

# The Freethinker

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THE Secularist Movement in this country dates back in its organised form for about a century. In its critical aspect, one could date it back another half-century to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* in the closing years of the 18th century. Prior to Paine there were, of course, the Deists and, before them, the Epicureans of the 17th century, such as Thomas Hobbes and Lord Herbert of Cherbury, not to mention the semi-Rationalistic sects who flourished during the stirring days of the English Commonwealth (1649-1660). Thus, the root of English Freethought goes back almost to the Middle Ages.

Freethought represents an elastic and comprehensive term which denotes primarily the criticism of traditional ideas. Secularism, contrarily, represents a less speculative and more practical type of organisation. Secularism is concerned not only with the criticism of ideas but, perhaps more fundamentally, with the reform of institutions. Perhaps some recent controversies on the nature and scope of Freethought might gain in clarity if this distinction was more often appreciated?

We have often deplored the lack in current literature of any concise and well-documented account of the evolution of the British Secularist Movement. It is deplorable that the student and, still more, the new recruit to the movement, should have to wade through the voluminous pages of biographies and general histories to gain the essential information: the more so, as the movement as a whole is often obscured by the individual leaders, upon whom biographical treatises tend to concentrate unduly. This is the more regrettable in the case of an advanced and often persecuted movement like Secularism, which has always been essentially democratic, a rank-and-file movement, the real hero and representative figure of which has always been the Unknown Warrior, the nameless propagandist and pioneer. No movement lends itself to what is sometimes called the "great man" interpretation of history than does the modern Secularist movement in Great Britain.

Our attention was recently drawn to an admirable short *History of the British Secularist Movement* which appeared as recently as 1948. Unfortunately, this concise little "outline of history," admirably concise and packed with relevant matter, appeared in America and, except, perhaps, for a few scattered copies, is unknown in this country and—a thousand pities!—to the Secular movement here, where the copious information which it provides would be particularly useful. *A History of the British Secular Movement* was written by Mr. John Edwin McGee in the U.S.A. and was published by the late Mr. E. Halderman-Julius in that country. It is greatly to be desired that an arrangement could be made with the author to bring out an edition in this country. For Mr. McGee has written what is an almost perfect text-book and summary of the historical evolution, doctrines

and practical effects of the British Secularist Movement both in itself and in the wider perspectives provided by the more general evolution of British Society during the approximate century of the existence of British Secularism as an organised militant movement with a coherent philosophy and a definite policy of social, ecclesiastical and intellectual reform.

In the course of some 90 pages Mr. McGee traces the successive stages in the historic evolution of British Secularism and the organised movement in which its ideas were more or less effectively embodied. Originating round about the middle of the 19th century largely as the result of the efforts of

such men as Robert Owen and George Jacob Holyoake, the Secular Movement assumed a succession of organised forms, of which our National Secular Society, founded in 1866, has been the most persistent and effective. After a brief initial glance at the "origins" of the movement and at the social conditions which motivated the activities of the earliest Secularists, our historian goes on to divide the sequential history of the Secular Movement into three successive eras: periods which, together, cover the past century and make up the totality of the Secular Movement.

These three successive periods are described by our author as: firstly, the initial period of "free association"; secondly, "the Bradlaugh epoch"; thirdly, the Foote-Cohen era, which was still in existence at the end of 1946 when the author concluded his work. Mr. McGee is no hero-worshipper and is careful to point out the essentially democratic and collective nature of the Secular Movement. None the less, the aforementioned periods are commonly associated with outstanding individual figures. Of what we may, perhaps, describe as the forerunners, Robert Owen seems to have been the most important; in the first period, that of "free association," George Jacob Holyoake represents the outstanding individual figure; whilst the two periods between the creation of the National Secular Society (1866) and the present day are denominated by the names of the three outstanding presidents of the N.S.S., Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen, to all of whom, and to the band of brilliant and devoted associates whom this remarkable elective dynasty gathered together between 1866 and 1946, when our historian laid down his pen, full justice is done, and glowing tributes paid in the author's pages.

The maximum numerical strength—at its peak never more than about 6,000 in all—of the National Secular Society was attained in what is here described as "the Bradlaugh epoch," 1866-1890. In the succeeding "Foote-Cohen era," 1890-1946, the numbers of organised Secularists declined and their activity became less social and more anti-religious than in the preceding "Bradlaugh epoch." Incidentally, our late contributor, Mr. T. F. Palmer, was, we should imagine, about the last survivor to witness the historic scene when Charles Bradlaugh vacated the presidential chair of the N.S.S. in favour of

## —VIEWS and OPINIONS—

### Secularism, Critical and Constructive

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

G. W. Foote (February 18, 1890), thus inaugurating what is here termed the "Foote-Cohen era" in the history of British Secularism.

An altogether admirable feature of our American historian's work is the effective way in which he relates the practical work of the Secularist Movement with the often deplorable social conditions of the day. For whatever may be the case with Freethought, as and when considered as an abstraction the concrete Secular movement was a reforming movement in many other spheres besides that of religion. It was essentially a *positive* movement, the influence of which, despite its small size, was far-reaching in many directions and exercised an influence altogether out of proportion to its numerical strength. In a brief but effective résumé entitled "Significance" our historian lucidly indicates the profound effect of Secularist activity, not only in liberalising religion and in promoting a sceptical attitude of mind, but also in the spheres of

legal, social and economic reform. Sometimes, indeed. Secularism removed abuses so effectively as, ultimately, to weaken its own influence!

