

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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CRITICISM of the British Broadcasting Corporation and of the intellectual level of many of its programmes has been a recurring criticism in the columns of this journal for some time past. In particular, its bigoted, or timid, attitude to free discussion of religious issues has often been the subject of critical observations. We do not know—perhaps, indeed, it is almost sacrilege to suggest it!—whether such independent criticism as is ours has managed to penetrate the august portals of Broadcasting House. Frankly, we rather doubt it! However, "credit where credit is due." Now and then, we do get a programme of intellectual merit. Let us be thankful for rare mercies!

We referred recently in the above connection, to the feature, "Encounters of Belief," in which the fundamentals of religion come up—or, at least, are supposed to come up—on the air. Another programme, debunking or, at least criticising, some of the more obvious and indefensible religious legends now features on the Home programme on Sunday mornings at 11-15 a.m., under the general title of "Myth or Legend." The programme itself, like the earlier "Encounters of Belief," is a mixed grill; like the proverbial curate's egg, it is "good in parts." Where our historians live up to their name and utilise the abundant resources of modern scholarship, their criticism is effective and illuminating. The learned broadcasters, however, seem periodically to remember that this is, after all, a Christian country, and that the B.B.C. regards it as its mission to keep it so. Then, criticism seems to flag, and the hand of tradition again becomes heavy and oppressive. For example, did St. Joseph of Arimathea really plant the holy thorn at Glastonbury? Modern scholarship, as our aerial expositor clearly showed, answers this question with a decisive negative. However, one must not be too emphatic. After all, one never knows! For, with God, are not all things possible?

Actually, the most valuable feature in this series of talks is its title, "myth or legend." For this alternative introduces us to one of the most interesting critical aspects of the science of comparative religion, even if this aspect is not made altogether clear in the succeeding discussions.

It is clear to all serious students of comparative religion that both myths and legends have played a very important, indeed, often a decisive part in the evolution of the great historical religions. It is also clear, though in practice it is often difficult to draw the line between them, that there is a fundamental distinction between these two ingredients of religious history. This distinction is, indeed, fundamental: broadly, a myth represents something imaginary, something which never actually existed except in the imagination of the believer; whereas a legend has an historical basis, subsequently distorted and overlaid with impossible accretions by the credulous additions made by later ages.

the feature to which we have referred: King Arthur and the Holy Grail. It is clear enough to anyone who accepts a rationalistic critique, that the famous Grail was something "that never was on sea or land."

It was a myth pure and simple, though, we hasten to add, a superb poetic myth prolific in lofty imagination and splendid poetry. When, however, we turn from the mythical Holy Grail to its hero, King Arthur, it is by no means certain that we are dealing with a pure myth.

The Arthur of the Round Table and the Holy Grail obviously is associated with myths, but this is not the same thing as stating that he is himself a myth. There is

a little direct, and a good deal of circumstantial evidence which appears to point to a Briton chief at the end of the 5th century shortly after the Roman withdrawal from Britain had inaugurated the Dark Age, who obtained some fame as a cavalry commander and for a time held the invading Saxons in check. If this be so, and a majority vote of historical specialists in this most obscure period in English history could probably, nowadays, be secured for such a proposition, Arthur passes from the class of myth into that of legend; around the historical nucleus of which the imagination of a conquered race and, later, the chivalrous tales of the feudal Middle Ages subsequently built an imposing pyramid of legend. We are afraid that we cannot say as much of the mythical visitor to Glastonbury, St. Joseph of Arimathea!

In relation to the great religions themselves and to their alleged founders, the above distinction between myth and legend obviously plays an important role in their evaluation. Some religious founders were certainly historical. No one has ever questioned the actual existence of Joseph Smith, for example. Nor, so far as we know, has it ever been seriously suggested that the prophet Mohammed did not exist. Such legends as his celestial jaunt to paradise on the heavenly horse, Al Borak, are obviously legendary accretions. They cannot be held to amount to a myth. With such an early religious founder as Gotama Buddha, the problem is more complicated. It is true that most Indian critical scholars appear to accept the historical existence of the founder of Buddhism; but here it is always possible that they are unduly swayed by national interest or sentiment. When we encounter such shadowy figures as Abraham and Moses, we are in a kind of twilight land between myth and legend; in such cases, failing now improbable manuscript discoveries, we are unlikely ever to be in a position to give a definitive solution.

However, the religion in which the controversy between myth and legend is actually most keen is, probably, Christianity itself. It cannot be repeated too often that we know practically nothing about the origins of the Christian cult. The vast amount of scholarship expended upon the subject has certainly achieved *negative* results in discrediting the literal supernatural explanation of the New Testa-

VIEWS and OPINIONS

MYTH AND LEGEND

By F. A. RIDLEY

ment, but one must, we think, admit that it has met with but little success in creating a *positive* alternative.

The fact is, as a writer in our correspondence column recently suggested, the most eminent scholars differ sharply and often completely even on such elemental questions as the actual historicity of the alleged founder. Is the story of Jesus myth or legend? Nowadays, even Christian scholars mostly admit that *some* elements in the Gospels are legendary, and even the conservative B.B.C. periodically broadcasts talks on the "demythologising" of

the Bible though it is true that it reserves these exclusively for the "Highbrow" Third programme!

We are here inclined to agree with Mr. Yates that—failing, again, some possible but unlikely manuscript discovery—the actual question of the historicity of Jesus is now unlikely ever to be finally resolved: since there are, as students of the problem are aware, very grave difficulties which confront all the various hypotheses that have, hitherto, been suggested. Perhaps, one fine day, the B.B.C. will broadcast a talk on this subject. But, we rather fancy, not just at present!

