

The Freethinker

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— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

New Light on Christian Origins?

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

A FEW weeks back, we reprinted in *The Freethinker* one of the most curious and, perhaps, instructive passages in early Christian literature: the declaration by the early Church Father, St. Irenæus, that Jesus was nearly fifty at the time when he preached his gospel. The author, Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, to-day a big French industrial town, then, presumably, a provincial town of the Roman Empire, was an early Church Father who, or so ecclesiastical tradition declares, was a native of Greek-speaking Asia Minor, who, in or about 179, became Bishop of Lyons. The name, Irenæus, is Greek, and the works ascribed to him were, presumably, originally written in Greek. It must be

remembered that Greek was the "lingua Franca," the cosmopolitan language of the Roman Empire at this time. Marcus Aurelius, under whom Irenæus lived, wrote his famous *Meditations*, his private Diary, not intended for publication, in Greek. The Christian Church in Rome also continued to use the Greek language in its ecclesiastical liturgy until a later date than that of Irenæus. The Christian community in Lyons probably consisted largely of oriental slaves.

What is most remarkable about our second century author's biographical information about the Jesus of the Gospels is the confidence with which it was expressed. When the Bishop of Lyons tells us that Jesus lived a life of honourable activity until he was nearly fifty and was universally respected by his contemporaries, he is not merely giving his own opinion, or asserting a doubtful tradition. Contrarily, he asserts that what he is reporting about The Lord is the unanimous tradition of the Church of Asia—that is, Asia Minor—as handed down directly from John the disciple of the Lord, the traditional Founder of that Church, who had lived "into the reign of Trajan"—that is, into the second century of the Christian Era; since the Emperor Trajan, one of the most famous Roman Emperors, reigned from 98-117 of our present Era. Not only does Irenæus tell us that his account of the life and activities of Jesus is the correct one, but he explicitly asserts that the story that Jesus only taught for one year after his baptism by John, and died at the age of thirty, or thereabouts, is a pestilential heresy assiduously circulated by the Gnostics, the arch-heretics of the period in which the Bishop of Lyons traditionally wrote.

In making such a statement, Irenæus, as the saying goes, "said a mouthful." For our Gospels, which, incidentally, Irenæus is the first recorded Christian author to quote as canonical by name, all repeat, with minor variations only the Gnostic "heresy" so roundly denounced by our author as contrary to the unanimous tradition of the apostles and of the Church. From which it would seem to follow that our Gospels must have been compiled by Gnostic heretics who succeeded in imposing, eventually, their point of view on the Church. One would like to know *what*, exactly, was in the Four Gospels which the Bishop of Lyons had before

him when he wrote his famous book *Against the Heresies*, from which our extract is taken, towards the end of the second century of our Era. It is worth recalling that the pagan critic of Christianity, Celsus, who seems to have written his *True Word*, the oldest critique of Christianity to have survived, about the same time as Irenæus, already accuses the Christians of having "edited" and rewritten

their "Sacred Books," "once, twice, many times." Apparently, this process had not finished even then?

The statement of this early Church Father about Christian origins is so original and so destructive of the now universally accepted Gospel tradition that, though unsupported by

any other surviving documents in early Christian literature, it appears to be worth further investigation.

Firstly, with regard to its author. At the time when Irenæus wrote the books ascribed to him, Christianity had not yet emerged from its subterranean existence as an obscure oriental cult. Its first authentic mention by pagan writers of repute—Celsus, Marcus Aurelius, and others—was, actually, contemporary with Irenæus, and no one, except the "Pagan Evidence" lecturer Celsus, who studied Christianity expressly to refute it, knew anything about the new religion except by hearsay: it is very unlikely that Marcus Aurelius ever saw a Christian in his life. It is, accordingly, not very surprising that all we know about Irenæus derives solely from ecclesiastical sources. It is, however, very unlikely that the passage in question, with its flat repudiation of the orthodox Christian tradition, could have been written by anyone else. In the period immediately after Irenæus's traditional date, Christian theology, of which Irenæus was one of the founders, hardened into the rigid mould that it has possessed ever since. It is quite inconceivable that such an heretical statement should have then been put into the writings of so famous a champion of orthodoxy as the Bishop of Lyons. Indeed, it is very unlikely that such a daring criticism of the Gospel story would have been left in the text of anyone less famous. The text of Irenæus, one may suppose, was so sacrosanct and well-known that editors dared not tamper with it.