Mr. McGee has written what is by far the most adequate account of the rise, evolution and social and intellectual significance of the British Secular Movement that we have yet seen. We repeat: a publication that, most certainly, ought to appear where it would do most good—and this is on *this* side of the Atlantic. The value of this small but heavily documented work is still further increased by its luminous (and voluminous!) bibliography: the influence of British Secularism may be gauged by the fact that it produced what is virtually an entire literature! We belong to an important movement with deep roots in British social history. Let us hope that in 2052, future historians will be able to add new and brilliant chapters to the historically impressive *History of the British Secularist Movement*.

## J. W. Hauer's "Germanic Faith"—2

By ARTHUR WILD

THERE has been a long struggle between the Near-Eastern-Semitic and the Indo-Germanic spheres. Apart from the centre (Iran) the Indo-Germans on the whole preserved biologically and politically their independence the milestones of their struggle being the defeat of Carthage by Rome, the defeat of the Arabs by Charles Martel, the Crusades and the defeat of the Turks. In the religious sphere, however, the Semitic Christianity overran Europe whereas Islam was much less successful in India.

The millennium of Christianity in Germany is a mere episode in a much longer existence of the German nation. After such great achievements as the flowering Bronze Age culture and the resistance against the Roman Empire there was a religious crisis. But the Germans would have overcome it even without adopting Christianity as the old Greeks had overcome theirs after abandoning the old Homeric Gods. This is proved also by the fact that certain German tribes offered armed resistance to Christianity. Even later the original Teutonic spirit reappeared many times in various forms, e.g., in Master Eckehart's mysticism, in the German Reformation, in the personality of Frederick the Great, in Rationalism, in Goethe's and Schiller's poetry, in the German Idealism and in the Romantic Movement, and the definite separation from Christianity was reached in Nietzsche's philosophy. This struggle against Christendom has been a characteristic feature of German history, the two "poles of life of the Germanic world of faith" being Eckehart and Goethe. This does not mean that Christianity or the polarity which it formed to the Teutonic spirit have never been creative. Christianity was creative, e.g., in Luther, Arndt, Bismarck, Hindenburg. It had produced even a kind of pseudo-synthesis with the Teutonism in the ecclesiastic State of the Middle Ages, but at the present time no organic creative tension with the idea of Reich and race is possible; where this is attempted an untrue Jesus is being used. This "Aryan Christ" represents a danger for the healthy growth of autochthonous Germanic Faith.

Every adherent of the Germanic Faith Movement must himself search and struggle for the last reality, for the divine, for the God. Hauer can only be his adviser.

There will come a time when there will be no German nation, no mankind, no earth, no solar system, no milky way, but the basis of life will be eternal. This eternal reality reveals itself everywhere in this world, especially where something great is happening, in every epoch, not once and in one nation only. The revelation valid for the

Germans has been occurring in their history, in their nature, in their hearts and not anywhere else. The strongest source of the revelation is in us, it grows in our contact with the world, with life and destiny. In this way the divine in us connects itself with that in the surrounding world and life in a wonderful unity. The formative will in our blood, brought about by the formative will in the world, is a part of the revelation of eternity. To listen to and to act in accordance with this call in our blood means to live in accordance with our faith. All leadership in religious matters has no other goal but to help the man penetrate into his innermost self in which the eternity reveals itself to him. The studies of race, theory, comparative religion, history have only more or less auxiliary importance, i.e., to put the ideal of our (Nordic) race, for which we should strive, more clearly before our eyes.

Mysticism, so typical for the Indo-Germans, does not lead always to passivity. Even India, before the Aryans there mixed with lower castes of different racial provenience, possessed vigorous metaphysics of action as reflected in the Bhagavad-Gita ("The Song of the Blessed One" summing up the results of Upanishad philosophy). There is, of course, in the Indo-Germanic sphere, a polarity of a kind of noble resignation and action, but Hauer thinks that his time is one of action and his Germanic Faith is a faith of struggle, not one of peace as is Christianity. Apart from the Germans, Gandhi also was waging a fight for an Empire admired by Hauer. Hauer, however, doubts whether the Germans will be able to imitate Gandhi's method.

Indo-Germanic religions have been tolerant to other creeds. Hauer also—in the best Indo-Germanic tradition of toleration (he quotes the examples of Asoka, of the pagan Queen Sigrid and that of Frederick the Great)—is ready to permit a Christian community in Germany, but he combats its claiming the monopoly. He assumes that the same fundamental forces in religion and ethics are operative in the other West Indo-German nations. He even wanted originally to call his Faith "Indo-Germanic." He seems to expect that all these nations will adopt their own faiths similar to that of the Germans. The rest of mankind would have, of course, more or less different creeds. He speaks with enthusiasm of the Indian universal love to all living beings, but he does not fail to mention many times the system of castes having originally for its purpose the protection of the pure blood. The eternal last one-ness is in this sphere not considered to be in con-

tradition with the phenomenal diversity. It is only one more of the polarities so characteristic of the Indo-Germans.

