

The Freethinker

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IT is on the literary record that an eminent character in Dickens was in the habit regularly of confusing the not dissimilar words, "auspicious" and "suspicious." However, Mr. Sam Weller was in good, indeed, in divine company. For the Feast of Christmas, held annually on December the 25th, beloved by all good Christians—and, equally, dreaded, presumably, by turkeys and other "table birds" — is both officially "auspicious" and actually "suspicious" in character. For the Divine Birthday is of mixed origin: indeed, the Deity, the natal day of whom is now annually celebrated on December 25th, is, historically, a changeling who has stolen the cradle of the original occupant: in the course of the centuries the Son of God has ejected and replaced the Sun God.

The evolution of the traditional Birthday of Jesus Christ affords, indeed, a striking illustration of the general evolution of the Christian mythology. It illustrates, and every 25th of December recalls, that weighty saying of Grant Allen that Historical Christianity is "a mausoleum of dead religions." For in the composition of the Christian Christmas many creeds and many gods have played their successive parts. When we commemorate the Birth of "Our Saviour" we commemorate Horus and Ra, Ormuzd and Mithras, the ancient gods, respectively, of Egypt and Persia, and in our colder northern climes, far from the shores of the sunny Mediterranean, whence the Christmas Festival originated, the pious Christian believer of to-day celebrates, probably in blissful ignorance of their actual pagan origin, immemorial rites originally dedicated to dark Norse and pagan deities whose names to-day only survive, also unconsciously, in the names of the days of the week.

Historically, nothing is clearer than that no authentic tradition survives of any real birth-day of Jesus Christ: the early Christians simply did not know when or, probably, where their Saviour had been born, nor, outside the Church, is there any historical record or even doubtful legend which can be held to shed any real light on the subject. Whatever view of Christian origins one takes—whether Christ was mythical or actual; whether the titular Founder of Christianity was a god imagined as a man, or an actual man later endowed with godhead by his credulous adherents—in neither case is there any clue to the actual date of his birth.

The early Christians, as we cannot remind ourselves too often, were not much interested in any historical Jesus, and that was quite irrespective of whether they believed in such an historical Jesus or not. What they were interested in, as any reader of the earliest Christian writings, the Pauline Epistles and the Apocalypse, cannot fail to note, was the *Second Coming*, the *Future Advent* of the Messiah Jesus, at whose coming the true believers, in the words of the Pauline writer, would be "caught up to meet Him in the air." It was only when the earliest Christian revivalism had been proved wrong by the

indefinite postponement of "The Great Event" which it had so confidently predicted, that the Christian Church began to look back instead of forward, and our Gospels were composed (towards the middle of the second century) to focus attention on, perhaps actually to create, "The Jesus of History."

Even after this relatively late development, the Christian Church does not seem to have had any very definite tradition as to the date of the birth of its traditional Founder. Actually, the oldest tradition seems to have been that Jesus was born in the spring, an obvious reminiscence of older pagan cults based ultimately upon the rhythms

of Nature. Certainly, the 25th of December did not figure in this connection. For the writer of our canonical "Gospel of John" (from internal evidence composed about 135) makes allusion to the Jewish Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, the date of which was December 25th, and makes no allusion to this as the Birthday of the Logos, Christ Jesus (cf. *John*, ch. 10, v. 22 and Dr. E. W. Barnes, *The Rise of Christianity*).

The actual historical date at which December 25th became, at one and the same time, a recognised religious festival and an officially recognised holiday, was the year A.D. 274, when the Roman Emperor Aurelian proclaimed it as a State holiday. Aurelian, however, was no Christian, but, conversely, was an ardent sun worshipper, and he proclaimed December the 25th as the feast of his god, Mithras, "the Unconquered Sun" ("Sol Invictus"), the divine patron of the Roman Army, which was by then largely made up of non-Roman races, and who, in that period of history, was running a neck-and-neck race with Jesus Christ for official recognition as "the god of the "Universal" Roman Empire.

For, by now, 1678 years (274-1952) the 25th of December has been continuously celebrated as a Divine Birthday, in which the pious worshipper says "many happy returns" to his god. But not to the same god! For a generation after Aurelian, Constantine, who was born in the same year as Mithra had been given his December birthday (274), transferred his allegiance to Christ, and the Roman Empire obediently followed the Emperor's example. From his day to ours, it is Christ, the Son of God, not Mithras, the Sun God, who has been fêted and adored upon December 25th, the ancient Feast of the Sun which, in the calendars of antiquity, reached his nadir point, his "winter solstice," upon December 25th, when he again began to ascend toward his midsummer meridian. Now, henceforth, all these attributes of Nature were to be interpreted symbolically and allegorically; henceforward it was not the Sun, but the Son of God, who was to rise and shine in splendour, this time in a spiritual sky.

At what precise date the Solar Birthday became universally recognised as that of Christ, cannot be stated with any actual precision. Writing towards 400, the

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Son versus Sun

By F. A. RIDLEY

Greek Father, St. John Chrysostom, tells us that "only recently have we discovered the true Birthday of the Son of God." In some areas, indeed, it may not have been until well into the Middle Ages that the Son of God took over from His solar predecessor the day, December 25th, traditionally sacred to the Birth of the Sun. The current Christian chronology traditionally described to the Roman abbot, Dionysius Exiguus (a Russian by birth), and which seems to have originated in the sixth century of the era which it definitely established, takes the Birth of Christ on December 25th as an historical fact beyond doubt or dispute; to be sure, the Dark Ages in Europe were not renowned for their critical faculty!

