our shores, appeared in the select precincts of Tonbridge School, one of those select "public" schools to which, we assume, only the very best people—and, we hope, spirits, go. However, a spirit of "pure evil" took possession of the sanatorium and had to be duly "smelt out" and exorcised by the school chaplain. We think that a special Labour Exchange ought to be set up exclusively devoted to finding jobs here for out-of-work witch-doctors.

By the way, Dr. Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, has just announced that thousands of parishes will soon be left without pastors, unless more young men "come forward" for ordination. Actually, we always understood that the ordination business was the exclusive department of the Holy Ghost who "called" people to the ministry. Perhaps, however, the Holy Ghost Himself is feeling the current economic "draught." It certainly looks as if young men of ministerial age were in that unfortunate position. Anyhow, the shepherdless parishes will soon get used to it and, in any case, there is always the B.B.C. to fall back on.

How much our campaign against Christianity is responsible for the Bishop of Chichester's grave warning we cannot say, of course, but the heads of the Church of England are very much concerned that so few young men feel "the call" to the service of God as they used to in less materialistic times. Soon, Dr. Bell moans, there will be plenty of parishes without any clergy—a catastrophe too terrible to contemplate. The truth is that the kind of young man who used to make the Church his career has virtually disappeared. He finds he can get a better salary in business, and he has no need to face the barrage of contempt so many of our clergy have to face.

One of the greatest curses inflicted by Christianity upon long-suffering mankind is represented by the legal status of illegitimacy inflicted, through no fault of their own, upon children born out of wedlock. It passes all rational understanding why children should suffer life-long victimisation for an action of their parents over which they had obviously no control. Even the barbaric regime of Hitler did away with this particular superstition. To expect "Christian England" to abolish it would, perhaps, be too optimistic just at present. But we are, at least, glad to see that a private member's Bill has just been introduced into the House of Commons in order "to protect the

interests of illegitimate children." After all, many famous men have been born out of wedlock: Erasmus, Da Vinci, and—what about Our Lord?

In any case, the training in history, biology, physics, and anthropology, boys get at school makes it very difficult to reject the ascertained results of science for the obvious Oriental myths and legends which surround true Christianity. No amount of "Modernism" can hide the superstitious drivel at the back of Christianity—its devils, miracles, angels and spooks, to say nothing of its Palestinian God. We think that the Church is facing a very grave danger, and one which, in the nature of things, it will never surmount.

Talking about Angels we came across the account written by a believer, a Mr. P. Godley, of Barnsley, who tells us that in church recently he saw quite plainly and heard "seven angels all in white. Each had a long, slender golden trumpet. [Mr. Godley forgot to add that each trumpet was beautifully embellished with real Hatton Garden diamonds.] Each angel stood on a cloud and blew a fanfare." And we have met people who were just as sure of seeing pink elephants chasing green rats across scarlet seas. But did Mr. Godley see the opening at the back of each angel's nightie to let the wings through? There's the rub!

The Head of the New Renaissance School, a Dr. Fearn, has solemnly warned the world that its end is imminent. We who are purely materialistic go gaily on as if there was nothing to fear, but these "extra-sensory" people know better. God, according to Dr. Fearn, has become bored with "public worship"—as he ought to—so "like a thief in the night" the end will swoop down on us and the only lucky ones will be the Spiritualists who have always fought blatant Materialism. "Death," declares Dr. Fearn, "is no longer a morbid, insolvable mystery." That may be, but we'd take a big bet that if Dr. Fearn is ill he would put off the solvable mystery as long as possible with the aid of a good doctor.

Whatever else parsons might write about in their weekly column of religion in our newspapers, they always come back to the same thing. This world of ours is full of broken homes, money and pleasure seeking, dishonesty, slaughter on the roads, easy divorce, and so on. How can we get a better world? This is dead easy—"the first step," cries the Rev. F. Martin in the *Sunday Graphic*, "is to admit that we have been wrong." Then "revitalise our country in the spirit of Jesus Christ—living towards God, which means personal religion at home, in industry, and in politics." If this were done the whole world would immediately change, there would be no slaughter on the road, no Iron Curtain, no Korean War, every Communist would embrace every Capitalist, work and wealth would pour into every home, and everybody would have as much food as he could eat. Perhaps!