Accordingly, it is, in our submission, highly probable that the text of Irenæus represents his authentic text. If not, it cannot possibly be much later in date. Assuming, as I think we can, its authenticity, what do we actually know about Irenæus? Only, it seems, that he came from Greek-speaking Asia, and that he became Bishop of Lyons in 179, after a massacre of the Christians of Lyons, including the previous Bishop, in 178. (The Massacre, which rests entirely on Christian tradition, may be apocryphal, but enriched the martyrology of Christian legend with some famous names. Irenæus is reported to have himself been martyred eventually, on still more doubtful evidence.) Assuming that, as he says about Jesus, one does not reach "years of discretion" until about fifty, one may assume

that he was probably a middle-aged man when he became Bishop. In which case, Irenæus would have been born about 130 of our Era; which tallies with the tradition that he was a disciple of Bishop Polycarp, a famous Christian Bishop, who was allegedly martyred about the middle of the century at an advanced age.

Irenæus, then, belonged to the second generation of the second century, and was probably born about a generation after the death of John who, we are expressly told, lived into the reign of Trajan; that is, into our second century. Such a man would be a fairly reliable witness to the state of belief current in Asiatic Christian circles when the new religion was in process of formation and before our Gospels were written; which, by all the available evidence, cannot have happened much before the beginning of our second century at the earliest—they may have been even later, as Walter Cassels has incontrovertibly demonstrated in his masterly study of Christian origins, *Supernatural Religion*.

Who was John, "the Lord's disciple," to whom Irenæus appeals so confidently? Upon that point, the Christian tradition of the second century is unanimous: the "John" to whom our author appealed, was the Founder of the Church in Asia, who died at an advanced age in Ephesus, and who "wore the golden breastplate," or was, originally, a Jewish priest in the Temple at Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans A.D. 70. This "John," sometimes described as "The Apostle," and sometimes as "The Presbyter," or "Priest," was so famous a figure in the early Christian Church that one must accept his existence unless one is prepared to deny the whole tradition of Christian origins—which the present writer, for one, is not. The standing of "John," whether "Apostle" or "Presbyter," in early Christian circles, is conclusively established by the fact that an entire "Johannine" Literature, of which he was the reputed author, a Gospel, an Apocalypse (our "Revelations"), and three Epistles, was incorporated into our New Testament despite the fact that it obviously represents quite a different tradition of Christian origins

than those of "Paul" and of the other Gospels. It is precisely this Asiatic "Johannine" tradition which Irenæus reflects, and it is from the Gospel of "John" that he quotes in the passage cited above: one would, we repeat, like to know what else was then in the Gospel which is not there now; since, obviously, if "John" taught what Irenæus says he did, which we have no reason to doubt, our "John" must have been pretty heavily bowdlerised in the interests of what later became orthodoxy, since the time when our Bishop quoted it and described the teaching of its alleged author.

We thus consider Irenæus as a reliable reporter of, at least, one of the sources that later merged into our "New Testament" and into fully-evolved Christian orthodoxy. As to who actually was the Jewish teacher who "claimed to have seen Abraham," we have no means of knowing. The fact, if it be such, that the "Jesus of the Gospels" is a myth, does not exclude the fact that a myth may be, and often is composite in character. The actual sayings and doings of actual men who lived in the Palestine of the first century may, at some points, be incorporated in such a composite myth. Of such kind may have been "John's" reminiscences of an actual Jewish heretic who claimed to be a reincarnation of the Old Testament patriarchs: in Gnostic circles, such as those in which "John" obviously wrote his Gospel, such fantastic personages were, by no means, unknown.