The Christian Christmas of modern times, as celebrated in the Protestant lands of the north, has itself retained many traces of paganism, chiefly of Norse, Germanic and Celtic paganism: whence the "Yule log," the "Christmas tree"—made respectable in "good society" in Victorian

England by that pious Teuton, the Prince Consort—and the originally Druidical mistletoe from the sacred oak. A modern Protestant Christmas commemorates, in fact if not in intention, not only Christ and Mithras, but Odin, Thor and a host of now forgotten Germanic and Celtic deities. It is rather ironical that the Catholic Church looks with suspicion upon these survivals of European paganism, whilst displaying its own Crib and Manger, with the Divine Child adored by shepherds, in obvious imitation of the older rites of Horus and Mithras!

Christmas, to-day, however, has become, in fact, largely a secular holiday. As such, and stripped of its mythological background, it may well survive into a secular post-Christian future. It is in this social and secular sense that we wish our readers, in the name of human solidarity, the fraternal good wishes which have now come to be associated with this socially auspicious, if theologically suspicious occasion!

An Enigmatical French Genius

By T. F. PALMER

BLAISE Pascal's early achievements in mathematics gave distinct promise of profound eminence in science. He was descended from a male ancestry of French officials and proved a precocious child. His father, Etienne Pascal, was a tax-gatherer whose wife died at an early age, the parent of three surviving offspring, the boy, Blaise and the two girls, Gilberte and Jacqueline. With little faith in school training, Etienne decided to educate his son himself.

The young Pascal was constantly asking questions concerning the problems of life. At least, so his elder sister, Gilberte, assures us in her biography of her brother, which is the main source of our knowledge relating to the greater part of his life. He was a sickly child and was always delicate, while his incompletely closed skull may explain the uncertainties and morbid imaginations he was apt to display.

Apparently, the boy had no playfellows and his recreations were spent in solitude. In his garret his father found him engaged in solving a geometrical problem, a study strictly forbidden. For much to his parent's amazement, the boy of twelve had succeeded in solving an abstract question unaided. Before again prohibiting the study of geometry, he consulted a scientific friend who advised him to encourage his son's genius. It is usually assumed that Pascal's proficiency was due to inborn intuition, but Morris Bishop, in his fine study of Pascal, suggests that the boy may have surreptitiously perused the work of Euclid (*Pascal: The Life of a Genius*, Bell, 1937).

In any case, Blaise was greatly gifted: whose remarkable ability was unfortunately deflected into religious channels. As Bishop notes: "Sir Isaac Newton, one of the supreme scientific minds this planet has produced, abandoned his labours in mid-career, to devote himself to the prophecies of Daniel and other theological mysteries. Emmanuel Swedenborg, a universal scientific genius, forsook the problems of the physical world to accept the wisdom of mystical revelation. Pascal resembles these two." For Jansenism, the cult he adopted, was not strict Catholicism. Hence his writings were placed on the Index, while some were burnt by the common hangman. Under pressure, Pascal's *Letter to a Friend* was condemned by Parliament, which registered "Alexander VII's Bull in December 19, 1657. In September, 1657 the *Provinciales* and the *Letter of an Advocate* were also put on the Index."

Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres, died in 1638. He was a clerical of little distinction and small following. But in 1640, a work of his appeared which made an

austere appeal to the faithful. Its adherents became known as Jansenists and made many French converts.

After Pascal's first pious experience he became acquainted with an aristocrat and spent his life, for at least a year, as a man of the world. Dancing, card playing and even love making were his usual diversions. Still, he never neglected the customary religious observances, and renewed his scientific studies and experiments. But the assurance of his soul's salvation was ever present in his mind, and the beatitude of his future existence became an obsession, and the affairs of mundane life lost all importance to him.

Gilberte's references to her brother's life during his worldly era are suspiciously scanty. Yet she depicts him as a spotless saint, which is a view that has been accepted by many who have written about him. Bishop, however, presents a less pleasing picture of Pascal in his twenties, and he died at the early age of thirty-eight. "Blaise Pascal at twenty-five," Bishop concludes, "must have been simply an insufferable young man. The pious lectures in the form of letters which he wrote to Gilberte reveal a spiritual prig, convinced of his own grace, but doubtful of the grace of all others. His exhortations and reproofs are of a sort to irritate the hearty and healthy." He officiously condemns his brother-in-law's intention to enlarge his house and recommends more attention to the mystical tower of St. Augustine. When Pascal later visited Gilberte's house, it was very inconveniently overcrowded, and Bishop wonders whether Pascal was lodged in the mystical tower he had praised.

Pascal's austerity revolted against the lenient attitude of Jesuit confessors towards opulent and powerful penitents. Also the Jesuits had assailed and ridiculed the Jansenists of Port Royal. Hence, Pascal's *Provincial Letters*, in which the Society of Jesus was castigated with wit and irony, while the Jesuits charged the Jansenists with arrogating to themselves "inflexible judges of what is good and true, not being human. The Jansenists reproached the Jesuits with sacrificing truth to men's interests and passions, with diminishing truth to put it into everyone's reach, by undermining it secretly by introducing the enemy into the heart of the citadel, since the very quality of truth is that it must exclude error, in a word, with being too human and not enough divine."