The test whether his Faith is worth something is in his opinion whether it can generate ethics as a basis of the morality of a nation and a State. A faith which is unable to do this, is worth nothing. Hauer's Aryan Nine Commandments are taken from Nordic mythology. They are: Honour the Deity; honour thy ancestors and thy descendants; honour the great men of thy people; honour thy father and mother; do not dishonour thyself; be loyal to thy people; do not steal; be truthful; be helpful to the noble. Unlike the Christian Commandments they are not valid for all. Conscience is common to all human beings, but race decides what is right and what wrong. For Hauer good is that which corresponds to the people's will (which speaks in every individual). Hauer claims that his ethics are autonomous: in man's own heart speaks the great Self of the world. The basic concepts of Germanic morality are duty and honour. We go on struggling even in a hopeless situation like Frederick the Great did, and we do not ask what the results of our deeds will be; we do not search reward. These ethics do not lead us to the inactive oriental fatalism, here we still collaborate with fate. In the Bhagavad-Gita and in the old Teutonic poetry there is the frequent motive of the conflict of duties: the honour of a fighter against the duties to his kin. The tragic and guilt is

so shown as inherent in the world. There is no escape from it as if life were a Greek tragedy. Higher than the blood of our relatives is the divine diamond core of our Self and Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita has to fight not to dishonour it. Even if we are guilty (not sinful, Hauer refuses the Christian conception of sin), we preserve the divine spark in ourselves. The evil is also of divine nature.

Some works of Hauer are written in an enthusiastic and poetic style and they contain quotations from poets and writers ranging from Indian poetry and the Edda to modern German writers such as Nietzsche. It is indeed sometimes difficult to find out what is meant as a really existing fact and what is only a poetic expression of a mysterious reality. Hauer does not intend to renew the cult of the old Teutonic deities as Wotan, Thor or Freya. They serve as mere symbols just as classical deities did in the art and poetry of the Renaissance and later time. Some of Hauer's collaborators went much farther in this and these spectacular events received exaggerated publicity. Hauer denies categorically ever appearing before his listeners and disciples clad in a bearskin or deerskin wearing a boar's head or sacrificing to the pagan Gods. Festivities and ceremonies organised by Hauer himself and by others in accordance with his views contained lectures, musical recitals, songs, poems, proverbs, folklore and much of the enthusiasm typical of the German youth generally and of that of those critical years particularly.

## The Israelites and Egypt

By H. CUTNER

A READER wants to know my authority for the statement made recently in these columns that the Israelites (or Jews) were never in Egypt as recounted in "Holy Writ." We can leave the word "Jews" out of the matter, for in the Bible it is the Israelites who first went down to Egypt—the "sons of Jacob" and their families, and there they found their long-lost brother, Joseph; and it must be confessed that a most interesting story it makes. Yet that is exactly what it is—just a story.

It seems to me, however, that this request for an "authority" proving it all never happened is putting the cart before the horse. What we Freethinkers ask for constantly and never or only rarely get is *evidence* that any of the Bible stories are history. Is Elijah going up to Heaven in a fiery chariot history? If so, what is the evidence that it ever took place?

Merely to say that it is in the Bible is not evidence except to Bible believers. It is useless to discuss any Biblical problem with a believer for he is ready to believe anything. So long as he maintains that the Bible is the Word of God and is a "revelation," there is nothing too silly which he cannot accept. As with God all things are possible, a Bible believer can accept Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp or insist that the Lord can make a clock strike less than one, with just as much logic as he accepts the Virgin Birth or Christ Jesus flying about with a Devil.

The story of the Israelites in Egypt considered as history is complete nonsense, and there should be no surprise that there is not a single reference to it in Egyptian records. There is no reference on any of the monuments to the 600,000 fighting men who, with their families, left Egypt—a hurried departure which is called the "Exodus." As far back as 1862, Bishop Colenso made "a critical examination" of the narrative which he dismissed with contempt. But it never presents any difficulty to a believer, of course, because it is in the Bible, the source of England's greatness.

Of what historical value is the story of the Ten Plagues?

Is it not a fact that 600,000 "fighting men" would mean between two and three millions of Israelites among whom there would be hundreds of births a week? Yet this immense number of people left Egypt in a night! What hopeless rubbish.

What evidence is there that somebody called "Abram," whose name was changed to "Abraham," ever lived? Or Isaac? Or Jacob? How can anyone believe that there really were twelve sons of Jacob who headed the Twelve Tribes of Israel—ten of them subsequently being lost, on the "evidence" in the Bible?

Is it not a fact that in the famous Chapter 49 of Genesis where Jacob "blesses" his sons, he carefully describes them in terms of the Signs of the Zodiac? Reuben, for example, is "unstable as water," that is Aquarius; Simon and Levi are "brethren," that is, Gemini; Judah is a "lion's whelp," that is, Leo, and so on. We are, in fact, in the midst of fables and myths. There never were such people as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; there never were, therefore, any "Israelites" who went to Egypt; and the whole of the story as related in the Pentateuch is, as I have said, just a story. It is unadulterated fiction.

If any reader denies this, let him produce from Egyptian history proof that the Biblical story is true.

For my own part, I have long since given up all the great Bible Heroes—Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus, Paul, and almost all the others. A few names in the Book of Kings are no doubt "historical," that is, there may well have been some "headman" of a small tribe in Canaan who was later made into a "King"—just as in our own day the "headman" of a small band of fanatical Christians, William Booth, was later honoured with the military title of "General." The Hebrew Old Testament is a late product, written, perhaps, about three hundred years B.C., but nobody knows who wrote it or from what data. I also hold that the "Hebrew" in which it was written is a made-up language, like Esperanto, and was

(Concluded on page 108)

## This Believing World

The Archbishop of Canterbury has made an alteration of the time when the Queen will be presented with the Bible at her Coronation. It will not be between the Crowning and the Homage, but between the Recognition and the Oath—and we hope that God Almighty will approve of the change. As Dr. Fisher said, the Bible is the Revealed Truth of God, and a lot must depend on the exact timing when it will be presented. As we listened to his reverent voice trembling with awe when he spoke of the Bible, we wondered whether Dr. Fisher had ever read the Higher Critics—people like Bishop Colenso or Bishop Barnes or Dean Inge? The Higher Critics—if read between the lines—pulverised the idea that the Bible was a "Revelation" and questioned whether it was anything else but a man-made book of legends and myths. But what a Godsend the Bible has been to the clergy!