The mists of Time, ably assisted in this instance by a millenium of Christian censorship, have now virtually obliterated every trace of the actual origins of Christianity, and we are now never likely to know how the tremendous drama actually started. Only a few isolated passages, surviving either by accident or on account of the fame of their traditional authors, give us occasional glimpses through the swirling mists which shroud the beginnings of the most powerful religion that our planet has known. Amongst such rare glimpses, that recorded by Irenæus is one of the most remarkable and, probably, most reliable.

The Wisdom of Folly

By C. McCALL

Farewell! live long, drink deep, be jolly,
Ye most illustrious votaries of folly!

THE lines prefixed above actually come at the close of a book written in 1510, which still has a great deal to commend it. Paradoxical though it may be in parts, *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus (1466-1536) is suffused with common sense and bristling with wit and irony—besides being illustrated by Holbein—and provides a rare feast for the bibliophile. For the Freethinker, it offers even more. It is a voice from the Renaissance: a voice of culture and tolerance, but one that commanded (and employed) devastating satire. Erasmus was, as G. W. Foote indicated, the precursor of Voltaire.

Much has been said in disparagement of him as a man, and even Froude thought that he should have supported the Reformation. But Erasmus was a timid man who hated violence and war. He avoided the martyrdom of his friend Sir Thomas More (to whom *The Praise of Folly* is dedicated) but he also avoided the fanaticism of Martin Luther. He was more of a Freethinker, though less of a revolutionary than Luther, who called him godless, an enemy of true religion, a slanderer of Christ, a Lucian, an Epicurean and the vilest miscreant that ever disgraced the earth. Perhaps those were times for clear-cut decisions and Erasmus, like many intellectuals before and since, failed as a man of action. But there is a tendency to oversimplify such situations. Erasmus believed in toleration,

as Luther never did, and perceived that the Reformation had substituted a local tyranny for a Roman one, an infallible book for an infallible Church. The essential difference between the two men has been epitomised by Foote, viz., "Luther was a theologian, and Erasmus a Humanist."

A scholarly humanism is clearly evident in *The Praise of Folly*, which was written at the house of More and described as "An oration of feigned matter, spoken by FOLLY in her own person." Much of the book is fittingly light-hearted and satirical ("trifles may be a whet to more serious thoughts") but there are passages of serious intent. The whole work is a plea for a sensible attitude to life. "Why, can any one be said properly to live to whom pleasure is denied?" it asks, and emphasises that it speaks of mortal men only, who have faults but make friends, and not of the gods who "have so much of wisdom, as they have very little of friendship; nay nothing of that which is true and hearty."

Living is a social matter, and Erasmus had no time for asceticism. For him, wisdom was "a readiness for doing good, and an expedite method of becoming serviceable to the world." The nature of "good" is "communicative, and mirth should be imparted to others. When we have run merrily on to our last stage of life, there should be no fear or pain to die, for good company is sure to be acceptable in the next life as it is in this. Clearly,

is no mournful Christian heaven here, and there would be no mournful earth either, if Erasmus's fool had his way. He had much in common with the sporting, jesting, pleasure-loving Pagan deities and quotes their escapades with relish. Not so with "the old crabbed philosophers, and those who now supply their stead, the mortified monks and friars."

Philosophers in their long beards and short cloaks esteem themselves the only favourites of wisdom, and look upon the rest of mankind as the dirt and rubbish of creation; yet these men's happiness is only a frantic craziness of brain; they build castles in the air, and infinite worlds in a vacuum." Their ideas are constantly tested in the laboratory of life and found wanting. What city, he asks, would ever submit to the rigorous laws of Plato? The stoical Seneca "pretends that the only emblem of wisdom is the man without passion; whereas the supposing any person to be so, is perfectly to unman him, or else transforming him into some fabulous deity that never was, nor ever will be . . . making him a mere statue, immovable, senseless, and altogether inactive. And if this be their wise man, let them take him to themselves, and remove him into Plato's commonwealth, the new Atlantis, or some other-like fairy land." Socrates was too intent upon abstract matters and "minded nothing of the world, and its ordinary concerns."