The hatred of the contending religious parties became intense and a prominent Jansenist was accused by his antagonists of reading aloud at Port Royal the most

indecent passages from the distinguished Jesuit, Sanchez's, confessor's manual dealing with the privacies of married life. These readings, asserts a Jesuit Father, induced these allegedly innocent virgins to deny their incontinence during confession. To such accusations the Jansenists replied with equal vehemence, and the Jansenist Saint Cyran called the Jesuits privy cleaners. These and other amenities were the begetters of Pascal's celebrated *Provincial Letters*, which appeared under assumed names. Arnauld had penned several rejoinders to Jesuit libels, but these were deemed ineffective. Pascal then wrote his *Letters*, so splendidly penned that they became the model of subsequent French prose of the highest attainment.

When the Sorbonne was consulted it decided that the Jansenists were heretical, while the Government was annoyed by the disturbance. The Chancellor, Séquier, presided at the Sorbonne inquiry attended by a host of anti-Jansenists, and it was declared that Jansenism was disloyal and invalid.

The Parisian public read Pascal's *Letters* and was amused and largely converted. The Chancellor and the Sorbonne were censured, while the authorities were exasperated by the wit, irony and wisdom of Pascal's writings.

A Visit to Amsterdam

By EVELYN BELCHAMBERS

(Concluded from page 406)

We visited The Hague (Holland's administrative capital), Delft, Haarlem and Arnhem. The Hague is, perhaps, more handsome than Amsterdam, which is the commercial capital, but it is to my mind somewhat stupendous and as I looked at the many rich houses in beautiful gardens I could not but wonder who worked in order that those rich people might idle, also what the rich had to show for their leisure and financial ease! Adjoining The Hague is the fashionable seaside resort of Scheveningen, to which we paid a flying visit: this also is the resort of the too-rich. What I shall chiefly remember of The Hague is its fine museum (where I saw my favourite picture) and the Peace Palace—that is, where the International Court of Justice sits. The palace is a beautiful building, enriched by works of art from all nations: I remember in particular an enormous tulip-shaped ornament made of solid Siberian marble weighing I forget how many tons!

Much prettier than The Hague, in fact highly charming in every way, is the small town of Delft. It really baffles description, but perhaps I can give some idea by saying that it is like a miniature Venice with canals everywhere—Amsterdam is always said to be like Venice, but I would say Delft is more like it, for there the canals are narrow and the houses often have their walls actually rising out of the water. We had a gondola ride right through these canals, and this was a good way of seeing the beauties of the little town, famed for its lovely china, especially tiling. The Dutch are very fond of tiles, both for walls and for ornaments such as tea-pot stands. Delft has changed much since Vermeer painted his picture, but it is still beautiful and I am sure must be a paradise for the artist.

The last place where we spent a day was Arnhem, which is, of course, famous because of the airborne landing there, and has suffered more from war damage than most Dutch cities excepting Rotterdam. It has a large war cemetery and a monument to our airborne troops, but my friend and I did not have time to go at all close to these—not that I mind much, for cemeteries are depressing

He was by some suspected as the author of the *Provincial Letters*, but he was unmolested. Yet Bishop observes that: "The printers and booksellers commonly associated with Port Royal were suddenly visited by the police. While the officers were curiously inspecting one of the print shops, the printer's wife slipped two heavy formes under her apron and succeeded in making her way through the guards. She strolled to a neighbour printers. That night and the next they ran off from the formes 1,500 copies of the second *Provinciale*." That the police were outwitted increased the popularity of the *Letters* and a greater sympathy with the Jansenists. From twenty to thirty thousand copies of the *Provinciales* were sold, which was an enormous circulation in the 17th century. *The Letters* lowered the Jesuits in popular estimation, but presumably of greater importance was their enduring influence on French literary composition. As Bishop truly testifies: "In the *Provinciales* Pascal created classic French prose which is equivalent to saying that he created modern French prose. His book is to French prose what *le Cid* is to French poetry. It established the form, the language and the style of the most excellent vehicle for the expression of human thought."

to me and I don't want to be reminded too poignantly of the colossal folly and senseless waste of life caused by wars. We went to see the Rhine Bridge at Arnhem, and I was very surprised to find it such a small river: on consulting my atlas at home I find that it is not the main Rhine at all but a tributary! Arnhem is a rather unimpressive town, much of it being war-scarred and newly-built, but we visited a pleasant park quite close to the city where my friend wanted to see some modern sculptuary, and, what pleased me more, a very lovely museum situated some ten miles out in the midst of the nicest country that Holland can boast. Here it is really attractive rather in the manner of Surrey, with gently undulating ground, rather sandy, and masses of heather forming a carpet for pines and birches. It was a treat to see anything so scenic after the endless flat pasture-lands everywhere else!