Almost, but of course, not all, the great people the Pope of Fleet Street, Mr. Hannen Swaffer, has known, including royalty, either believed in Spiritualism or were ready to believe it, or were handing out messages from spirits to somebody. It is really extraordinary how Mr. Swaffer managed to rope in so many genuine spirits into his flat, a rendezvous obviously no spook could resist entering. One lady medium told him that the late George V was there thanking Mr. Swaffer for "what he did for his son," though "nothing much more took place on that occasion." No doubt the medium was terrified at the idea of talking with a Royal Spook.

Mr. Swaffer has always preferred the company of great spooks, and so he managed to get the late Douglas Fairbanks to appear before Miss Mary Pickford, his ex-wife. Duggie abjectly apologised for being so unkind to her in this Vale of Tears, and Miss Pickford was entirely convinced. With such a reconciliation, one can only hope that he will now give many of his swashbuckling performances in Summerland and dispel the monotonous boredom that inflicts so many spooks there.

We think it a pity that Prof. John Foster, who is easily most optimistic Fundamentalist Christian living, will never meet in debate the Rev. H. Martin, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council who, before the microphone, while admitting that over 33 millions of people belonged to the Free Churches, yet presented a doleful account of the almost complete disunity in the Christian Churches. To overcome this calamity, the Free Churches are going in for a big campaign in the autumn to boost up the Bible—to date, the 43,719th campaign with the same object. The Bible, contended Mr. Martin, was "This Living Spring"—though most people would rather have, we are sure, a little sign that Nature's Spring was on the way, than the Bible.

But the Bible is still more in the news than ever. For example, in the U.S.A. there is a project to send "Bibles to Russia by means of Bible balloons." We think this is a magnificent idea, especially if the Bibles sent are in English, in our A.V. version, and printed on thin paper. There is nothing like thin paper for rolling cigarettes from loose tobacco, and Russians would be most grateful. But we have a better idea. The Bibles should be in Russian, and the name of Stalin substituted for God Almighty (with or without the Lord's permission). That would surely bring in the sheep to Christ without further inducements. But let us issue a solemn warning—under no circum-

stances should the New American Revised Version be sent. Think what a pious Russian would feel if he learnt that in the New Version the famous Virgin Birth Prophecy in Isaiah has been discarded as erroneous! Could blasphemy go further?

## Theatre

### DONALD WOLFIT AND SHAKESPEARE AT THE KING'S THEATRE

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE has only one male part that offers good scope to an actor, and Donald Wolfit takes on himself the personality of Shylock giving a clarity of interpretation which seems nearer to Shakespeare than Paul Rogers's well-considered performance at the Old Vic recently.

There is more sincerity in Mr. Wolfit's production than in the Old Vic's, where certain liberties were taken with costume, but the Old Vic has a much better balanced cast. Donald Wolfit is so great a personality that only a cast with leading players of equal calibre could give us mere symmetry.

MACBETH suffers in a similar manner, and Rosalind Iden is given roles in these plays irrespective of her suitability for the parts. I have great appreciation for her acting, and I think she makes more of Lady Macbeth than of Portia.

Mr. Wolfit is fully able to cope with the leading part, but the play as a whole does not demand the subtler acting of most other Shakespeare plays. The supporting players are noticeably weak in the fighting scenes, but the effect as a whole—thanks to Mr. Wolfit—is satisfying.

*The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth* after its present run, are to be repeated at various dates during the next few months. Mr. Wolfit, in a curtain speech, gave us every reason to expect an extension of his season till the end of the year, with the exception of a break starting in June.

Mr. Wolfit is a dynamic and vital force in the theatre, and while he is able to delight us with his performances we can be sure that there will be ample opportunities to see Shakespeare, though perhaps not at his best.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

## The Hypocrite

He goes on Sunday to the church,  
And drops a penny in the plate;  
His fire insurance then is paid,  
He thinks he's master of his fate.  
But parson says that he will find  
That all his hopes will not be well;  
And where he'll go there'll be no harps,  
For harps they vapourise in hell.

PAUL VARNLEY.

### The Israelites and Egypt—

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never spoken. It was probably changed when the square letters in which it is now printed were introduced, and much more changed by the Massorites about the sixth century. But that is a long story and I may deal with it all another time.

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## To Correspondents

F. S. HOUGHTON.—Thank you for your article, which we hope to use shortly.

G. BENNETT.—Your contribution received. We shall hope to use it in due course.

F. HILTON.—We cannot promise *immediate* publication, but your contribution will eventually appear.

PAUL VARNEY.—Your information regarding the Aztecs of Mexico is outmoded. Consult G. C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico* (Pelican Books).

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Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

Lecture Notices should reach the 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, Hamstead Heath).—Sunday, 12 noon: F. A. RIDLEY.

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

### INDOOR

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Street, Edware Road, W. 2). — Sunday, 7-15 p.m.: F. CUNNINGHAM. — "Rats and Man."

## NOTES AND NEWS

The controversial feature, *Encounters of Belief*, has now, it seems, been definitely discontinued. However, the controversy over the feature continues to rage even in the august columns of *The Times*, the rarified atmosphere of which pontifical journal is occasionally disturbed by the unwonted impact of ideas. Recently, Professor F. de Zulueta, of Oxford University, a devout Roman Catholic, we believe, wrote to *The Times* objecting to the whole discussion on the double ground that any public discussion of their faith is offensive to Christians, and that, in any case, the technique of radio itself does not permit the Christian case to be fully stated.