Monks are "another sort of brainsick fools" whose first step whereunto they esteem a profound ignorance, is "thinking carnal knowledge a great enemy to their spiritual welfare." They seem "confident of becoming greater proficient in divine mysteries the less they are poisoned with any human learning," imagine "they bear a sweet consort with the heavenly choir," and some "make a good profitable trade of beggary." Divines are dexterous in unfolding the most intricate mysteries about the conception of Christ, the sacrament, and a thousand other "sublimated and refined niceties," but they hold absurd and extravagant tenets and maintain that it is "a less aggravating fault to kill a hundred men, than for a poor cobbler to set a stitch on the sabbath-day."

Those sadly misguided folk of to-day who acknowledge favours received from blessed saints and virgins or think that St. Christopher will protect them from danger, might care to hear that "if any pray to Erasmus on such particular holidays, with the ceremony of wax candles, and other fopperies, he shall in a short time be rewarded with a plentiful increase of wealth and riches." (The obligation should be admitted in the Personal Column of the Press). And the numberless readers of *What the Stars Foretell* in the various women's weeklies may be interested to know that although "it is all but a presumptuous imposture, yet some to be sure will be so great fools as to believe them (the astrologers)."

No subject was sacrosanct to Erasmus. Popes, cardinals and bishops, who "in pomp and splendour have almost equalled if not outgone secular princes" come in for violent denunciation. The first "pretend themselves Christ's vicars," sometimes buy votes in the conclave, and have attendants galore, including "grooms, ostlers, serving-men, pimps (and somewhat else, which for modesty's sake I shall not mention)." "They think to satisfy that Master I shall not mention." "They pretend to serve, our Lord and Saviour, with their great state and magnificence, with the ceremonies of installations, with the titles of reverence and holiness, and with exercising their episcopal function only in blessing and cursing." Bald-pated priests are "most subtle in the craft of getting money, and wonderfully skilled in their respective dues of tithes, offerings, perquisites, etc."

Erasmus is scathing in condemnation of the "cheat" of pardons, indulgencies and other magical charms;

"fumbling" over beads in "the rehearsal of such and such petitions (which some religious impostors invented, either for diversion, or what is more likely for advantage);" and belief in guardian saints with distinct offices: one for the toothache, another to grant easy delivery in child-birth, a third to recover lost goods, and so on.

But he reserves perhaps his most pungent satire for the schoolmen, who "can deal with any text of scripture as with a nose of wax, knead it into what shape best suits their interest;" in whose "abstracting brains" subtleties are "alchemized to a more refined sublimate;" and who make divisions in hell and purgatory "as if they were very well acquainted with the soil and situation of those infernal regions." In fact, so clever are they, that Erasmus recommends them as replacements for the many unsuccessful legions sent against the Turks and Saracens in holy wars. The engagement, surely, would be mighty pleasant, and victory unquestioned.

There, this appetizer (for it is nothing more) must end. Erasmus, like his voice of Folly was "communicative and bountiful." Well might he exhort us to "drink deep" for, like a good host, he gave us genuine vintage. Whatever his personal deficiencies and his falterings at historic moments, he possessed a fine intellect and a lively wit which he poured into this delightful book.

Theatre

Escapade by Roger MacDougall. St. James's Theatre. THE subject-matter of this play is a little confusing, but there emerges with reasonable lucidity its main propaganda point, which is peace. Unfortunately, the situations are rather improbable, but you may find the play passably good if you can be convinced that all youngsters do not want to fight and that a sixteen-year-old boy could organise the whole of his school into a unit of militant pacifism.

Phyllis Calvert and Nigel Patrick play the parents of three boys. They are away at school, and the eldest at sixteen gets up a peace campaign. His bold action in this respect makes the parents conscious of their responsibilities, but they are at variance with each other, for the father is a stormy pacifist and the mother feels she cannot tolerate him and wants to part.