These impressions are, I know, very sketchy indeed, but I hope they give some sort of overall picture to you who have not been able to go to Holland. I found the country and people grew upon me as I stayed there. (I spent ten days with my hostess, then when she could no longer take me I moved to a hostel whose two drawbacks were, first, that it seemed to cater exclusively for men and, second, that it was in a terribly noisy street and I could not sleep till after the trams stopped at 12-30!) I should imagine that they resemble other small countries in being of necessity much more efficient and industrious than the large powers can afford to be. This offsets their somewhat ponderous and prosaic character, and I found them always kindly and courteous and above all *clean*. They are orderly in everything, with one exception: their traffic! As you probably know nearly everyone rides a bicycle and the whirling mass of them is positively terrifying when one tries to cross a road. My friend and I had several narrow escapes, and the annoying thing is that no provision is made for pedestrians: even in the parks one cannot escape the cycles, and one has the unpleasant feeling of being chased!

Acid Drops

Really, we were surprised to find in *Christmas and Christmas Lore* how little respect its author, Mr. T. G. Crippen, had for the sacred feelings of his pious readers. The way he debunks Christmas is astonishing. He says there is no proof that "our Saviour" was born on Christmas Day, that is on December 25; there isn't even "any respectable tradition." This is horrible enough, but he makes it worse by saying that nobody knows when "our Saviour" was born, neither the year nor the day. In fact, it appears that "there was scarcely a month in the year to which some guesser did not assign it."

But when it was decided to give "Our Saviour" a birthday, "there was much to commend" selecting December 25. It was the birthday of "the Unconquered Sun," first made into a holy day by the Emperor Aurelian in honour of Mithra the Persian Sun-god in 274 A.D. And, after all, there were other festivals at the same time—like the Roman Saturnalia, the Jewish Feast of Lights, the northern festival of Yule, and the birth of the Egyptian Sun-God. But, of course, as any good Christian would tell you, it was only at the birth of Jesus that the Wise Men of the East followed his Star, and Angels sang Hosannas, so his was the only true Birth of a God.

Alas, Mr. Crippen looks upon the wondrous story of the Angels singing as sheer "superstition," the naughty man. And it is obvious that he thinks the same of the Wise Men of the East. It is awful to think what Atheistic blasphemies this book on Christmas will spread about. Thank God, we are not responsible for it!

One religious nuisance is the way in which carol-singing is used to cadge money by hordes of children whose method is very simple. They "sing" one line of a carol, and then bang the door to announce that they are ready to be paid for it, the more cash the better. Even the clergy do not eye with favour "carol spivs"—though it is not quite clear whether this is due to unfavourable competition or not. The "spivs" start in November, and the church and chapel spivs find most people sick to death of carols when Christmas draws nigh. But if people want Christianity, they must be prepared to pay for it!

We note that the Spiritualist Council for Common Action are going to "test" mediums in future. This strikes us as being quite as effective as if fully believing Christians tested other fully believing Christians. In any case, the Council assures all mediums in advance "of the most sympathetic consideration," and we quite believe it. It would be too heart-breaking to find most, if not all, the mediums tested utterly unable to supply the goods. "Mental" mediums anyway are likely to get through, but what about the "physical" mediums? What will happen to them if they fail to "apport" Maori shells from New Zealand, or if Aunt Martha fails to materialise?

The Bishop of Bradford wants no hanky-panky with the Prayer Book. Some weeny modifications may be permissible but that is all. Every clergyman has pledged his utmost loyalty to it and has therefore no right to "adulterate or mutilate it." The Bishop admitted that it was criticised as "out of date"—so what? Though in English, and a product of the Reformation, it was compiled from the services of the early medieval Church, and what was good enough for them should be good enough for us.

Delivered in a true parsonic voice, what can be more venerable and reverent? God Almighty is bound to prefer a prayer in the English of Edward VI rather than in the English of a Hollywood film. Hands off that glorious heritage—the English Prayer Book! All the same, in spite of Dr. Blunt, the Prayer Book is on the way out—like Christianity itself.

Can anybody help the Director of Television? He wants to televise an honest-to-goodness ghost, a real one, that is, with a head or without, with or without clanking chains. As there are at least 150 haunted houses in England, and Ireland is said to be "black with ghosts," there surely ought to be no difficulty in proving even to the incredulous readers of this journal that ghosts do exist. Why not rope in the editors of our spiritualist journals who get more information about ghosts in one day than Alexandra Palace would get in 50 years? What about Lord Dowding, a fervent believer in ghosts, or Brigadier R. C. Firebrace? But perhaps these gentlemen do not believe in ghosts, but in spooks!

Drinking Song

One for the road! The hour is late, the clock's tall hand is stern—

One for the road, my happy men, for this hour will not return.

The cold moon cuts the world in two, the earth is black and white;

One for the road, the lonely road, and the perilous stretch of night.

Who drinks with me is an olden friend; deep though is the cup;

Deeper the love I have for him as he lifts the flagon up.

Drink deep, my friend. The sad night waits with a waiting face outside—

Drink deep for the love of fellowship and the men we knew who died.

True men they were who stood and drank on such a night as this;

Loved with an oath that was truer love than ever a woman's kiss.

Gone are they now before their time to a clockless world afar—

Drink to the men who stood their round and followed a falling star.

One for the road, in an English inn with the signboard creaking slow

Above the door that sold good ale five hundred years ago.

One for the road, for the love of them who stood when the world was black,

Who drank their ale, who paid their shout, who went, who came not back.

One for the road! The world is grey, a sickness is abroad. Peace is a jewel in our heart though our hand be near the sword.