This drew an admirable reply from Mr. C. H. R. Meredith, who pointed out that "Professor de Zulueta protests without cause. Almost every reference to the Christian faith on the radio treats it precisely as he desires—not as an open question, but as a profound and settled conviction." If he is 'irritated' or 'scandalised' by a single attempt to debate his beliefs, let him spare a thought for the considerable number of non-believers who resent intensely the continued repetition of religious dogmas without any attempt to explain or prove them." Mr. Meredith concluded his pungent criticism by a demand for a full-length discussion of "the fundamental premises" of Christianity; but we fancy that it will be some time before we get as far as that.

The B.B.C., however, has to wage at present a war on two fronts. For whilst Rationalists are criticising it in *The Times*, its former chief is stabbing it in the back—surely "the unkindest cut of all"? For no less a person than Lord Reith, its former Director-General, has publicly accused it of desecrating the Sabbath by the introduction of frivolous programmes, unworthy of the Lord's Day. In particular, we regret to learn, his lordship disapproves of the Light Programme feature, "Life with the Lyons." But, surely, there is a Scriptural warrant for this? Did not the Old Testament patriarch, Daniel, enjoy his life with the lions? However, even the B.B.C. is unlikely to ever again reproduce the ideal of his puritanical lordship who directed its fortunes for so long and who has left his gloomy Calvinistic impress upon it. Let us be thankful for *small mercies!*

We learn the heartening news that our Salvationist contemporary, *The War Cry*, has just celebrated its 4,000th anniversary, also that its circulation is in the quarter of a million class. Thomas Carlyle once remarked that "England is inhabited by thirty million people, mostly fools." Since Carlyle's day the population has increased, but the proportion of nit-wits appears, if anything, to be larger than ever.

The speaker due to lecture before the Leicester Secular Society last Sunday was unfortunately prevented from fulfilling this engagement by illness. Enough notice was given, however, to enable the Secretary of the N.S.S. to step into the breach and give a talk entitled "All-Embracing Freethought," a subject made topical by recent articles and correspondence in this journal. Mr. Morris reports that his visit to Leicester also gave him the opportunity of arranging details of the N.S.S. Annual Conference, to be held at Leicester over the Whitsun holiday. These will definitely include a coach outing on Monday, May 25, for those desiring to round off the work of the conference with a pleasant trip through the interesting and beautiful country near Leicester.

## "Snow on their Boots"

One evening I saw seven Angels a-wing,  
(Though for Angels I cared not two hoots);  
I heard 'em as well, for they carol and sing,  
I know—there was snow on their boots.

In discreetly dark rooms I have seen sundry spooks,  
As the medium, murmured prayer moots;  
(You don't find 'em nestling in neon-lit nooks)—  
But they're known by the snow on their boots.

There are fairies, they say, in the sweet Summerland,  
Wearing wide wings, with winter-white roots;  
And, although it's not cold on that sun-shining strand,  
There is snow on their tap-dancing boots.

Far up in the sky have been saucers that fly,  
And they've sent the jets up to impound 'em;  
But they couldn't be caught, they were just "all my eye",  
Or, perhaps, they had snow all around 'em.

Now, all of these wonders are swallowed somewhere,  
And new ones replace those that go;  
So we'll be better off when Freethought clears the air—  
And the sunshine of Truth melts the snow.

ARTEUR E. CARPENTER.

# The Passion Considered as a Hill-Climb Bicycle Race

Translated from the French of ALFRED JARRY (1873-1906)  
by SIMON WATSON TAYLOR

[It occurs to me that the enclosed short text may conceivably be of interest—or at least amusement—to readers. It forms part of a larger mass of material I am translating from the great French satirical playwright and novelist, Alfred Jarry. They will agree, I am sure, that it throws entirely new light on an incident which has been hitherto largely obscured by the dark clouds of superstition and partisan interest! I have no doubt that Jarry's erudite thesis may provide the basis for an entirely new exegesis of Christian history in all its aspects, based on this discovery that Jesus was essentially a sporting type.]

BARRABAS, who was listed as an entry, scratched from the race.

The starter, Pilate, taking out his water-chronometer or clepsydra, which made his hands wet—unless he had simply spat in them—gave the starting signal.

Jesus was off the mark like a flash.

In those times it was the custom, according to that fine sports editor Saint Matthew, to flagellate the sprint cyclists at the starting post, as coachmen do to their hippomotors. The whip is at the same time a stimulant and an hygienic massage. So Jesus, in great form, shot off; but the accident to the tyre happened almost at once. A clump of thorns pierced the entire surface of his front wheel.

Nowadays one can see an exact reproduction of what one may call this crown of thorns in the shop-windows of bicycle shops as an advertisement for unpuncturable tyres. Jesus's—an ordinary racing single-tube—was not unpuncturable.

The two thieves, who were, one may say, "as thick as thieves," got into the lead.

There is no truth in the rumour that they were attached to their machines by nails. The three objects which can be seen in various reproductions are in fact the patent tyre-lever with the trade-name "in a jiffy."

But we should perhaps now describe the various spills. And first of all let us attempt some description of the machine.

Bicycle frame-work is of fairly recent invention. It was only in 1890 that the first bicycle with frame-work appeared. Previously, the body of the bicycle was composed of two tubes welded at right-angles to each other. This was called a "straight-frame" or "cross" bicycle. So Jesus, after the accident to his tyre, started up the hill on foot, carrying his frame-work—or, if one prefers, his cross—on his shoulder.