Although the play could be much tidier and clearer, it is saved by considerable wit in the dialogue and mainly good character parts. John Fernald's production is of high standard and the acting is excellent, notably from the two leads and also from Ernest Clark as the schoolmaster. Two junior actors also stand out clearly; one is Lance Secretan bent on keeping the truth from the master, and the other is Alec McCowen who has a more varied rôle.

That the young are sent to fight in case of war, and that they should seek their own means of keeping peace, is the message of this play. It is nothing new, but it is good to know that it is kept alive.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

The Design Argument

The crocodile's approach is deadly silent, and his attack swift as a flash of lightning. Even a large ox has small chance of escape from the great jaws when once dragged into deep water. Yet the reptile has so small a gullet that he can only swallow small morsels of solid food, and he conceals the bodies of the large animals in the reeds below the surface until they decompose before he can enjoy them.—W. S. CHADWICK, *Man Killers and Marauders*.

THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE MYTHICAL CHRIST. By Gerald Massey. What Christianity owes to Ancient Egypt. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

This Believing World

We often wonder whether the Church is obsessed by the word Jesus quite as much as by the word "Unity." Over and over again "Unity" is the principal topic for our clergy on the B.B.C.—the latest example being "Two Statements on Episcopacy," one by the Rev. G. L. Prestige who appears to be quite certain that God Almighty intended the Churches in England to be ruled by Bishops; and the other by the Rev. E. A. Payne, speaking for the Free Churches, who was just as certain that God Almighty didn't want any Bishops at all. Dr. Prestige seemed very surprised that the Free Churches should want to keep out of the Communion of the Church of England over such a small matter as a Bishop; while Dr. Payne seemed to think that as Jesus Christ wasn't ordained by any Bishop, these gentlemen were quite superfluous.

It was all a pretty tussle of wits, and lay people (such as ourselves) must have been quite unable to judge on such domestic matters. What did emerge from the two statements was that there wasn't the least likelihood of "Unity" so long as one side wanted Bishops, and the other side didn't. The divergence of views was just as acute between them as between the Church of Rome which wanted a Pope, and the Church of England which didn't. What a blessed word is "Unity"!

Whether History is, as Henry Ford is supposed to have said, "all bunk," or not, is a question for historians to discuss. But we are all for accuracy if we can get it, and a line in the American journal, *Progressive World*, for July on forcible conversions credits Charlemagne with giving "100,000 captured Turks five minutes to decide whether to become Christians or to be hanged." It would have been some job even for Charlemagne to hang 100,000 unlucky people—but where in history is the evidence for this statement? And were there any Turks at all in the days of Charlemagne?

Let us give credit to one Anglican Bishop, the Rt. Rev. H. H. Dixon of Brisbane, for giving an "emphatic 'No'" to the suggestion of the Acting Prime Minister, Sir Arthur Fadden, for prayers of thanks for the Korean Truce. He thought it "farcaical to arrange thanksgiving services" after only a day's truce. Still, why should we have any thanksgiving services? After all, if the Lord really arranged the truce, he must have also arranged the Korean War. At all events, we shall maintain this until the Almighty assures us that he is entirely innocent of the War.

A reader of this journal wants to know whether the Rev. Solomon Spaulding is or is not responsible for the famous (or infamous) *Book of Mormon*, the Bible of all good Mormons. Of course, the Heads of the Mormon Church indignantly deny that it was pinched from Spaulding, but there is enough evidence to show that Joseph Smith got hold of his unpublished MS which was called the *Manuscript Found*, and which tried to prove that the original aborigines of America were descended from the "lost" tribes of Israel.

The Mormon prophet added a whole lot of twaddle about Jesus coming to America to convert everybody, claimed that he "translated" the lot from "Golden Tablets guarded by Angels," and the Mormon Church was born. Unfortunately, Smith was bitterly attacked by his fellow Christians, and he eventually was foully murdered by them—which is not surprising to anybody who knows

Christian history. The *Book of Mormon* is written in the style of the Authorised Version of the Bible which thus adds distinction, dignity, veracity and authenticity to it—as in the case of our own Holy Bible.