The Abortion Law

By (Mrs.) K. C. ALLPRESS

IN reply to Cardinal Griffin's attack on the Abortion Amendment Bill, may I draw attention to the illogical woolly-mindedness which first of all insists that the doctors *must* save both mother and foetus, though expressly told that it is often impossible to save both; and then, while sticking grimly to the contention that the "innocent unborn" (though the unborn are potentially as sinful as the parents!) must never be killed, refuses to see how this inevitably signs the mother's death warrant. What, in effect, the Pope said some time ago was: "I don't believe the doctors *can't* always save both"—and hid his head in the sand.

The reasons given for this lamentable attitude are that abortion is contrary to human, natural and divine law. Human law can be left for the moment, since it is the subject under discussion for amendment; divine law, as expressed in the Bible, has been so variously interpreted by many equally well-meaning people, each of whom thinks he alone knows what God ordained, that it is useless here as a guide to conduct. There remains Natural Law. What is Natural Law? Is it not, by and large, "kill or be killed"? Nature, though she goes to great lengths to perpetuate her species (and doesn't always succeed, as extinct types show) cares nothing for the individual, and discards millions in order to preserve a few. We humans are included in this method, for we procreate, roughly, as do the lower mammals; yet Cardinal Griffin presumably thinks nothing of the enormous slaughter of the seeds of life which can never even have the chance to combine and reach the embryo stage. Oh, those poor lost half-souls in male and female, which are doomed to unfulfilment from the outset! War, likewise, though doubtless deprecated or even forbidden by the Cardinal, kills its half-mature souls by the million without being dubbed "illegal" on the human plane; only the child within the mother is to be exempt from harm and interference by the Law; at the embryo stage life is of more importance than at any other!

But if the Cardinal would only stretch his mind a little he would realise that every time we pull up a weed, plant a flower or spread artificial manure we are interfering with Natural Law. Every time he eats, or swats a fly he is taking life. Accident and disease are rampant in Nature's realm, yet would he condemn a doctor for tampering with natural law in saving a woman from cancer or pneumonia when she ought, by "Nature" to die? Damming rivers or splitting the atom is "contrary to law"—in short, the whole of our process of civilisation is nothing more nor less than the checking or diversion of natural laws as we identify them. And though our present state of civilisation may be little to boast about, it is only by means of a *mature* and intelligent application of our increasing knowledge and insight to the problems of society that we can hope to survive at all.

Again, natural law, though perhaps wise and just and

inevitable if it could be viewed from the standpoint of the entire Universe and all Eternity (as Divine Law) is, from the individual point of view, often whimsical, cruel and unjust—Nature's Whim rather than Law. It appears to us to be a survival-of-the-fittest method, in which "fittest" merely means "fittest to survive." If man, with his amazing conceptual powers, has found it good to interfere with Nature in his civilising process and to decide "fittest for what?" on a maturing scale of values, surely it is within the province of a *group* of doctors to decide whether to save the foetus or the mother in cases where both can *not* survive, and where the mother could, if saved, produce another foetus at a later date. If the doctors have no grounds for asserting that the mother is more valuable than the unborn child, neither would they be right to assume that the unborn child was more valuable than the mother; and since these estimates cancel each other out, it is only commonsense and common humanity to go for the solution which will cause least unhappiness to those now concerned.

Finally, Cardinal Griffin cries: "If abortion is allowed, what is to prevent all our seniles and incurables from being liquidated too?" Nothing. Nothing at all. It is high time we adopted a more mature attitude to these cases which are a "running sore" on our body politic. Far too much time, energy, money and vitality are spent on useless care of the unfit who *have no interest in living* and never can have; and if space only permitted, I could show how and why this is far from being the callous and inhumane statement it may sound. But that is another question. For the moment, I beg of the Cardinal to spring-clean his logic and base his opinions on sound, clear thought. If the cry of Right is "Hands off the unborn child!" then we must let everything else in Nature go its own sweet way.

The Riddle of Life

O' weep no more! For Spring will come again,
Forget mistakes, and leave the haunts of men!
We all were fools, and squandered better years,
But come, dry up your useless tears!
Seek not to know the mystery of earth,
Why, all must die, that life may come to birth!
Let pastors preach, but leave death's veil alone,
Live while you may: each breath's your very own.
I tell you, argument and talk are all in vain,
Once, and once only, may we walk this lane
That leads us thru' the vales and o'er the lea;
Yon sun will rise, and other eyes will see.
Dear heart, the bravest and the best are all asleep,
The road is ours, some unpierced Tryst to keep;
O' here's my hand! The distant dog-star gleams,
'Tis life that matters, and men's mortal dreams!

VILLENEUVÉ.

Industry in Prehistoric and Pagan Times

By T. F. PALMER

VOLUME II of the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (C.U.P., 1952) is edited by Professors Postan and Rich and constitutes an elaborate survey of trade and industry in the Middle Ages. Owing, however, to the Second World War some of the selected authorities were unable to contribute to the work and, indeed, Prof. Bloch, one of these, was executed by the Nazis, while the eminent writer, Eileen Power, died before this volume was published although her important correspondence was utilised.