Some contemporary engravings reproduce this scene from photographs taken at the time. But it appears that the sport of cycling, as a result of the well-known accident which so annoyingly terminated the Passion race, and which is given fresh interest recently by the similar accident which, on practically the same day of the year, befell Count Zborowski on the Turbie hill-circuit—it appears that this sport was forbidden for a certain time, by official decree. This explains why the illustrated papers, when reproducing the famous scene, portray more or less fantastic bicycles. They confuse the cross of the machine frame with that other cross, the handlebars. They represent Jesus with both hands extended on his handlebars, and in this connection one may note that Jesus cycled on his back, the aim being to reduce air resistance.

Let us note, too, that the frame or cross of the machine, like certain wheel-rims to-day, was made of wood.

Some people have claimed erroneously that Jesus's machine was a scooter, a most unlikely choice for a hill race, and hopeless for the ascents. According to the old cyclophilistic hagiographers, Saint Brigit, Gregory of Tours and Irenaeus, the cross was furnished with an apparatus which they call a "suppedaneum." It is hardly necessary to be an accomplished classicist to be able to translate this by "pedal."

Justus Lipsius, Justinian, Bosijs and Erycius Puteanus describe another accessory which one can still find, according to a report of Cornelius Curtius in 1634, in Japanese crosses: a projection of the cross or frame, in wood or leather, which the cyclist straddles—obviously the saddle.

These descriptions are, in any case, no more unfaithful than the definition which the Chinese to-day give to the bicycle: "A little mule which one leads by the ears and which one urges forward with kicks of one's feet."

We will give only a brief description of the race itself, since it has been so frequently commentated in specialist works and demonstrated by sculpture and painting in "ad hoc" monuments.

In the fairly difficult Golgotha hill sector there are fourteen turnings. It was at the third that Jesus had his first spill. His mother, sitting in the grandstand, became alarmed.

That fine trainer, Simon of Cyrene, whose function would have been—had the thorn accident not occurred—to "pace" him and give him second breath, carried his machine.

Jesus perspired, although he was wearing nothing. It may or may not be correct that a female spectator wiped his face, but it is definitely true that the newspaper reporter Veronica took a snapshot of him with her Kodak.

The second spill happened at the second curve, on a slippery surface. Jesus skidded for the third time on a tram-rail, at the eleventh bend.

The Israelian *demi-mondaines* waved their handkerchiefs at the eighth curve. Jesus was dead-heat with the two thieves at this moment. As we know also, he carried on the race as an aviator. . . . But that is another story.

(From *Speculations*, first published 1911.)

## Ike Joins Church for First Time

President Eisenhower, for the first time in his life, has become a baptized member of a Church.

He and Mrs. Eisenhower were formally affiliated with the National Presbyterian Church here yesterday (February 2, 1953).

They previously listed themselves as Protestants with no denominational ties. Since General Eisenhower's return from Europe last year, however, they have customarily worshipped in Presbyterian churches.

Dr. Edward L. R. Elson, pastor, said that in becoming a communicant member of the National Presbyterian Church, General Eisenhower received formal baptism for the first time.

—From *Age of Reason* (U.S.A.), March, 1953.

**INFIDEL DEATHBEDS.** By G. W. Foote. Revised and enlarged by A. D. McLaren. Price 3s.; postage 3d.

# A Planetary Mind?

By LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.)

A CAREFUL survey and scrutiny of the average American newspaper, during the present day and age, will reveal to critical and observant readers the more than customary amount of space devoted to the activities of the strongest religious bodies on the American scene. The unusual measure of attention directed to religious activities, in the United States, through such media as television, radio, the cinema, and the press, is enough to make a critical observer ponder whether the current spate of sermons, telecast and broadcast, and the cinema showings of a religious bias, are designed to promote a religious "revival" reminiscent of the "old-fashioned" school of evangelists, or does the present religious crusade betoken an end which is other than salvationist? A close observer and student of the various political currents and forces will readily gather that the much-stressed religious brotherhood and unity expressed in America to-day is quite obviously different from the rescue-mission work of bygone days, for to-day, as never before, the need for religious unity in the United States is stressed more strongly than ever. However, all the eloquent pulpit testimonials and pious rhetoric of politicians, in their bleatings for religious unity and brotherhood cannot dismiss the infinite harm done to a true human fellowship among men by the blood-stained annals of many powerful present-day creeds, which are among the most profuse in calling for "religious brotherhood." The much-belaboured need for brotherhood, as expressed by many eminent American theologians, is dictated by social and political expedience, and not derived from theological principles or sacred books, as the theological gentry, of various shades, would have us believe. The dark and chequered histories of entrenched spiritual theocracies, past, recent, and present, prove that their primary and all-inclusive concern were other than promoting human brotherhood.

In the *Evening Bulletin*, Philadelphia, Pa., February 26, 1953, the following, but vaguely meaningful, caption appeared: "Brotherhood Week Promotes 'Planetary Mind' in Education." Undoubtedly a person with more than an iota of intellectual curiosity or of critical inclination would be attracted to such an article-heading in order to satisfy his desire to learn about a novel phenomenon, particularly about a "planetary mind." Since the word "mind," in all its theological and metaphysical constructions, and with reference to the human organism and vapourings, what, in all likelihood, will philosophical disputants of the present and future have to say concerning the newly-discovered metaphysical entity, the "Planetary Mind?" How will the realisation of the existence of such a phenomenon as a "Planetary Mind" promote among men justice and equity in all their relations? Will the realisation of such a "mind," enlarged and magnified from that of the average human to a "total mind," the "Planetary Mind," be the "mind" representative of our planet? "Planetary Mind," a catch-word of recent American coinage, will, after due examination, prove as meaningless as numerous other catch-words or phrases. And it will join the meaningless twaddle which still has currency in many so-called learned circles which banter about, with the greatest gusto, such terms as "Absolute Mind," "Carnal Mind," "Infinite Mind," "Vital Principle," "Eternal Verities," and a host of other philosophical lumber too numerous to enumerate. What-  
ever else, the introduction of the principle of a "Planetary

Mind" will neither usher in the millenium of "Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men," nor solve the ever-recurring evils of war, poverty and unemployment.