One for the road! The hour is late, the clock's hand is upright—

One for the road, the perilous road, and the lonely stretch of night.

JOHN O'HARE.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

Will intending contributors to *The Freethinker* kindly keep their articles short? Our space is extremely limited and we are, nowadays, receiving far too many articles which require several issues.

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Plattfields).—Every Sunday, 3 p.m.; (St. Mary's Gate, Blitzed Site), every Sunday, 8 p.m.; (Alexandra Park Gate), every Wednesday, 8 p.m.; (Deansgate Bomb Site), every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "The Coming of Iron—its Influence on Social Life."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Brains Trust—Mixed Team of Experts.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: E. POWIS, "The Basic Religions: their Contacts and Differences."

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

Existentialism

By G. H. TAYLOR

PEER GYNT, peeling off the layers of his onion, compares the layers with periods in his life, expecting to come to the core of the onion and the core of his own personality. But layer follows layer and no core is found. Similarly to many in western Europe towards the end of the war life seemed devoid of meaning and substance. The intellectuals among them were fair game for the form of escapism known as Existentialism, and this was the soil in which it flourished and has since spread geographically.

Though its two bibles are *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger) and *L'Être et le Néant* (J. P. Sartre, 1943) it has spread more spectacularly through its periodicals, novels and dramas. In the latter respect it even reached the West End stage, where *Le Crime Passionnel* used the favourite theme of the time, underground resistance in occupied territory. The spread has been from Germany through W. Europe, the United States and Latin America. In England, by comparison, it has enjoyed little more than a flirtation on the "try anything once" principle. By and large, in our country sense and nonsense are treated alike: neither is taken seriously. That is why the small-

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ness of its freethought movement finds its counterpart in the empty pews of the churches.

One hesitates to call Existentialism a philosophy. It is a philosophy only if we stretch the term away from its strict academic meaning (the study of ontology and epistemology). It will have little to do with philosophy in that sense. It claims, for instance, that nothing can be known. It does not, of course, deny the technical successes of science, but it denies that they have anything to do with "the relation of the individual to life." Thus, for those who lack the patience and industry required for discovering things, it must indeed be consoling to know there is nothing to discover anyway.

Existentialism dates as a term from Kirkegaard in the 19th century. Heidegger wrote in the inter-war years but was subsequently re-discovered, while Sartre, who suited the prevailing mood, had immediate success (in terms of adherents).

Heidegger used the phenomenology of Husserl, which is a sort of halfway house between Idealism and naive Realism, in which we neither eject events from our minds in Idealist fashion, nor get to grips with external things point-blank as in naive Realism. What we do is to "intuit their essence" (*Wessenschau*). Intuition as a source of knowledge is not new in philosophy, bringing to mind Nietzsche, Mach, Avenarius and Bergson, while even Bertrand Russell, who has affinities with Mach, propounded a philosophy of "neutral particulars" which in his then Neo-Realist setting held a sort of balance between Idealism and Realism.

In adopting Husserl the aim of the Existentialists is to oppose Dialectical Materialism, with which they were coming into contact, and to preserve the conclusions and comforts of Idealism without being tied to its exploded philosophical method, much as Fascism seeks to abolish the appearance of capitalism while preserving its substance. We are therefore, according to Existentialism, free to make of life what we choose, and free to shape our destiny as we will. We do not choose freedom: we are doomed to be free, according to Sartre. We are cast into a state of nothingness, which we must freely shape into something with meaning. This outlook no doubt fascinated those newly liberated in 1943-5. They yearned to be "free," which then nebulously meant being free from Nazism.

Existentialism is thus an attitude, and here the common ground among Existentialists comes to an end. It is for each to choose his own path, for each to find his own meaning and fulfilment.

In the case of Heidegger the meaning of life is to seek Death. To follow the path of one's existence is to take the road to Death, not any sort of death but his own personal Death. He must live in such a way that death does not come upon him as a brute fact breaking in on him from outside himself. It must be a Death of his own seeking, a fulfilment. "Actual existence can find its crowning achievement only in such a personal demise."

Existentialism thus breaks all contact with sober philosophy and partakes of the nature of a religion in which the consolation of a hereafter is replaced by the assertion of Death as absolute fate and sole destination. It is not a quick suicide that is implied, but a life purposefully directed towards its end. Only this, he maintains, can make existence real.

Sartre rejects the death-goal of Heidegger. Man's energies should according to Sartre be directed towards becoming God. Since the old God is dead, "being a man is equivalent to being engaged in becoming God." "Man is the Being whose plan it is to become (God)." He retains the conception of First Cause, an attribute of the dead God, and applies it to man, who is similarly self-caused and who must become self-directed towards God. Sartre has been called an atheist. If so he is essentially a God-drunk one.

His obscurities and contradictions make it difficult to pin him down, and the logician could play havoc with some of his utterances. "When I bring about tolerance among my fellow men," he says, "I have forcibly hurled them into a tolerant world. In so doing I have taken away their free capacity for courageous resistance, for perseverance, for self testing which they would have had

the opportunity of developing in some world of intolerance.