The opening chapter was penned by the distinguished archaeologist, Prof. Gordon Childe, who ably reviews the evidences of industry in prehistoric Europe till the Iron Age. He concludes that: "In the Stone Age, of course, the words 'industry and trade' are applicable only in a somewhat restricted sense; for one definition of a Stone Age might be a period in which a people lived in labour-sufficing communities with no more regular division of social labour than is imposed by age and sex differences." Yet, as the Ice Age ended materials were being transported many miles from their place of origin. The shells collected by the mammoth hunters were sent as charms or ornaments from Russia to the Mediterranean while the northern tribes were receiving shells from the southern districts. In a later era, when fishing and food gathering added to the chase, and the Ice had retreated to the far north, evidence of early trade or barter is afforded, when sacred shells were carried from the Mediterranean into Germany.

In the Neolithic or New Stone Age the soil was rudely cultivated and domesticated animals were bred for food and raiment. The gathering of nuts and berries, with primitive husbandry, thus supplemented, led to the storage of edibles for seasons of dearth. These ancient peoples appear to have dwelt for a time in clusters of huts on the verge of the encircling forests which covered the greater part of Europe. As Childe avers: "Despite the obstacles of forest, marsh and mountain that separated each hamlet from its neighbours, archæology yields abundant evidence for an astounding amount of transportation and interchange of substances and even of manufactured articles.

Shells were venerated as charms and adornments, for religious fantasies are as old as the hills. Superior stones were now transported in a manner which forecasted the industrial achievements of the succeeding Bronze Period. Pottery was in use fifty miles from its seat of manufacture. Tools and weapons of flint were also conveyed long distances from one tribe to another.

As early as 3,000 B.C., Egypt was supplying foreign communities with artifacts and other commodities. Ancient Greece and Crete could furnish copper and other metals and materials to neighbouring peoples. As Childe observes: "Once 'sea-going ships' were available (and such existed from 3,000 B.C., on East Mediterranean water) sea transport was easy and cheap. Very soon the peoples living round the Ægean began tapping the Egyptian market and, through Syria and Anatolia, the Mesopotamian. Villages of neolithic farmers already tied to the soil by the cultivation of fruit trees and vines grew into little townships comprising smiths and other specialised craftsmen and substantially supplementing the proceeds of farming and fishing by maritime trade."

In the middle Minoan period in Crete a superior standard of culture was established, while economic and

social affairs were directed by sacred rulers who erected a magnificent palace at Knossos in the north of the island and another in the south. Splendid ceramics were produced and exported for wealthy purchasers in Egypt, Syria and other lands. As Minoan civilisation developed it embraced the whole Near Eastern World including old time Greece and Mesopotamia. Then, for some uncertain reason, Knossos was pillaged and burnt in 1400 B.C. This calamity was probably due to foreign invasion. Thus Cretan supremacy ended, even if its culture survived among neighbouring communities.

After the fall of Crete trade expanded and Mycaean commerce became extensive. This is shown by the vases and utensils of Mycaean origin that have been excavated in the Nile valley, and along the Mediterranean coast cities which include Cilicia and Troy, the Apulian shores, and Sicily. But Mycaean power was shattered by war and civil strife. Then about 1200 B.C., barbarian raids destroyed the Hittite Empire, ruined Palestine and impoverished Egypt. Trouble in the Balkans again completed the ruin of the remnants of Mycaean ascendancy in Greece. A dismal period succeeded, but bronze—a compound of copper and tin—was gradually eclipsed by the use of iron for domestic and military purposes.

The concluding phases of the Bronze Age were those when the plough was utilised on arable land and replaced the toil of the human digger. Stock raising greatly increased in the more advanced communities, and mining for metals was undertaken and steadily improved, even if its methods remained crude. Asia Minor appears to have been the scene of the original use of iron which spread slowly over Europe.

The marked increase in the yield of crops as agriculture improved led to a larger population, especially when the Roman Republic annexed the most fertile Mediterranean lands. This advance was aided by the influx of Syrians and Greeks. Not only were agrarian products made more plentiful, but luxuries from the Orient were imported on an extensive scale.

Businesses in the Republic were usually small, but a few large ones soon emerged and wealthy traders were known in the later Roman Empire. As Prof. F. W. Walbank states: "The first period of the Empire undoubtedly saw the fruits of security, peace and a good system of roads and safe sea communications in the rise of Italian business men, sometimes free and sometimes of freedmen origin, who took the initiative of developing the western provinces."

Under Augustus and his successors a high degree of civilisation was sustained until the inroads of barbarism and the adoption of the Christian cult heralded the decay and downfall of the Western Empire.

A SUGGESTION FROM AMERICA

SIR,— "Quiz on a vital topic" is an excellent, informative leaflet. As I read it, the thought occurred to me that the writings of Foote and Cohen are barely known to your average reader. Why not have, as a regular monthly or bi-monthly feature in *The Freethinker*, complete excerpts from the writings of those two leaders in Freethought? I am certain that most of your subscribers will endorse the idea.—Yours, etc.,

M. ISENBERG.

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

This Believing World

The "S.O.S." sent out by the revivalist, Dr. Sangster (who has the honour of being boosted up by the *Daily Express*) "Women and Children Only" does not mean that he wishes to save them, but only to point out that, in spite of the optimistic revival of religion we are constantly told about, it is they who go, in general, to church, and not the men. The proportion is about five to one and, as Dr. Sangster admits, "Some congregations are almost entirely women and children." In other words, "We have lost the men from the churches," he moans.

The reverend revivalist has been getting in touch with the heads of some trade unions and a very dismal story they have to tell. The Church is "slow to face the challenge of modern science and psychology"—which seems to us a rather belated admission, for we have been saying it ever since *The Freethinker* came into being. Then there is the "narrow" view taken by the Churches with regard to games on Sundays and—this was the most damaging admission—many workers "feel no need of religion at all." But this doesn't really worry any religious optimist; he can always play his trump card. "Yes, but are the workers really happy?"