Mr. Martin should look up his history. When every country was revitalised by Christ, that is, when the Christian Church was in power, there was little else for the common man but an early death, poverty and misery if he survived, and any independent thinking was rewarded by torture, imprisonment, or the stake. Justice, as we understand it, was simply non-existent. If Mr. Martin thinks we have forgotten the record of his Church he had better think again.



# "THE FREETHINKER"

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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.

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.

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.

## SUGAR PLUMS

Mr. J. Glenville Cook, Secretary of the Australian Rationalist Association, in a letter to the Editor of *The Freethinker*, expresses his personal regret, as well as that of Australian Rationalists in general, at the heavy loss sustained by the National Secular Society in the deaths of its late President and Secretary, R. H. Rosetti and J. Seibert. Mr. Cook pays a generous tribute to both the personal merits and the eminent services to International and British Freethought of these gentlemen. He concluded by expressing his firm conviction that the N.S.S. will survive its recent heavy losses, and that the work for Freethought will continue. Indeed, it will, in both England and Australia. Personalities come and go, but the movement continues.

## DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND MATERIALISM

### II

IN another Marxist pamphlet, written by a Mr. M. Cornforth, entitled *Dialectical Materialism and Science*, the author is very pre-occupied with what he calls "bourgeois science," and he insists that there is a "crisis" in this "bourgeois" science. He claims that modern science is "the creation of the bourgeoisie." Here I must admit that I am in a dilemma.

As an out-and-out Materialist myself, I welcome the achievements of modern science, and I must confess that I never cared a tinker's hoot whether they came from the "bourgeoisie" or the "workers" or the "proletariat" or even from a noble lord. Science has always appeared to me like music, of no race or section of a people, but something "universal," something all mankind can share. To call science "bourgeois" is, in my opinion, just as idiotic as to call literature or art, bourgeois. Who cares from what kind of people Rembrandt or Dickens or Schubert sprang—we are concerned only with what they have left, a precious heritage which some of us hope will last as long as man can enjoy beautiful things. To label something "bourgeois" has, of course, come to mean a sign of contempt for Marxists—though Marx himself was as "bourgeois" as any of his Capitalistic opponents. Not

## "THE FREETHINKER" FUND

Donations for week ended Saturday, March 8, 1952:—  
J. S. Reynolds, 10s. 6d.; A. Beale, £1; J. Buratt Macauley, 4s.  
Total for week: £1 14s. 6d.  
Total received to date: £473 19s. 5d.

even his most enthusiastic follower could call Marx a "working man," a rugged proletarian, inflexibly bound by the petty rules and regulations of a Capitalist employer or a Trade Union.

It is true that Mr. Cornforth does "not deny the achievements of science," which is most generous of him considering he has to endure these achievements with as good a grace as his non-Marxian opponents; though here I am wondering whether the science he does not deny is "bourgeois" or "revolutionary working class" science. He criticises science because it is the "science of a class." the class he obviously loathes; how generous would be his appreciation if this same science had been "revolutionary working class"—as if science in reality had any of these idiotic distinctions.

"What," asks Mr. Cornforth, "are the new, revolutionary features of dialectical materialism?" And he answers, "It is the complete victory of the materialist outlook, establishing the principles of a complete and absolutely consistent materialist approach in all spheres of thought." And "this materialism involves at one and the same time the criticism of both the idealist and the mechanist preconceptions which penetrate bourgeois thought in the sciences." Moreover "dialectical materialism ends the philosophical systems of the past"—as if it alone ended them. Some of the philosophical systems of the past became out of date when the ideas upon which they were founded were out-dated; but the one philosophical system which has not been ended is Scientific Materialism which is strengthened by every scientific discovery. Even Engels had to concede this in what must have been a very bitter passage for Mr. Cornforth. "Modern Materialism," he wrote in *Anti-Duhring*, "is essentially dialectical and no longer needs any philosophy standing above the sciences." The reader will note that Engels says "modern" Materialism—that is (I hope) the Materialism I have been defending, but which Mr. Cornforth criticises throughout his pamphlet by calling it "mechanistic." So it is, and we Materialists are proud of the fact. We see no ghost of a God or an "entity" in it. And even Engels wants to be known as a Materialist so strongly that he tries to rope in *our* Materialism as "dialectical" when it is nothing of the kind. As Prof. MacMurray clearly said, "Dialectical Materialism is *not* (my italics) a mechanistic philosophy." As Prof. MacMurray is a practising Christian, holding, I think I am right in stating, that the "philosophy" of Christ is pure Communism, and therefore Christ is a Dialectical Materialist, without doubt the greatest Dialectical Materialist who ever lived, I for one am grateful for his saying so.