Heidegger the Nazi member, Sartre the atheist and Jaspers the Christian represent a peculiar assortment of Existentialists. According to Jaspers nothing good or essential can come of social activity; each should passionately concern himself with his own existence and others of like persuasion, exclusively. This is typical of the psychological introversion which seems to characterise the followers of this cult. I cannot see that Existentialism has any survival value at all in the world of ideas, since those seeking to change the world will probably survive those seeking to escape from it by pursuing a policy of Death. Much literature has now surrounded Existentialism, but as Prof. Lukacs, one of its critics, observes, the labours of the mighty mountain have produced a dreary Philistine mouse.

The "Hibbert Journal" and Jesus Christ—3

By H. CUTNER

LOOKING through John M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs* the other day, I found that the *Hibbert Journal* did "review" this book and so was obliged to mention the existence of an author who denied that Jesus Christ was an historic personage. In *Pagan Christs*, Robertson put forward the thesis that "the Gospel story of the Last Supper, Passion, Betrayal, Trial, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, is visibly a transcript of a Mystery-Drama, and not originally a narrative; and that that drama is demonstrably (as historic demonstration goes) a symbolic modification of an original rite of human sacrifice, of which it preserves certain verifiable details." Here was a chance for pious reviewers to spread themselves, but Robertson complained that no notice (or very little) was taken of his thesis—in fact Christian reviewers shirked the issue, while some of our Reverent Rationalists, most of whom would never give up "Jesus of Nazareth," pooh-poohed it.

The *Hibbert* had a chance of "smashing" the book but preferred to hand it over to a lady who, by almost completely ignoring what he had to say on Pagan Christs and Pagan myths, and who obviously could not at all answer him from the myth angle, concentrated on some of the things he said about Paul and the Epistles and Jesus ben Pandira; uttering such nonsense as "(Robertson's) theological position requires that he should deny the historicity of the Crucifixion." Considering that his "theological position" completely denied an historic Jesus, there seems little point in saying that he denied the Crucifixion. Robertson was very polite to the reviewer, but I can only say that I have rarely read such pious piffle as this lady produced except in the pages of the Salvation Army *War Cry*. He had carefully to explain commonplaces about the Apostles and Paul—commonplaces known to the veriest tyro in Freethought but which, with the mentality of a Salvation Army lassie, the reviewer thought Robertson did not know. For him, of course, the *Hibbert* case was the Unitarian case, and he never failed to express his contempt for it—quite rightly, in my opinion. He concluded his devastating analysis of the *Hibbert Journal* reviewer in his second edition with, "The Unitarian case is in fact only the orthodox case minus the supernatural. But even the orthodox case is a compromise. If the early Christians believed anything, they believed in the ascension. No educated Christian now believes in the ascension. Yet educated Christians believe in the resurrection on the testimony of an age which believed in the ascension, and call the legend 'evidence'."

Of course, the special number of the *Hibbert Journal* entitled "Jesus or Christ?" did not confine itself to an exposition of the Unitarian position. Most of the writers believed, or said they believed, everything—God, Christ, Miracles, Heaven, Hell, Devils, Angels—no matter what, so long as it was in the Bible. One of these was the Rev. J. Rickaby, S.J., and naturally there can be no arguing with a man of his type. If the story of Aladdin had been in the Bible, Wonderful Lamp and all, he would have been extremely pained at the very thought of anyone doubting it. His article is a tragic example of the terrible havoc made on human intelligence by religion. A similar example is a Swede, a Lutheran, Dr. N. Soderblom, one of whose gems caught my eye as I turned the pages—"That a God exists we all know. But do men take up a right attitude towards him? Do they possess a gracious God? Do they know him in Christ?" Dr. Soderblom would be a grand acquisition to the Salvation Army if he could have been a little clearer. An article on "Faith and Fact" came from Principal Garvie, in those days quite a well known theologian. Here is one of his pious gems—"Faith is concerned with the ultimate meaning and the final aim of self and the world." This is a far cry from the usual "Faith is the ability to declare belief in something which you know to be absolutely incredible." I am certain that some Catholic converts at least would subscribe to the latter definition—perhaps wondering at the same time what Garvie meant if he did mean anything, which is not at all certain. Half the beauty of theology lies in its almost complete obscurity, unless one grants certain premises. For instance, "Not only is His certainty regarding God's Fatherhood contagious," says Garvie, "and His moral perfection reproductive so that those who come into contact and communion with Him come to trust God as Father and strive to live as God's children in likeness to Him, but Christ himself becomes to them a living, gracious, mighty presence, whose love not only constrains them. . . ." And so on and on and on, pages of similar drivel. You turned on the tap and it swelled out, but nobody really knows what it all means. The Rev. R. Roberts, who probably in his pious days could equal Garvie at this kind of slush, must have roared with laughter. It never touched his argument.

Then in came the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the one-time stormy petrel of the Church, but later full of sweet submission, full of the Garvie-like incoherent quality; and the Rev. J. Drummond followed, on "Jesus Christ and

His Teaching." Dr. Drummond was a Unitarian, but for Jesus the Man he felt exactly like Father Rickaby felt for Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Man was always right in His teaching and every critic must necessarily be wrong.

I was curious to read again what Prof. B. W. Bacon had to say on "The Jesus of History and the Christ of Religion," for he was well known as an excellent Biblical critic. And, of course, his criticism of the Gospel narratives could only have resulted in making the other writers in the volume very angry. In the ultimate, he finds that Christianity will rest "not on the teaching of Jesus alone but on the 'representation of the divine idea' apparent in his life and death. . . ." Not even capitals for poor Jesus!