The idea behind this is that if the workers are not really happy they must have religion. A belief in Hell, the Devil, Miracles, Angels, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, Relics, the Church Fathers, and the Saints, will make any working man genuinely happy. Unless he accepts all these, he is bound to be thoroughly miserable. It is difficult to believe that Dr. Sangster, even in moments of the wildest optimism, really feels this. But even if it takes time, he will eventually realise that, if the teachings of modern science and history are accepted, then religion cannot be true. It is based on the ignorance, superstition, and credulity, of primitive man, and should be banished to the realms of folk lore, myth, and legend.

What is a poor Agnostic Mayor to do? There is going to be a Coronation Thanksgiving in church at Chesterfield and his attendance is characterised by two Methodist ministers as "arch hypocrisy and a mockery of religion." Some other ministers expressed merely "regret" that Councillor Swale, the mayor-elect (who, incidentally, won two D.F.C.s in World War I), should go to the service; and one of them said he would boycott it. God Almighty will certainly feel the snub. But Mr. Swale is going to church all the same. After all, he needn't go on his knees in prayer or sing the hymns. He could—like so many soldiers did when forced to go to church—take one of the much discussed American comics and read that, or even *The Freethinker*, while the sermon was on. In fact, he could thoroughly enjoy himself.

Nothing is more significant than the way the Great Spiritual Healers we have in our midst, curing thousands of cases of incurable diseases, not only by a mere touch but also, far, far away, by "intercession," coyly refusing to go to a local hospital, and clearing out a ward of sick people in a jiffy. Here we have one of our most celebrated Healers, Mr. Harry Edwards, writing to a newspaper when questioned on this very point, "I should be very happy to visit the sanatoria and hospitals, but first we should have to receive permission from the medical authorities . . ." As if the medical authorities would not gladly welcome wholesale cures when thousands of sick people are on a long waiting list!

The truth is that our Healers are by no means eager to cure hospital patients, for it might turn out that, whether it is Jesus Christ or His Blessed Apostles who are responsible for the cures, or a spirit doctor (who in general seems singularly to have failed in the flesh) or even an Indian guide, failure in a hospital might "blow the gaff" completely. And then what can a Spiritual Healer do? Mr. Edwards, in fact, implores the clergy to do their bit in hospitals following the command "to heal the sick" while he is busy healing elsewhere. But not all the clergy are such idiots as to believe they can heal the sick.

Theatre

"A Woman of No Importance." By Oscar Wilde.
Savoy Theatre.

When Tennent Productions Limited set out to present a play, they make sure that where value is missing from one side they will give it to you on another side.

Here is one of the poorest of Wilde's plays in which even his wit and epigrams seemed forced, but the settings are so stupendous and magnificent and the colours of the period dresses so well blended that we can look amazed at what is perhaps the most elaborate staging ever given to a straight play.

Added to this there is an excellent array of stars. Athene Seyler is Lady Hunstanton, who has more wealth than good sense. Isobel Jeans is elegant and charming as the rather sardonic Mrs. Allonby. Jean Cadell successfully portrays the conventional and snobbish Lady Caroline Pontefract. Nora Swinburne is very sincere as the wronged Mrs. Arbuthnot, and Peter Barkworth as her son was suitably cast. Clive Brook as Lord Illingworth does not appear evil enough to be a villain. Of the lesser lights I appreciated the good performances of Joan Benham as Lady Stutfield and Frances Hyland as an American visitor.

We must thank Loudon Sainthill for the settings and costumes. Michael Benthall has given us a production worthy of the fine settings.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

OUR contributor, Mr. Peter Cotes, is the producer of the very successful play "The Man," an interesting study in split personality which, after drawing large and enthusiastic audiences for a number of weeks, is now extending its run at the St. Martin's Theatre to which it has been moved.

F. A. H.

A Democratic Council

In Leicester the Housing Committee of the City Council has given an example to other local authorities by refusing to grant sites to churches and chapels at a special low rate. The Council referred the matter back by a small majority but the Committee would not budge from its attitude that it would be unfair to give religious bodies concessions that would mean higher rents for council house tenants. We are glad to note that the *Leicester Mercury* printed some admirably brief and pointed letters, underlining the democratic nature of any privileges to religious bodies sent in by Mr. G. A. Kirk, President of the Leicester Secular Society and, of course, a member of the N.S.S.

PSYCHO-ANALYSIS—A MODERN DELUSION.

Frank Kenyon. Price 6s.; postage 3d.

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THE FREETHINKER

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

Telephone: Holborn 2601.

To Correspondents

J. R. HOWES.—We will consider your suggestions. Normally, we only advertise meetings at which the N.S.S. is officially represented.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.—Your contributions will be used in due course.

ALAN E. WOODFORD.—Thank you for your letter. You appear to us to take a very negative view of Freethought which is a good deal more than mere anti-religion. *Elmer Gantry* is one of the great anti-religious satires in modern literature and this alone would fully justify an article on Sinclair Lewis.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (*Home and Abroad*): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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 Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1, and not to the Editor.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: L. EBURY.

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

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, 6-45 p.m.: Councillor J. BACKHOUSE, "World's Economic Trends."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 10, 7 p.m.: ALEC CRAIG, "Recent Book Banning."