Of course, Prof. MacMurray may be, for all I know, disowned by orthodox Dialectical Materialists; for he says in *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism* (page 40) that "The essential point in which Dialectical Materialism is materialistic is that it defines the central problem of modern society as a material problem . . ." but, "Just here, however, it seems to me the contemporary form of Dialectical Materialism makes a fundamental mistake, a mistake, moreover, from the point of view of its own fundamental postulate. It proceeds to take this material problem as the universal problem of all human society.



Now this is not true. . . .” Whether all the other Dialectical Materialists will now start back in horror at one of them accusing their celebrated philosophy, which is not a “system,” as being “not true,” I cannot say; but in the days of its power the Catholic Church had some very grim ways of dealing with one of its professed adherents saying Catholic Christianity was not true; and in the land where Dialectical Materialism is now all-powerful, I do not think Prof. MacMurray would have got away with it as easily as he does in our democratic land. I wonder what really would happen to any follower of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin if he stood up in a Moscow Square and said that Dialectical Materialism “makes a fundamental mistake,” a “postulate” which is not true?

It appears to me that if Dialectical Materialists want to make converts then the first thing is to convince their own followers. To show them, as in this book *Aspects*, disagreeing with one another, surely proves that either they do not understand their own philosophy or that, at least in “fundamentals,” they totally disagree.

No one, of course, need be surprised that another Dialectical Materialist, Mr. R. Page Arnot, tells us that “of Marx himself it may be said that he was the greatest thinker and the greatest revolutionist of all time” thus forestalling any other Dialectician who might have been anxious to say that of Jesus Christ. After all, it looks like substituting one God for another. But Mr. Arnot appears to find it difficult to say what Dialectical Materialism really is — why *Dialectical*, he rather hesitatingly asks? And his answer is, “This has always been a verbal difficulty, to begin with. . . .” It reminds me of Voltaire’s remark anent St. Denis who walked six miles when he was beheaded with his head under his arm. The great Frenchman said it was not the six miles which were so difficult to believe—but the first step!

Needless to add, Mr. Arnot wants “the establishment of Soviet power in this and other countries.” Some of us may perhaps be sorry that he does not view this establishment, not while he himself is in England, but from a permanent home in the chief land of the Soviet.

H. CUTNER.

## IS IT PEACE?

(Concluded from page 74)

### THE CANDIDATES

Is it not possible that they are both alarmed at the prospect of atomic war, and may agree to ban atomic weapons? No. The risk is too great. There was no great risk in abandoning gas warfare, since it was not very effective. Atomic weapons are effective; and moreover have hitherto provided the only adequate answer to the gigantic military advantage totalitarianism gives. If America destroyed her atom bombs there would even now be nothing to prevent the Russo-Chinese armies from overrunning the whole of Europe and Asia, and there is little doubt that they would do so.

This conference is not meant for disarmament. It is a contest of propaganda. Russia is not much concerned about her own public: their opinions can be controlled. Nor is she much concerned about neutral opinion. If she could attack South Korea in the middle of her own Peace Campaign and yet continue to win over neutral opinion, then she can count on getting away with anything. She can scarcely cherish any hope of an immediate

agreement which would slow down America’s rearmament or hamper her atomic development. She may hope to weaken the alliance of America, Britain and France, and their embryonic alliance with Germany. What she probably hopes most of all is to influence the American election next year.