The next writer was the Rev. J. E. Carpenter, whose book *The First Three Gospels* was a very drastic analysis of these books, but who appears to have resented anybody else going further. So as to make his meaning as obscure as possible he roamed over all religions and appeared to be as much at home with Zeus, Enoch, Augustus, Mithra, Vishnu, and Maha-Purisa as with the living Christ—if he really believed in that elusive Deity. The last writer was Mr. James Collier—just a plain "Mister," but one, thank God, who believed "in the vision of the crucified Christ by Mary just after Christ's death" as perhaps "history." Mr. Collier, however, also believed in "rationalising" many of the Christian mysteries and,

though his article "The Christian Cult as Christ Worship" proves he really believed that Christianity is just another "cult," he battled bravely for its retention. It will probably have caused Father Rickaby to faint.

Going methodically through this number makes me understand why the *Hibbert Journal* did its best to ignore a first-class scholar like John M. Robertson. This mixed bag of theologians, with their naive attempts to get intelligent people to believe in both Jesus the Man and Christ the God together with the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, and Ascension, tried its utmost to roll back the tide. At all costs the "Grand Heresy" of the Mythicists must be kept out of the Theistic and therefore unsullied pages of the *Hibbert Journal*. If Robertson has to be mentioned, then for God's sake confine him to Paul or the Apostles, and never hint at a Pagan Drama or at Mythology.

But I will give it this credit: the *Hibbert Journal* of 1909 at least had the pluck to admit an article by a Rationalist like the Rev. R. Roberts—an article which, read between the lines, proved he did not believe there was anything left of "Jesus of Nazareth" when genuine criticism had done its work. The *Hibbert Journal* of to-day appears to be literally frightened to give its readers any hint that the problem now is not "Jesus or Christ?" but whether there ever was a Jesus at all to worry about.

Among Thieves

By A. R. WILLIAMS

A CERTAIN man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him: Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

But the man, when he was whole again, joined himself unto a band of robbers.

Saying, I will avenge myself on the thieves who left me half dead.

Wherefrom his fellow robbers constrained him, their intent being to get money, and not fight with other armed bands.

But secretly the man cherished his wish for revenge.

Whereby as a robber he did less than his fellows, not risking his life; holding back when attacking rich travellers.

Except that toward priests and Levites he was fierce; injuring all of such he could.

Of which he told his fellows: A priest saw me when I was half dead and passed by on the other side; and a Levite came and looked at me and passed on.

But still I seek revenge on the thieves which beat me.

Seeing his heart was not with them the chief of the robbers chid him.

So when a traveller mounted on a beast was seen coming,

Saying, Thou must rob to get riches to share with us; or perforce thy fellows will hate thee.
the robbers hid, leaving the man to make the attack, to test him.

He, being determined to make himself able to kill the thieves who had left him half dead; and needing to stay with the robbers for that; fell upon the traveller and slew him.

When the band of robbers gathered round for the spoil, their chief turned the corpse over.

The man uttered a loud cry; it is the good Samaritan, who bound up my wounds, and carried me to the inn, so saving my life.

And he wept sore, and tare his clothes, lamenting aloud: Alas! My one friend! Thou saidst thou wouldest return!

So he implored the robbers: Kill me also.

But they laughed him to scorn, their captain saying, Now truly are thou one of us, and cannot depart. Albeit I am the thief who beat thee and robbed thee.

Whereat the man ran him through with his sword; then falling upon it himself died, too.

Freethinker to Christian

No, I don't need a Church, to be cheerful,

Nor a Creed, to be honest and fair.

I can make up my mind to be friendly and kind

Without having recourse to a prayer.

Still, to class men apart from each other,

Under nation or race or belief,

Has persisted too long, and has always proved wrong

By the way it has brought them to grief.

I suggest that you celebrate "Christmas,"

And I'll hail "The Rebirth of the Sun,"

Trying, both, to fulfil hopes of Peace and Goodwill

For all peoples on earth, barring none!

P. V. M.

Correspondence

HE SAID IT!

SIR,—The Archdeacon of Bedford cites "Six days shalt thou labour" as *God's* commandment. Was it?

Some say Moses said "God spake these words" to impress god-fearing followers to ensure obedience. *A cute move?*—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

MISS ETHEL MANNIN

SIR,—In your issue for December 7, one would imagine that it is thought that Miss Mannin was to blame for being considered as having imbibed the most superstitious form of Christianity.

That she admires a good deal of the Christian doctrine, and is not even convinced of the historicity of Christ, is hardly a valid reason for people to believe in a rumour. That I admire, in the best possible manner, the legend of William Tell does not make me a Swiss. I sometimes wish it *o'd!* For I admire that Figure and the Unity he stood for and created as well as that most beautiful and noble country. That I also, as well as Miss Mannin and many others, and Freethinkers as well, admire certain things in the teaching of Christ does not mean that I have become a Christian, or believe all the articles of that Faith.