Glasgow Secular Society (N.S.S.) (McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street).—Sunday, 7 p.m., F. A. RIDLEY, "The Social Origins of Christianity."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, 6-30 p.m.: 72nd Anniversary. Mr. F. J. CORINA. Musical Items.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, 2-30 p.m.: Rev. BRYN THOMAS, "Soviet Civilisation."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, 11 a.m.: Professor T. H. PEAR, M.A., B.Sc., "The Function and Duties of Psychologists To-day."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Street, Edgware Road, W.2).—Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: E. W. SHAW, "Fact and Fancy of the Coronation."

NOTES AND NEWS

The N.S.S., ever since its inception in 1866, has advocated and worked for the abolition of that puritanical abortion, the English Sunday or, more accurately, Sabbath. That much work remains to be accomplished in this particular sphere is conclusively proved by the recent crushing defeat in the House of Commons of the recent Bill to reform the current laws relating to Sunday, which was moved by Mr. John Parker, M.P. The N.S.S. naturally supported Mr. Parker's measure and, after its failure, called a public meeting at Conway Hall in order to discuss the matter further. This meeting was held on Wednesday, February 25, Mr. P. Victor Morris, General Secretary, N.S.S., presided, and the speakers on this

occasion were Mr. F. A. Ridley, Mr. Len Ebury, both well known on Secularist platforms, and Mr. H. Cutner, well known to readers of *The Freethinker*, and as the author of *What is the Sabbath Day?*

In the course of their respective speeches the whole question of the "English" Sunday was fully analysed in all its various aspects. Mr. Ebury referred in detail to the controversies of the past relating to this question, and quoted very effectively from the writings of G. W. Foote on the Sabbath. Mr. Cutner gave a learned resumé of the growth of Sabbatarianism, and insisted strongly upon the absurdity of such bodies as "The Lord's Day Observance Society" in citing the Bible in support of the first day in the week: whereas the only Sabbath mentioned in the Mosaic legislation is the seventh day—a most effective debating point. Mr. F. A. Ridley suggested that the substituted first day of the week amongst converted Pagans was probably due to the fact that in Pagan astrology, Saturday, the day of the god Saturn, was an unlucky day. He traced the growth of Sabbatarianism from the Reformation with its bibliolatry, and pointed out that, in Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland, the "English" Sabbath is surpassed.

The small but attentive audience were clearly interested. Many questions were put to the speakers, and several interesting points were raised. In his final summary the Chairman pointed out that the recent defeat of Mr. Parker's Bill indicated that there was still much educational work to be done on this question, and that, only by a body like the N.S.S. not affected by short-range questions of political expediency. Politicians reflect, rather than create public opinion. The N.S.S. has an indispensable task to perform in creating that more liberal public opinion.

A Literary Frontiersman

By A. P. PERRIN

(Concluded from page 71)

THE work of Sinclair Lewis, highly autobiographical in content, inevitably leads to psychological speculation. The central characters often incorporate sections of his own experience, reflect his own conflicts and longings, and even when they are "bad," may deal with possible projections of himself; every man, faced with great success, has the temptation to become a bombastic self-applauding fraud, a Gantry or a Planish. It is to Lewis's credit that he did not succumb in this manner; other contemporary writers, most notably the "left" writers of the 'thirties, such as Stephen Spender, who have not displayed a comparable integrity can be recalled. The invariable self-stultification with which Lewis's reformers are confronted raises the question whether he is merely writing out his own personal problems, or is making a realistic appreciation of the reformer's fate in the U.S.A. Is the idealist in fact so impotent against the commercialisation of life in America to-day, that conversion of every activity into a money-making "racket" which Lewis detested above all else? It may be that he is simply giving expression to a sense of impotence in his revolt against his parents, a revolt which (*Kingsblood Royal* excepted) he never quite achieved, and about which he always felt guilty—hence the self-punishment, expressed in failure, of his "rebel" characters. Again, the recantation of Babbitt, and the feeling of uncertainty that pervades the book about Lewis's actual attitudes may reflect his unconscious longing to be at one with conventional opinion as typified by one or the other, or both, of his parents. Revealingly, he is reported to have said: "I don't

know what to do about anything. I'm not a reformer. I really don't care." He felt incapable of action. Lewis's father was a country doctor, and it is interesting to observe that in *Main Street* a doctor plays an important role, while *Arrowsmith* is a novel entirely concerned with the life story of a doctor. Although only speculation it seems probable that the brash Doc Kennicott in *Main Street*, a small town practitioner with a small town outlook, approximates to the reality of Lewis's father, whilst Martin Arrowsmith, a visionary pioneer, represents a father-ideal; alternatively this novel expresses Lewis's fantasy of the course he would have followed had he assumed his father's mantle. It is noteworthy that in *Main Street* he establishes a feminine identification, in making his central "rebel" character a woman: an unconscious attempt, perhaps, to solve his own Oedipal problems. Carol Kennicott's return to her entirely unsuitable husband doubtless symbolises his own longing for "home." Lewis's novels echo the actual pattern of his life. Entered as a young man for Yale, he broke away and became an itinerant free-lance for a year before returning to complete his studies. Always a wanderer, he was twice married, the second time to Dorothy Thompson, later notorious as the fashionable red-baiting columnist. Both marriages were dissolved.