In November, 1952, America will elect a new President, and it seems likely to be one of the most critical elections in history. As things stand now, it is probable that the Republicans will win. As to who will be the Republican candidate, if the field of choice were confined to the party leaders, it is almost certain that Senator Taft would be the man. But it is possible that General Eisenhower will be put up, and if so he will probably be the Republican candidate and win the election.

Eisenhower, though a Republican, would continue Truman’s foreign policy. But Taft would make big changes. He has the reputation of an honest, able, independent man, but he is already advanced in years, and his ideas are distinctly old fashioned. He believes in the 19th century doctrine that every man, and every country, should look after itself. Until quite recently he was a full-blooded isolationist, and though he has relented somewhat, his foreign policy as announced would destroy the world anti-Communist alliance which Truman is building up. Not only that, his domestic policy would probably provoke strong class conflicts, and might bring about a good old-fashioned trade slump, which would certainly have the most disastrous effects throughout the free world.

Russia would give a very great deal to see Taft elected. In 1948 she did what she could to support Dewey against Truman, though Dewey was a Left Republican who would have made little difference to foreign policy. This time the situation is far more tense, and Russia could hardly imagine a better candidate, for her own point of view, than Taft.

It is probable, therefore, that Russia’s tactics in the disarmament conference, and the armistice negotiations in Korea, will be directed above all at influencing American opinion in such a way that the Republican Party may choose Taft as their candidate, and the electorate may elect him President.

Exactly how Russia will try to do this we can only guess. Doubtless the general line will be a display of moderation, implying that she has called off the world revolution, so that resistance is no longer necessary. If so, we may expect some considerable reversals of Russian policy in Paris and in Pan Mun Jom.

But it will not do to infer that she really has called off the world revolution. Why should she? The world revolution is going ahead very nicely. Nobody but a fool or a coward would give it up just because of some resistance by America. If Taft can be elected, American obstruction should be cleared out of the way very soon. If not, she will try some other method.

N. K. PARIKH.

## TWO HERETICS

Our old friend, Bishop Barnes, is in trouble again. This time it is over Communism, not Christianity. Can’t our heretical bishop arrange with his colleague, “The Red Dean” so that the Bishop sticks to theological heresies and the Dean to heresies of a political nature? Otherwise its going to get very confusing all round.



CORRESPONDENCE

FREETHOUGHT AND DOGMATISM

SIR.—Mr. R. J. Jackson's letter in your issue of the 17th February in reply to my previous one, is a very interesting example of the wish fulfilment method of thinking, but I am afraid that our wishes and sentiments do not affect the facts of the case.

There is no need to imagine anything about Freethought, it is either a case of thinking freely without beliefs, inhibitions, restrictions, and reservations, or not being a Freethinker.

By the use of complete and untrammelled freethought, one stands a very good chance of resolving the problems of things, as far as lies within the orbit of our knowledge extended as much as possible.

I again repeat that all life is idiotic, and is a continuous ghastly tragedy, despite the fact that humans, animals, and possibly plants, snatch some occasional pleasures from the welter of misery. Was it Darwin who said "Nature is red in tooth and claw"?

Please read my original letter again, there may be an aim by some men, at the expense of masses of suffering by untold millions of people, and if some people of the future gain an advantage as a result of the present and past suffering, then it is just luck.

There is no intelligible reason why another man should sacrifice his life for mine, or mine for his. It is fantastic. Mr. Jackson says: "Man gives Meaning to all things, and this is the dynamic objective of Freethought." Fine words, but unfortunately they mean absolutely nothing. Sentiment is not necessarily sense.

It is now to-day and to-morrow that concerns most people, not some dim and distant future when we are dead. When you die, Mr. Jackson, the world is finished from your point of view, and the same applies to me.

Your assumption that you are more important than other things in nature (except to yourself) is not borne out by any known evidence.

As to frustration, what use is its urge to thousands of men and women who, because of their opinions, are imprisoned in various parts of the Christian world, by legalised half-witted gangs of crooks, gangsters and murderers.—Yours, etc.,

P. TURNER.

ROME OR BABYLON?