Perhaps some quotations from the above-mentioned article, and comments pertaining to such, will be of interest to readers of *The Freethinker*, which should provide them with food for thought. However, there is no assurance that the following quotations will supplement their stock of useful knowledge since, at most, they will reveal how nonsense can be made to sound abstruse with philosophical trappings. The article opens with the following thought-provoking statements: "The planetary mind is the goal of American education. It is a mind attuned to all time, to all space, to all cultures, to all humans and to One Divine Infinity. And Brotherhood Week this week is a concerted effort to promote the planetary mind." In this declaration perhaps it is meant that a "mind" or outlook is to be cultivated which will be in harmony with all events from eternity to eternity, an understanding of events in worlds beyond our earthly sphere, and to a familiar interchange of sentiments with a One Infinite Divinity, whose unconcern with terrestrial events should shock even the expounders of the "planetary mind." The political expedience of cultivating the "planetary mind" is in evidence by reading the following quotation: "The danger of Communism calls desperately for the co-operation of all people who want to be free from the prison of State provincialism, the educators warn." And the following quotation should be quite illuminating, since it reveals the role of America in promoting the new "mind": "Thornton Wilder is responsible as envisioning America as the first planetary mind." To quote further from the article, "Brotherhood Week Promotes 'Planetary Mind' in Education," would encroach upon the limited space of *The Freethinker*. Enough has been quoted to reveal the intellectual absurdities and utter shallowness of the promoters of a "Planetary Mind," as a means of eradicating religious animosities and group rivalries in America.

## Correspondence

### REPUBLICANISM

SIR,—The reference to the "Royal Circus" in last week's issue is a reminder of the origins of, and early connections between, Freethought and Republicanism. The apogee of the republican agitation led by the indomitable Dilke antedated the foundation of *The Freethinker* by only a few years; just over a century ago the first English version of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared in a paper adamantly styled *The Red Republican*.

Surely now is the time to revive this connection? The growth of Welsh Nationalism, and the accelerating series of E I R pillar-box outrages, recalling, in milder form, the Nihilist outbursts under the old Czarist autocracy, surely indicate that the monarchy, now as effectively controlled by Parliament as the late Frankish Kings were by their Mayors of the Palace, has outlived its function.

The recent visit of the Yugoslav Prime Minister Tito, who has solved in masterful fashion the national question in his own country, by the formation of the Yugoslav People's Federal Republic, involving local national assemblies, indicates a possible solution to our own problems of regional nationalism. Why not make a British People's Federal Republic a plank in the Freethought platform? The existence of the Jersey States-General, and the proud Manx Parliament, are an embryonic form of such an arrangement.

Only those will object who are concerned with restricting Freethought to mere anti-religion (in which case Freethought, together with religion, is destined to become, in a few decades, as dead as the Dodo). Alas, however, these sectarians still seem to be numbered amongst readers of *The Freethinker*—Yours, etc.,

A. P. PERRIN.

## THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH

SIR.—I am afraid James Matson is "seeing things" when he says the Church is becoming "a sinister menace." In support of his belief he notes the dominant role that the clergy seem to be playing in every walk of life. But things are not always what they seem.

The Church, without doubt, is one of the pillars of capitalist society; but it does not own the country.

The people who own and rule Britain are clever, and up to now have made few mistakes. They know the great hold religion has on the minds of the common people, so they use it for their own ends. The boosting of religion over the air gives the impression that our rulers believe in the Christian faith, and thus they get away with much that is contrary to the interests of the masses.

We see the way our rulers work in the preparations being made for the Coronation. The idea behind all these is to convince the people a Monarchy is much better than a Republic. The young girl to be crowned is but a means to an end—the strengthening of the position of the small minority at the top.

I do not believe the present Duke of Windsor abdicated to make room for one "more subservient to clerical aims." I believe, with millions more, he was removed because he wanted something done for the miners in the distressed areas of Wales.—Yours, etc.,

HARRY WARIURST.

## MENTAL HOSPITALS

SIR.—I am very surprised to read Mr. F. Hilton's statement with regard to the condition of mental hospitals.

I am afraid Mr. Hilton doesn't realise the precautions and safeguards which are specially designed for a mental patient (i.e., one whose mind is unbalanced).

As a student male nurse in a mental hospital I can honestly say that everything is done for the patient's quick recovery and well being. For example: a Social Welfare Officer assists with patient's problems, etc.; the Medical Superintendent (or his deputy) visits each ward twice a day; each patient has four blankets on his bed plus a counterpane over; suitable meals are given to the patients; weather permitting the patients who are physically fit are allowed in the fresh air for half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon; ample recreational facilities are provided such as cinema, concerts, embroidery, woodwork, rug making, knitting and games, etc., to help each patient to forget his worries and illusions.

It is natural of course that a mental hospital should be always locked and such precautions as w.c.s and bathrooms being locked for safety.

These are a few of the conditions in the mental hospital I am training at and I must admit that everything is as humane as is possible in such an institution.—Yours, etc.,

DAVID SHARPE.