It is fashionable nowadays, especially amongst the Proust-Kafka brigade, to denigrate Lewis. The high-class critical pundits consider his work automatically excluded from the classification "literature" by reason of its vast circulation. ("He's not literature, he's a best seller.") Only in the Soviet Union does he enjoy an increasing vogue; here he happens to conform with the contem-

porary formulation of "socialist realism," although it seems doubtful if "Red" Lewis would in fact have found himself any happier in the collectivist anti-hill society which constitutes the U.S.S.R. of to-day than in his native United States. His work is, indeed, not without faults. Often repetitive, confused and badly constructed (v. *Gideon Planish*), it can also be mawkish and forced. However, his scope and vitality must compel admiration. As a dictionary of American society the novels are invaluable. *Main Street* and *Babbitt* cover life in the small Middle-West town. *Arrowsmith* attacked commercialism in the medical profession. *Elmer Gantry* portrayed corruption in the ecclesiastical world. *Gideon Planish* exposed the philanthropic and democratic leagues as "front" organisations for the manœuvres of American monopoly capital. *Kingsblood Royal* dealt with the Negro problem. *Bethel Merriday* with actors and the theatre. *The God Seeker* provided an excursion into American history. These are but a selection of the more prominent works.

In such a vast output, comparable in volume with that of his French nineteenth century prototype, Emile Zola, there is bound to be some unevenness. What he lacks in form Lewis makes up in content. Above all he has that comprehension of life in its totality which is the trademark of a great novelist. This, allied with perception and vision, and an uncompromising talent for depicting things as they are, which, despite certain lapses, remained with him to the end, places him amongst writers of the first rank. Born four years before the closing of the actual frontier his death marked the closing of a literary frontier. An America which has to contend with McCarthy can ill-afford his loss.

Freethought and Some Critics—1

By H. CUTNER

LET me admit that I found the recent criticism by Mr. Yates very interesting. For him, and no doubt for others, my attack on Christianity, based as it is on the non-historicity of Jesus, would lead to the death of Freethought, and there would be no necessity for such a journal as *The Freethinker*. This is certainly a point of view which never occurred to me, and I am wondering why?

When, many years ago, I became a Freethought "missionary," I set out with three books which seemed to me all unanswerable. They were *The Age of Reason*, *God and My Neighbour*, and the *Bible Handbook*. In my then almost complete ignorance of what Freethought stood for, I thought that all its philosophy was contained in them and, being unanswerable, those relatives and friends of mine who still professed belief in a religion, would immediately become converts. I am sorry to say that with religious people logic or reason are almost completely useless—especially if their initial premises are granted. As I was unable to say "who" made the Universe, God must have created it, and who was I to deny that this God had a Son who was Himself, and could perform miracles as easily as I could kill a fly?

This was the attitude of most people; and those whom I tried to convert, if still alive, are still believers. In fifty years I have found very little change in the published numbers of outspoken Freethinkers—though, naturally, there are many who dare not for various reasons proclaim their unbelief; and there are many more who are what we call "indifferentists," who care little one way or other, but who are ready lustily to sing any hymn inside or out-

side a church and who, if they had to take sides, would play safe and join the believers.

To say nothing of the hundreds of books which have poured from the Rationalist Press, the Pioneer Press, and other anti-religious organisations for fifty years, there has been a constant stream of attack in this and other journals on the current creeds—and for the mass of the people, what have we to show for it? At this moment the B.B.C., for example, broadcasts the most childish Fundamentalism day after day, week in and week out; and if it does allow some opposition this has to be couched in the most academic language and—as far as I can see—no attack on the "fundamentals" of Christianity would be tolerated for a moment.

Now, one can understand that no opposition from the pulpit of a church would be permitted, but the B.B.C. is a national affair and its broadcasts reach literally millions of people. What do they hear? Almost exactly the same presentment of Christianity that a Wesley or a Spurgeon would have blessed.

Freethinkers, and even Christians like the most famous of Higher Critics, have in the past riddled the Bible to such an extent that a thorough believer among intelligent people was regarded almost as a religious lunatic. This was certainly the case fifty years ago—but now?

Even in our own ranks how many will boldly follow the forthright attacks of Paine, Robert Taylor, G. W. Foote, J. M. Robertson, and Charles Bradlaugh? Paine was bitterly attacked by the very respectable Sir Leslie Stephen who, as an Agnostic, went far beyond Paine's Deism. Robert Taylor spent three years hard as a

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"blasphemer" in the foul prisons of William IV and when he came out, got so little support for his "advanced" views that, no doubt whatever, he was glad to go to France and practise as a surgeon. G. W. Foote, one of our most scholarly writers, whose *Bible Romances* and *Bible Heroes* are truly masterpieces in their own vein, is almost completely forgotten by this generation except by our "veterans." As for Bradlaugh and Robertson if they are referred to at all, it is in the one case, as a respectable Member of Parliament who was not at first allowed to take his seat, and in the other case, as a fine though somewhat unconvincing Shakespearean scholar. What they did for Freethought is as far as possible hushed up.

Why do I recall these things? Simply because as the years went by, I felt that we were attacking Christianity often in the wrong way. I began to see that nothing pleased the heads of the Churches more than interminable discussions on the "documents" of the Bible, their probable dates, the value of the "codices," what did the Church Fathers mean, was a Roman Catholic interpretation of various passages in the Gospels more plausible than a Protestant interpretation, and so on. This kept the Churches prominently before the public, and their Heads, Archbishops, Cardinals, Popes, as well the humble parish priest, could sit back perfectly safe and smile.