SIR.—It is difficult to follow the workings of Mr. Preece's mind in his insistence on a "fundamentalist" interpretation of the Christian writings, known as the Apocalypse (your issue of the 10th February). Even the Churches recognise the symbolic reference to Rome as "Babylon"; Monseigneur Knox's footnote to Apocalypse XVI, 19, in his recent translation of the Christian Scriptures, for example, talks of "Babylon, that is Rome." It is really a remarkable stand to take—to treat the name Babylon as "fundamental" when that city had already ceased to exist for over 700 years and could have had no more significance to the early Christian than it has for us to-day. In a work that drips imagery and symbolism, does Mr. Preece really think this talk of "the great city" would have any point for the Roman except as a reference to his own capital? Why, I doubt if one Christian in a hundred had ever heard of Babylon; after all, they didn't carry around a Bible to bang!

Again, why does Mr. Preece deny the truth that ancient Rome was built on seven hills; the only sense in which this might be described as inaccurate is that one could name more than seven. *Chamber's Encyclopaedia* states that "the city developed first on the seven hills"—to quote only one authority. The hills are quite well known; they are Palatine, Capitoline, Aventine, Esquiline, Quirinal, Viminal and Caelian (and the Pincian hill might well have been added as an eighth). It is, indeed, due to this historical fact that Rome largely owes its survival and eventual supremacy. Lying in a bend of the River Tiber was a plain known as the Campus Martius; this in turn was dominated by the aforesaid seven hills, the whole terrain situated on the left bank of the river. Such a geographical position created a tremendously strong one, militarily speaking; furthermore, difficult as it must have been to take it, to hold it must have been considerably more difficult.

"Historically the Apocalypse is a Christian canon." In the name of Rationalism what does this mean—that we should acknowledge its divine origin?—Yours, etc.,

P. C. KING.

VULCANOLOGY

SIR.—Here's an idea of mine which might do either for "Correspondence" or "Acid Drops." It concerns "vulcanology." Once upon a time there were some people who believed in a god which they called Vulcan; he was supposed to be the god of fire. This is the reason the study of volcanoes is called vulcanology.

Now in Heb. xii, 29, it says: "God is a consuming fire." Matt. i, 23, says: "The Son of God is the same person as God." So according to that, *Christ* is a consuming fire. So it strikes me the study of volcanoes might very well have been termed Christianity!—Yours, etc.,

A. HANCOCK.

[An excellent idea! And most useful for those who, like Secularists, are destined to spend eternity in a "volcanic" atmosphere.]

—EDITOR.

OBITUARY

The N.S.S. has lost a faithful worker by the death on February 28, at the age of 76, of Frank Terry, for many years a member of the Birmingham Branch, of which he was the able and energetic Librarian. At its meeting held on March 2, the Branch passed a resolution recording members' high appreciation of his services to the cause of Freethought, and voiced their sympathy with his daughter, Mrs. Stanton, also a member of the Branch, and with her family. On March 5 his remains were cremated, a Secular Service being conducted by the Branch Secretary, Mr. Charles Smith, who writes: "I have delightful memories of both Frank Terry and his late wife, who passed away nearly four years ago. To them I owe much, for bringing into my life Freedom of Thought." P. V. M.

We regret to report the death of a reader of many years' standing, F. le C. Parsons of Cheltenham, a member of the Rationalist Press Association, at the age of 83. He left evidence of his unwavering Freethought by specific, written instructions that no religious ceremony should take place when his remains were cremated. On March 1, a short address by Mr. G. H. Holmes, who had been in daily association with him for the last fifteen years of his life, formed part of the Cremation Service by which his wishes were respected. It consisted of a simple yet eloquent statement of his sceptical attitude to religion, followed by a beautiful rendering of Handel's "Largo" on the organ. P. V. M.

LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

OUTDOOR

- 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. Speaker: G. WOODCOCK.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon, J. M. ALEXANDER and W. G. FRASER.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Sunday, March 16, 11 a.m. Speakers: A. ELSMERE and T. M. MOSLEY.
- Sheffield Branch N.S.S. (Barker's Pool).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: Mr. A. SAMMS.