Disgruntled and unsuccessful artists can take hope from the experiences of a Mr. J. H. Bent, who is in the Spirit World—and he ought to be believed when he tells us that there he is creating "beautiful landscapes, paintings of rare richness and beauty" all through the laws of God. There is, he adds, "nothing to fear, because God is Love." This magnificent tribute to the Spiritual Uplift engendered by Spiritualism should give Hope to the Weary, the Sick, and the Miserable. Can Materialism do likewise? Not on your life!

The story of the finding of the True Cross by St. Helena, the mother of Constantine, fervently believed in by most if not all Christians, and especially by Mr. Evelyn Waugh, proves how wonderfully true is Spiritualism. It appears that when the three crosses were found, the presiding Bishop with St. Helena visited a sick woman and touched her with them. Two of the crosses utterly failed but—yes, you have guessed it, the Third, the True Cross, cured the invalid at one touch. And where does Spiritualism come in? Well, it was a Spirit Guide which led the Sainted Lady to the One True Cross!

Westering

Now, at the hour of the long shadow,
When beetle drones, and the night-moth flies,
When on trunk and branch golden glory lies,
And coney seeks his hole beyond the meadow,
Time is it too the dreamer made for home,
To witness on the morrow long shadows come. B.S.

N.S.S. Executive Committee 6th August, 1953

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Eburne, Griffiths, Tiley, Johnson, Cleaver, Corstorphine, and the Secretary. Eight new members were admitted to the Parent, Kingston and West London Branches. It was decided to send a letter of fraternal greetings to the National Congress of French Freethinkers, meeting at Toulouse, August 13 to 16. An invitation from the Southport Debating Society for a speaker to lead in a debate on the After-Life was read, and it was decided to refer it to the Manchester Branch. Owing to the possibility that Mr. Taylor might not be able to attend the approaching Conference of the Ethical Union, it was agreed that the Secretary should represent the N.S.S. there. News of Mr. E. T. Bryant's recent thought activities in Folkestone and Trimley was received with interest, Mr. Bryant having been an active and useful member of the Executive Committee for some years prior to his departure from London. First information of a forthcoming legacy to the Society under the Will of the late Thomas A. Greene, Drumcomdra, Eire, was read.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

BLASPHEMY!

I always understood that cricket was a sport and the men who indulged in it were known as sportsmen. If they expected to be provided with sleeping carriages on the trifling railway journey from Leeds to London, they had better travel in a hearse—which would be at least as exciting as the game they play.—Letter to the Editor of the *Evening Standard*.

IS THIS DEMOCRACY?

A youth parliament that held a debate in May on the abolition of the Monarchy has now been barred from meeting in the Wimbledon Council Chamber.—The *Daily Express*, August 8, 1953.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

Mrs. K. M. GOLDNEY.—We are not quite sure of your point. We did not say the gentlemen referred to were members of the S.P.R. but that they should join with those of your members who are "believers" in spirits.

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

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7-30 p.m.: H. DAY and A. H. WHARRAD.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Sunday, August 23, 8 p.m.: Messrs. BARKER and MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every week-day, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK and BARNES. Every Sunday, 3 p.m., at Platt Fields, a Lecture.

North London Branch (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, August 23, noon: L. EBURY.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Marble Arch).—Every Sunday from 4 p.m. onwards: Messrs. O'NEILL, CLEAVER, WOOD, and other speakers.

INDOORS

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead, 2 mins. Wanstead Station).—Thursday, August 27: Open Meeting.

NOTES AND NEWS

For quite a number of years past *The Freethinker* has had the good fortune to possess amongst its most valuable literary assets the talented pen of Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann. Well known in the legal profession as a practicing advocate at the Criminal Bar, Mr. Du Cann seems, somehow, to find the time to get through an almost mythical amount of both reading and writing. His published works, including several pamphlets published by our *Pioneer Press*, occupy whole columns in the catalogue of the British Museum Library, whilst his numerous contributions to this journal are equally distinguished by vast reading and by a style of singular elegance and literary lucidity. Our learned contributor has now expanded the scope of his contributions; in our contemporary, *Truth* (August 7, 1953), appears a notable article by Mr. Du Cann on Divorce entitled, *Is the Church Right in Saying Divorce is Un-Christian?* We must congratulate the readers of *Truth*, who will hear, perhaps for the first time, the case for treating marriage not as a mystical sacrament, but as a civil ceremony governed by common sense considerations.