As I view Christianity I see this: (1) A man who proclaimed, and acted up to it, that the Law IS Thou shalt not kill thy fellow-man. (2) A man who proclaimed that Human Love, and due respect to The Golden Rule, was above ALL virtue and that without it ALL is worthless and profitless. (3) A man who *willed* and gave his person voluntarily to a vile and barbarous death for the Human Principle that war is murder and Human Love supreme and above virtue and all law. (4) A man who, in consequence of this teaching, *willed* that all the Human Race should achieve, here and now on Earth, the Unity of Man: the Fraternity of ALL nations: the Peace and Order of the World and Goodwill to all the Human Race. And that thereby all mankind should enter into the Garden of Human Welfare wherein Life, Health, Joy, Happiness, Peace and Prosperity grow and flourish and wherein Human Love reigns Absolute and Supreme. (5) That this man's representatives or administrators do not so proclaim all these things renders them, in my view, not only traitors to their own Founder but to all the human race. (6) This has nothing to do with superstition, myth, faith, or belief in any conscious memory in any life to come—or in Party Politics! Nor has it anything to do with the doing things for reward, or refraining from doing things because of punishment. It does mean doing both without any consideration of reward or punishment just because, and only because, Human Love is the Supreme Law—which needs no interpretation and no enforcement! It is within itself the beginning and the end. (7) If the real and true teaching of Christianity does not mean all these things, then, indeed, is it not only an impossible fairy tale but a vast piece of hypocrisy in the face of Truth.

Christ said not one word against Birth Control, or against Onan whose story he knew quite well. The theory that Mr. Onan was punished for a form of Birth Control was propounded by his so-called representatives and not by his Disciples. It is a piece of theological humbug. Many thousands of Christian Clergymen have limited, and do now limit, their families by Contraception—my father was one.

All honour to Ethel Mannin for her courage and her humanity. It is a dark and bitter world for so many of our brothers and sisters of all lands and all colours—let all Freethinkers and True Thinkers unite to lighten their load of suffering and bring out of barbarism a truer and finer civilisation—where the dear little ones of our brothers and sisters being used as "work-slaves" and cannon fodder is a vile relic of a truly barbarian age.—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIS.

LOOKING BACKWARD

SIR,—Why this foolish, unjustifiable optimism regarding the progress of Freethought? I, for one, am getting a little weary of it. Actually, Freethought progress is like the social progress we are supposed to have enjoyed during the last 50 years: it's a great delusion. I believe there are less Freethinkers to-day than there were 50 years ago. Has Christianity lost any of its power? Not at all: it has more influence to-day than at any time in its history. The condition of horror in which the world exists now is proof of that. In all its ghastly history—since it destroyed what was a far greater civilisation than it, itself, could ever conceive—it dragged a world of agony and suffering to its greatest achievement, i.e. the Dark Ages. These Dark Ages, we are apt to persuade ourselves, are gone never to return. That's the greatest of all delusions, for with the Christian religion to-day exercising a far greater influence than at any time in its history it can only mean the coming of the Darker, Dark Ages.

At no time has the Church possessed such power as it has to-day. Its propaganda machinery, cunningly organised, is engaged in one incessant barrage in which all mediums are utilised, even to the music hall comedians. Fifty years ago its propaganda was limited to the pulpit; to-day the Church has no confidence in the value of the pulpit—the music hall can put the "dope" over far better than the parson. Then comes the mighty power of the Press, which has become the daily dope purveyor, then the B.B.C. True, there may be less numbers going into the church, but what need have they to go to church when the church is brought to their breakfast table, and, indeed, for every meal. Do any Freethinker believe it would have been possible if the Church had not its enormous power for the world to have engaged two world wars in a few years and then to prepare again, at once, for another world war? Freethinkers must know by now that Christ and bloody carnage are synonymous institutions. Look at these nations under Christian political dictatorship where murder and torture are a saintly pastime for the rulers of those countries. The terrible tragedy is that humanity is so hopelessly soaked in the opiate they are quite incapable of any kind of decent human thought; consequently, we must recede further and further from anything approaching civilisation.

So it seems it must be onward to the Darker, Dark Ages. The only happy memories I have left are the glorious days of 50 years ago when we could, and did, expose these liars, hypocrites and race destroyers. We met them face to face: there were no cowards' castles then in which they hid and let loose their poison gas. And where will it all end? There is only one end possible—and maybe that is our consolation—this pseudo-civilisation will, and must, end itself, and out of its ruins we hope some specie will arise more worthy of life.—Yours, etc.,

JIM FLANDERS.

P.S.—Excuse mistakes, I am growing old and shaky. Remember me to Chapman Cohen and all the old boys of 50 years ago.—J.F.

THE CRAIG CASE

SIR,—There is one point in this case which has been overlooked, which has a bearing on the question of punishment by beating. The headmaster, in trying to explain the educational defects shown in Craig, stated in his report that "Craig did not seem to resent corporal punishment." So this would appear to be another case in which Lord Goddard's remedy had the reverse of the intended effect. In Denmark, which is a law-abiding country, *any* beating of children or young persons at school or at home is an offence, whether done by parents or anyone else.

What is going on in the country at the present time in the shape of murders would suggest that Lord Goddard's successful campaign to restore capital punishment has not only failed completely, but has made matters worse.—Yours, etc.,

C. H. NORMAN.

Don't let anyone say a whipping would be un-Christian.

—Rev. A. Cook, of Hove.

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