INDOOR

- Burdford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: G. RAMSDEN, "Dianetics—A New Science."
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1). Tuesday, March 18, 7 p.m.: ASHTON BURALL, "What is Art?"
- Coventry Rationalist Group (Rose and Crown Hotel, Coventry High Street).—Sunday, April 16, 7 p.m.: Mr. F. A. RIDLEY (Editor, *The Freethinker*), "The Menace of Rome."
- Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: T. MOSLEY, "The Three Buttresses of Superstition: God, Free-will and Immortality."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Rev. K. WAIGHTS, "Some Thoughts on America."
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S.—A meeting at the Trades Hall (Old Corn Exchange) Thurland Street.—Sunday, March 16, 7 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, veteran physical culturist, lecturer, and author, will speak on "The Culture of the Abdomen," illustrated with abdominal exercises and an exhibition of native dances.
- Public Meeting N.S.S.—"Why a State Church?" Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1. Thursday, March 13, 7-15 p.m. Representative Speakers. Questions and Discussions.
- South London and Lewisham Branch N.S.S. (London and Brighton Hotel, Queens Road, Peckham).—March 16: Mr. P. VICTOR MORRIS (Secretary N.S.S.), "Some Free Thoughts on Defence."
- South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Grounds of Toleration."
- West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: Mrs. RUBY TA'BOIS, "My Freethought Bible."

WANTED. Old Catholic pamphlets, such as "Sight of Hell," by Father Furness; "Instructions to Nurses," etc. Books on Freethought, Witchcraft, etc., purchased. Send details and prices to E. W. Shaw, 195, Chipperfield Road, St. Pauls Cray, Kent.

YUGOSLAV HOLIDAYS (Apr. to Oct.).—Dormitory accom. in hostels, camps of Yugoslav Trade Unions, Youth Movements, etc. Reductions for youth; family exchange. Write: Sec., 16, Doneraile House, Ebury Bridge, London, S.W.1. Send stamp; state holiday month.



### N.S.S. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING, 6th MARCH

Present: F. A. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Barker, Corstorphine, Ebury, Gibbons, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shaw, Tiley and the Secretary.

New members were accepted into the Parent and Nottingham Branches.

An invitation from the Streatham Debating Society for the N.S.S. to send a representative to oppose a motion "That Christian Teaching, logically applied, would Solve the World's Problems" was welcomed, and Mr. Ridley was appointed to act in this capacity on March 28.

The Secretary read a letter from the Director General of the B.B.C. arising from the Society's February meeting at the Conway Hall, assuring the Society that the B.B.C. was anxious to give minorities their proper opportunities at the microphone, and that a review of the broadcasting of the Secular and Humanistic points of view was taking place at the present time. The Secretary's reply to this letter was endorsed.

A statement of the financial position of the North London Branch showed it to be in a flourishing condition, and a motion congratulating the Branch Committee was passed. A letter from the General Register Office stated that the quarterly report to be published in April might contain details of numbers of marriages taking place in registry offices, churches and chapels, and the Secretary was authorised to purchase a copy. An appeal from The Marriage Law Reform Society was received, and a donation authorised.

Mr. Shaw reported on a successful Celebration and Dinner of the Leicester Secular Society, at which he represented the N.S.S. The Secretary reported agreement by a number of Branches that the Conference be held at Leicester, and no dissentients, and was authorised to proceed with arrangements.

The Sub-Committee dealing with Principles and Objects reported the holding of two lengthy meetings, and its recommendations were authorised to be circulated to all Executive Committee members with a view to their being included in this year's Conference agenda.

A letter was produced informing the Executive of a legacy from the estate of the late C. Clayton Dove.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

### NOTE ON "QUO VADIS?"

LIVING in the North country, and not yet having had the opportunity of seeing the new film of "Quo Vadis?", I can naturally express no opinion about it. But I have recently been reading the book and find it immensely good.

I read elsewhere that its Polish author, Henryk Sienkiewicz, was a deeply religious man (which is obvious from his writing). But he was also a Catholic—as is implied by such words, occurring in the last lines of his novel, as: "And so passed Nero. . . . From that time onwards the Basilica of Peter has dominated the city and the world from the heights of the Vatican."