But there was something even worse—in my opinion. This was the "emergence" of many Rationalists whom I like to designate as "reverent." Of course they did not believe in God Almighty though they would never go so far as to "deny" Him; why, to "deny" God is quite as silly as to affirm him. Then we must never hurt the feelings of our opponents, poor dears. It was simply

intolerable that any one should attack the "pure" teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, "true" Christianity as opposed to "churchianity." Of course, Jesus was a Man, it is true, but not a mere man; did he not go about doing good? Was he not, as Renan truly said, the greatest of the Sons of Men? I found this so pathetic—in some quarters—that I was not surprised to find reverent Rationalists almost with tears in their eyes pleading for a recognition that Jesus really was the Greatest Man who ever trod this earth of ours; and when I decided to throw in my lot against this hopeless nonsense, I was not altogether surprised to find myself attacked not only with unbelievable ferocity, but every effort was made to accuse me of sheer ignorance as well as stupidity. The sceptic who finds no evidence that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays has to bear furious onslaughts, especially on his sanity, from the orthodox; but these furious onslaughts are mild compared with what the champion of the Myth Theory of Jesus has to bear from some fellow Rationalists.

Yet the truth must be told. It is, simply, that if there is one attack on Christianity which is loathed by believers more than anything else, it is this Myth Theory. I have seen priests and parsons literally foaming with rage when I have brought it into my argument. I say quite seriously that if it were possible to revive an Inquisition to try the upholders of the Myth Theory not only would it be heartily supported by our priests and parsons but even by a number of reverent Rationalists.

But my space has run out. I shall continue the argument in my next article.

The Gospel Priests

By A. R. WILLIAMS

I

LIKE characters from the *Arabian Nights* but without their gusto, lacking plot or action, a crowd of individuals are named in the Gospels as having contact with Jesus Christ. Pharisees, Scribes, Galileans, Herodians, Samaritans, Levites, Sadducees, rulers, lawyers, centurions, disciples, publicans, fishermen, soldiers, women; all occur haphazardly.

Scribes and Pharisees appear frequently as villains of the piece, baffled and confuted by Jesus Christ, much denounced, often as hypocrites.

Priests are mentioned little till toward the end of the Gospel narratives. Altogether in the four Gospels there are over seventy references to them.

At the visit of the Wise Men to find him that was born King of the Jews. Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together and demanded of them where he should be born.

Zacharias, father of John Baptist, was a priest on duty in the temple when an angel appeared to him announcing his wife Elizabeth should bear a son.

After an early miracle, curing by touching a man with leprosy, Jesus Christ tells him to go and show himself to the priest and offer gifts as Moses commanded.

As mild defence of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus Christ calls attention to David's eating the shewbread reserved to priests.

And: Have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?

Feeling heightens with the parable of the Good

Samaritan. The priest passes by on the other side when he sees the half-dead man; the Levite deigns to come and look before passing on.

In almost every mention of priests they are chief priests, nearly always associated with other professions. John's Gospel tells us the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John Baptist: Who art thou?

II

In the Jerusalem scenes priests appear as enemies of Jesus Christ. We read the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take him.

After the miracle of raising Lazarus, it is stated the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus to death.

All through the events of Passover or Passion week the campaign against Jesus Christ is conducted by chief priests and elders, chief priests and scribes, chief priests and captains, chief priests and scribes and elders of the people, chief priests and Pharisees, chief priests and officers, chief priests and council, chief priests and rulers of the people, culminating in the high priest taking a leading part. Like bishops he occupied a palace.

Of the chief priests Judas receives the thirty pieces of silver, and to them he flings it back.

Before Pilate the chief priests accuse Jesus Christ of many things. Pilate knew that for envy they did it. Likewise the chief priests stirred up the people to shout: Crucify him!

At the crucifixion the chief priests and scribes are named as mocking him, with the elders.

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Supreme verse is the ninth of chapter twenty-three in Matthew's Gospel, where priests are not named at all, but it is more pointed for that. It runs:—

"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."

Call no man your father upon the earth!

Consider the forms padre and pope: how Roman Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, and Orthodox priests insist on being called father—or their churches insist and laity conform—it shows how much priests respect the behests of Jesus Christ.

Correspondence

MR. YATES IS WRONG!

Six.—May I comment on Mr. A. Yates's letter in your issue of February 1. I would like to express my opinion that readers of, and writers in, *The Freethinker* should be really free to express themselves on all subjects, and not be bound by the limitation of their writings to religious matters. This, I imagine, is your opinion.

Mr. Yates is obviously not an ardent admirer of the Art of Poetry, but can we not be free to smile with the witty Mr. Arthur Carpenter; shed a tear with Mr. O'Hare, and endorse, on occasion, the humane, philosophic outlook of Mr. Bayard Simmons?

And do not many of us like to have a glimpse of the gloomy Calvinistic Amsterdam with Miss Belehambers, and admire with her Holland's beautiful flowers?

In your issue of February 22, a supporter of Mr. Yates, Mr. Alan E. Woodford, also attacks the feature, "The Theatre." I, for one, would like to say that I always read Mr. Raymond Douglas's reviews with great interest. I find them most informative, and written in an excellent style.

By all means attack religion and superstition in all its forms. But I feel that most important of all to *The Freethinker* is that it, like its readers, should be really free of limitation in expressing sincere opinions.

With every good wish for the Freethought movement in all spheres.—Yours, etc.,

(MIS.) VALENTINE MANOUSSO.

REPUBLICANISM AND SECULARISM

SIR,—I feel I must oppose Mr. C. McCall's suggestion that "... the N.S.S. and *The Freethinker* do all they can to combat Monarchism."