Mr. Du Cann marshals his attack with sharp legal precision. He emphasises the contradictory teachings on the subject of Divorce ascribed to the Jesus of the Gospels, whom the author appears to regard as an historical, though human character. The writer then proceeds to indicate the contradictory attitude taken up by the Christian Churches upon this subject at different times,

Dr. Marie Stopes and her pamphlet on the Royal Commission on the Press

OUR contributor, Mr. H. Cutner, writes as follows: "In my review of Dr. Marie Stopes's pamphlet—a review completely favourable to her and her cause—I recalled an incident which took place about 30 years ago, and made certain comments to which she has taken exception. I wish to say that I am sorry if my remarks have done her any injustice whatsoever. I based my remarks on my memory of a discussion at a public meeting 30 years ago; but I understand that Dr. Stopes published in the same year her *Contraception: Its Theory, History and Practice* in which she gave (and still gives in the Eighth Edition) full and documented details about Bradlaugh and the others. Reference should be made to this book for a correct representation of her views. Having always admired her courageous stand on behalf of Birth Control against all bigots, I had no intention of injuring her reputation. I trust that she will accept this very sincere apology.—H. CUTNER."

(We have pleasure in inserting the above apology and in fully associating ourselves with its terms.—EDITOR.)

and places. Actually, we find it rather difficult to accept some of our author's arguments on such lines. No doubt, the Church has often deviated from the teaching of the "Master," but could it have done anything else? As far as its actual beginnings can be reconstructed, Christianity seems to have begun, not as a fixed system, but rather as a "revivalist" movement. The Founders seem to have believed that the end of the world was at hand; and their teaching on marriage as on other matters was adapted to such beliefs. Could the Church do anything else except modify such visionary teachings in a world which obstinately continued to exist long after the "end" was overdue? Even assuming the existence of an historical Jesus of Nazareth, we do not imagine that he said the last word on Divorce or, indeed, on anything. However, we do not suppose that Canon Roger Lloyd, of Winchester, who is to reply to Mr. Du Cann in the next issue of *Truth*, is likely to take this precise line!

God Save the B.B.C.!

(News Item: Beauty Queen Patricia Rossiter, of Bristol, has been warned by the B.B.C. that she must not wear a bathing suit in the T.V. Holiday Girl Show from Brighton. Instead, 19 year-old Pat, a clerk, will wear a dress run-up by her Mother.)

A Show from Brighton was arranged in which a Beauty Queen Was due to make a "brief" appearance on the T.V. screen. The B.B.C. in horror cried with all its awful might—

"Unless the lady wears a dress there'll be no Show to-night!" And so her Mother had to get her needle out tout-suite And run-up something covering the lower bits of meat. For nasty-minded humbug this must surely take the bun— Thank God we have a B.B.C. to see *we see* no fun!

W. H. WOOD.

Our older readers will remember the excellent comic verse which Mr. W. H. Wood used to contribute to this journal. Mr Wood ceased to write for *The Freethinker* on account of differences of opinion on the subject of Materialism. We have much pleasure in welcoming him back to our columns where we shall published an article in the near future in which he defends his position. *The Freethinker*, as befits its name, is always open to all forms of bona fide Freethought.

Robert Taylor

The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844) By H. CUTNER

(Continued from page 263)

AND there are other references in all of which he gives details to support his case; such as, to come back to the "Fall of Man" again, when he points out, "And that appearance of natural dialogue, and real character of speeches and answers, which run through the four gospels, results from the fact of their being the speeches set down to be spoken by the persons who enacted the characters. The persons being as real as the Keans and Kembles of the modern drama but the characters being altogether as imaginary as the Vampires, Fiends, Gods, or Devils, which they represent so ingeniously." And he quotes Clemens Alexandrinus: "All these religious tragedies had a common foundation, only differently set off, and that foundation was the fictitious death and resurrection of the Sun, the soul of the world, the principle of life and motion."