The *Oxford Companion of Classical Literature* describes Sienkiewicz's rendering of Petronius, former Roman governor of Bithynia, and Nero's Arbiter of Elegance, as "idealised." Be that as it may, in the novel he is an engaging personality. He is, par excellence, a hedonist, a man of culture and polished repartee, with a loathing and contempt for the insensate blood-spilling and brutality of Nero and his satellites.

Near the end of the story, Petronius's nephew, Marcus Vinicius, becomes a Christian out of his love for the beautiful Christian girl, Lygia, who only just escapes death in the arena, where Nero in his satanic madness has contrived, as a piece of public entertainment, the horrifying massacre of thousands of Christians. Now married to Lygia, Vinicius writes to his uncle from distant Sicily imploring him to come out to them and see for himself what happiness living the Christian life brings. But Petronius replies with characteristic scepticism that "truth dwells in regions so inaccessible that the very gods cannot perceive it from the heights of Olympus," and that "your religion is not for me." How could he love everybody—

Nero and his infamous henchman, Tigellinus, amongst them—as the Christian religion would bid him to do? Paul of Tarsus had told him how, for Christ's sake, one must renounce garlands of roses and all wordly pleasures. He could never do it! His senses would always be delighted by flowers and the fragrant, lovely things of this world.

Then an ominous note. He writes that he has fallen into disfavour with Cæsar, who has decided he must be "removed." "Life for you has scarce reached its dawn; for me the sun has set and the twilight is upon me. . . . I have lived as I wanted to live, and I will die as I please."

Saying that "no God has promised me immortality," he continues his letter. "You are wrong, Vinicius, in stating that your God alone can teach men to die calmly. No, our world knew before yours that when the last cup was drained it was time to vanish among the shadows, and our world still knows how to die with countenance unmoved." . . . As indeed, in the novel, he and his beloved Eunice do, opening their veins and passing away together, denying Nero the satisfaction of issuing the execution writ.

I am sure that many Freethinkers who have not read this 56-year-old novel would enjoy it as I did—even if only for the character of Petronius: this refined old Roman pagan, grandly aloof from the allurements of religious faith in the ancient world.

G. I. BENNETT.

### SIMILAR SAVIOURS

#### BUDDHA

6TH CENTURY B.C.

- I.—Virgin Birth from Maya.
- II.—Vision of Suddhodana, Buddha's Father respecting the Saviour's miraculous conception.
- III.—Buddha, at birth adored by Kings.
- IV.—Buddha argues with the learned Kishis.
- V.—Buddha tempted by the demon Mara.
- VI.—Buddha baptised in the River Nairanjana.
- VII.—The incident of the Chandala woman at the well.
- VIII.—The prostitute Ambafali.
- IX.—The traitor Devadatta.
- X.—The triumphant entry of Buddha into Rajagriha.
- XI.—Adoration of Rice Cake.

#### JESUS CHRIST

A.D. 1

- I.—Virgin Birth from Mary.
- II.—Vision of Joseph, Father of Jesus, respecting the Saviour's miraculous conception.
- III.—Jesus adored by Magi.
- IV.—Jesus discourses with learned doctors.
- V.—Jesus tempted by the demon Satan.
- VI.—Jesus baptised in the River Jordan.
- VII.—The story of the Samaritan woman at the well.
- VIII.—The prostitute Magdalene.
- IX.—The traitor Judas.
- X.—The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.
- XI.—Adoration of Eucharist.

W. A. V.

### CATHOLIC CENSORSHIP

A very Irish story is reported in *The Bookseller*. Apparently the Irish Censorship Board was criticised in strong terms when its supplementary estimate was considered in the Dail recently. A former Minister, Mr. James Dillon, said that some time ago a book had been banned on the grounds that it was indecent. On the same day it was acclaimed by the U.S.A. Catholic Book Club as the book of the month.

Mr. Dillon is reported to have said that the latest book by Graham Greene "was condemned in Ireland and put in the dustbin, but when it was pointed out that Mr. Greene was a well-known Catholic writer it was taken out of the dustbin again." Such things, he said, were bringing the censorship of books into ridicule, and some means should be found of ensuring that they did not happen.

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