Surely the "Immediate Practical Objects" of the N.S.S. are already cluttered up with far too much ambiguous matter, completely irrelevant to Secularism, without adding yet another musty Victorian museum-piece. At least half of these "Immediate Practical Objects" (whether we agree with them or not) have little or no connection with the "Principles and Objects" of the N.S.S., and in my experience they deter potential members from joining.

Is our movement so strong that we can do without Atheists who, for example, hunt the fox, or believe in capital and corporal punishment? And now Mr. McCall seems to want to drive away Atheists who support the Monarchy. Let us widen our minds and our ranks, not close them!

As for *The Freethinker* wasting valuable space on Republican (or for that matter, Monarchist) propaganda, I would agree with the views put forth in a recent letter from Mr. A. Yates: that the journal already contains far too much extraneous matter.

Finally, Mr. McCall appeals for a history of the British Monarchy. As this could do no possible harm to our present Monarch, I would only oppose it on the grounds I have already mentioned: that it is not relevant to modern Secularism.

We have had an excellent front page article in *The Freethinker* on this subject, and if anyone wishes to pursue the matter further, there are many free libraries open.

In any case, the only possible connection between Secularism and the Monarchy would appear to be the title "Defender of the Faith." This title would obviously be dropped in the event of the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, and this, I feel, should be the target for which we should all aim, whether we be Monarchist or Republican.—Yours, etc.,

R. D. MARRIOTT.

RUSSIA AND THE JEWS

SIR,—The persecution of Jews in Russia is partly the handwork of the Soviet orthodox Church. There were persecutions of Protestants in orthodox Bulgaria and Rumania, persecution of Protestants in Germany, Latvia, Estonia, and in occupied Finland. There were

persecutions of Catholics in Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Croatia, Hungary and Yugoslavia. But were there persecutions of orthodox Church in satellites and in Russia after 1945? Of course not. By the Tsar's régime the Jew was the most dangerous man, due to his mind and education. But the power of orthodox Church in Russia was based on people's poverty, darkness, illiteracy, and overall, on superstitions. Outwardly, the Soviet orthodox Church was separated from State, but inwardly there is the greatest trust and material support. By the Tsar's régime whole massacres were organised, even conducted by orthodox Church, namely, priests and monks.

Now it was started again by the orthodox Church, entirely Soviet institution and part of Soviet secret service. It is already known that Soviet orthodox priests started missionary business in non-orthodox satellites to make the converts. Soviet Church started the same business which failed by Tsar Nicholas I more than 100 years ago to make Russia 100 per cent. orthodox country, with poverty and superstition seen in every orthodox country. A modern Jew, with his non-orthodox and non-Communist State of Israel behind of him, can't agree with orthodox superstition and Communist slavery. Soviet idea to introduce Communism in Israel and make the country the military base for Soviet power failed. In such a case when the Jew is not with Communism he is against it, and should be persecuted.—Yours, etc.,

K. LIDAKS.

WAR AND MR. MARRIOTT

SIR,—I think that Mr. Marriott (18th January) misconstrues my argument, he certainly doesn't answer my questions. My remarks were confined to war and the military profession, terms which are not particular either to one nation or one occasion; the multifarious motives for war, which may occasionally include the protection of one's wife and home, etc., I did not mention as I was not aware that they were under discussion, but since Mr. Marriott mentions them I would like to point out that the Americans did not desert upon Korea out of any such laudable motives as protecting their wives and families any more than the Chinese did, this at least I should have thought was evident. As for Malaya, I have a close friend who, at the beginning of the last war, was a witness to the mass hanging of sixteen Malays, one of whom was a fifteen-year-old boy whose only crime was having stolen a small sum of money from the home of a European. For the same offence against one of his own people, who could less afford it, the penalty would have been a few months' imprisonment; my friend remarked upon this and was told that he was there to witness the hanging and not to question British justice.

Under these conditions you would be never likely to find me in the mangrove swamps with a rifle, but this is a motive for killing that may or may not be honourable, depending upon whether you're a European planter or a Malay peasant. Even if the motive is judged to be honourable it does not make the ensuing warfare honourable on either side but merely an unpleasant necessity, both, and unfortunately necessity is no criterion of honour.

Mr. Marriott rightly infers that I take exception to the use of Napalm, but I am no more upset by the Allied use of it than I would be by the Russian use of it, as I fail completely to conceive any perceptible difference between one mangled body and another, and as for holding the soldier responsible for the use of this weapon I can only say that all the scientists and politicians in creation couldn't induce me to drop liquid fire upon a pack of dogs let alone my fellow men, and Mr. Marriott can draw what inferences he likes from that statement.—Yours, etc.,

MICHAEL J. BARNES.

UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE

[This letter was sent in reply to an editorial in a Bournemouth paper and refused insertion.]

SIR,—May I offer my humble support to a suggestion that has appeared in your columns? I refer to the idea that a copy of the New Testament should be presented to each child as a souvenir of the Coronation. (Or perhaps it would be better to add the Old Testament, so that the gift would be more acceptable to Jewish children.) I would like, however, to add a proviso, viz. that no public money be used for this purpose.

If, under these conditions, good, kind, Christian people will proceed with the undertaking, then the Corporation might consider co-operating by adding to each Sacred Volume a copy of "The Bible Handbook" (Pioneer Press). This would enable young scholars to study the Divine Book with understanding and to reach a sound appreciation of its true worth.—Yours, etc.,

W. E. HUXLEY.

We regret to report the serious illness of our oldest contributor, Mr. T. F. Palmer. Our readers, we are sure, will join us in hoping for his speedy recovery.