## REPUBLICATION

SIR.—I wish to support the suggestion of M. Isenberg that the writings of Foote and Cohen should be reproduced in *The Freethinker*. I would specifically suggest that G. W. Foote's article on the Coronation ceremony be reprinted. I think this was written in 1901 or 1910, and once read is unforgettable.

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

## FREETHINKERS DISAGREE

SIR.—In the funeral address re Mr. T. F. Palmer (deceased), as reported in *The Freethinker* of March 20, 1953, these words are reported on page 90 thereof:

"In a debate in which he participated . . . we remember Mr. Palmer's emphatic assertions that liberty, . . . could not continue to exist under the Socialist State, which would never tolerate the free expression of minority opinion. . . ."

Compare the above with the article on page 91 of the same issue of *The Freethinker* on "Our Seniles and Incurables," in that article the proposal, as I read it, is that a certain mere minority with legal sanction, should be exterminated on certain grounds.

This contradictory attitude of self-styled Freethinkers as to minorities leaves one puzzled to know why one should uphold mere Freethought, when in action one Freethinker is out to destroy what another such will preserve, and on such a fundamental question of life or death of another person.—Yours, etc.,

CHAS. E. BERRY.

P.S.—Perhaps the writer of the article on "Our Seniles, etc." does not style herself a Freethinker?—C.E.B.

## POSTSCRIPT TO LETTER

SIR.—Many thousands of Yugoslavs already in Argentina, America, Australia and New Zealand before Tito regime; reasons, economic and political, as many found disagreement with Serbian monarchy, particularly Croats.

These atrocities certainly did not happen while informant there, as she lived for two years with a devout R.C. family in Dubrovnik who would have and did report every action taken by Church.

While she was there she attended services, processions and religious

festivals which all proceeded without interference and even with the assistance in some particularly recollected instances of the local party V.I.P.s.

Would very much like to know the source of your information. Meanwhile we are writing to verify the cases she specifically mentioned, having many friends in all parts of Yugoslavia.

Would like to point out there is at present no censorship of letters, nor has there been since 1948.

Regarding OZNA, certainly we know of its existence and of the mass arrests which are quite true, but of the heavy sentences passed it is rare for prisoners to serve the full terms, and appeal is allowed and in many cases is successful.

We do not condone Tito's regime, nor do we wish to establish it here, but we do believe that much is being said in Roman Catholic and Cominform circles which are pure propaganda against him.

My informant saw much excellent work being done by Tito's regime in child welfare, fight against malaria and tuberculosis and the welfare of young people.—Yours, etc.,

PHYLLIS PERCIC (Mrs.)

Paper Mill Cottages, Hewell, Redditch.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT TITO

SIR.—The recent letter from Mrs. M. Perry calls for some sort of rejoinder, although I do not intend to arouse any controversy, nor do I desire to impose on your valuable space.

During the late war there were many dreadful excesses, most engendered by fierce religious hatreds, and in these the now Cardinal Stepinac, together with his Secretary, played a very prominent role.

My daughter lived in Dubrovnik for over two years with a very devout Roman Catholic family who, incidentally, hated the regime of Tito. Had such a massacre taken place in Dubrovnik she would surely have been told of it. My daughter has indeed heard of the same OZNA in action.

In my letter I did not in any way defend the regime, I merely pointed out that Stepinac was a war criminal and was tried and convicted as such.

I did not describe Yugoslavia as an Eldorado, nor do I nor my daughter think so, but neither of us subscribe to the idea that Tito's regime is so bestial and brutal as Catholic propaganda would have us believe.

I enclose notes written by my daughter (Mrs. Phyllis Percic) which perhaps you can edit and embody in the printed reply to your esteemed correspondent who, like myself, is an admirer of *The Freethinker* and rejoices in the mental freedom which it disseminates so liberally. It is as well, however, even for Freethinkers, to have an open mind and to carefully analyse statements and propaganda, particularly those emanating from Catholic and Cominform sources.

I do not think that Mrs. Perry and I are in any real disagreement in those essential matters. I fully agree with her that Marshal Tito's visit to this country is dictated by political expediency, but it is to me that the spirit of co-operation and friendship offered is of vital importance to-day in a world that is so permeated (mainly) religious hatred and distrust.

In conclusion, may I say how very much I regret the passing of that splendid historian and writer in your columns, the late T. F. Palmer. I think his writings on historical subjects and also contemporary matters have been largely instrumental in forming the basis of my own philosophic outlook. I shall miss him sadly as a valued and brilliant literary friend.

I am myself an old age pensioner of 72 years, in a country crowded with an immense garden, from which it has been difficult to tear myself away in order to deal with this letter.

Now that Marshal Tito's visit to this country is an accomplished fact, it does seem that all the spiteful and vindictive abuse in which Catholic prelates excel has been ignored by the people and Government alike, and I rejoice accordingly. Thanking you, Sir, for your interest and the space in your columns.—Yours, etc.,

FREDERICK E. PAPER.

## WORLD POPULATION AND WORLD NECESSITIES

SIR.—Neither science nor any political or economic system can increase let alone double world necessities of human life and go on doing so in perpetuity. I also say world population can increase every generation and go on doing so in perpetuity. And I say it so increase perpetually without contraceptives of some kind.

It is the whole duty of mankind to consider, not only his generation but all future generations which he is responsible for bringing to this world. If he does not, then he and his sons and his sons' sons will for ever remain barbarians producing "work-slaves" cannon fodder in perpetuity!—Yours, etc.,

RUPERT L. HUMPHRIES

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