But the reader must turn to the *Devil's Pulpit* and learn for himself how much original research and how much sheer *thinking* Taylor put into his lectures. As has already been said, he was years before his time in many ways, and, of course, he could get but little further than his time when depending upon the authorities of his own day. So far as it goes, and bearing always in mind that the question of the origins of Christianity—and for that matter Judaism, and other religions as well—must necessarily have a wider field than the solar myth theories alone, the *Devil's Pulpit* can still be read with profit. And Roberison in his *Courses of Study* (1932) marks out the *Diegesis* as "still worth attention"—an opinion at direct variance with that of the Rev. A. Gordon who said the book was "a curious medley of random judgments and second-hand learning" which criticism can be levelled at any historical work, not even excepting Gibbon. The real query must be, of what critical and historical value as they stand are the *Diegesis* and the *Devil's Pulpit*? And the answer is that they are both works of remarkable quality and certainly "still worth attention."

While Taylor was delivering his lectures at the Rotunda, Carlile published a drama for him, partly written in blank verse, called *Swing* (1831). Its exact title is SWING: / OR/WHO ARE THE INCENDIARIES?/FOUNDED ON LATE CIRCUMSTANCES, AND AS PERFORMED /AT/The Rotunda. BY THE REV. ROBERT TAYLOR, A.B. It was sold at one shilling. The copy in the British Museum was evidently presented by the author to the famous actor Charles Kemble, for it has the following, written in Taylor's own handwriting, on the fly-leaf:—

C. Kemble, Esq. The Rev. Mr. Taylor respectfully gratifies his own vanity with the hope of affording some entertainment to Mr. Kemble on this specimen of *what the Drama should be*.—17, Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn.

Swing is pure propaganda, mostly against the authorities for allowing so much misery to prevail among the poor. The Archbishop of Cant is introduced with Judge Jeffries and members of the "proletariat," and Taylor has some magnificent revolutionary sentiments in which he shows a decided democratic spirit. He is under no illusions as to Royalty:—

FRANK: But why don't the poor people petition good King James, who is the best King that ever sat upon a throne?

JOHN: Why, yes, Frank, he's the best because he happens to be upon the throne. Can you tell me who was *not* the best King while he was reigning? The devil himself will be the best when it comes to his turn in the royal family.

It need hardly be said that Taylor was no born dramatist, nor even a born writer of blank verse. But as far as it goes *Swing* is a remarkable production. It closes with a line Taylor considered of noble morality—"Who'd live himself must let his neighbour live!" Never has that sentiment seemed more applicable than during the tragic days of a great war.

Robert Taylor was too badly treated in gaol on his second imprisonment to produce any other book such as either the *Syntagma* or the *Diegesis*. But on his release he commended a weekly publication entitled *The Philaethan*, by Talasiphron, a curious production entirely written by himself. It ran for three months only from September 21, 1833 to January 18, 1834, at 2d. a copy. It consisted of two parts—one on "a course of Astronomical Theology" and the other was his own *Autobiography* which began in No. 2 and was entitled "Life and Opinions of Talasiphron." The publication suddenly ceased, the present writer being unable to find any *reference* as to the cause. How many copies survive, it is impossible to say, as even the immense library in the British Museum does not possess one. It may be conjectured, however, that the reason for its ceasing publication was Taylor's marriage, and his flight to Tours with his wife. He lived there ten years but does not seem to have made any further *published* contribution to Free-thought. He certainly left a large quantity of manuscripts which were probably destroyed by his wife or scattered out of existence, the fate of so much valuable literature.

The first page of the *Philaethan* opens with the heading "Axioms", and these are worth reproducing:—

The annexed are the twelve grand axioms upon which the whole argumentation throughout this intended course of Astronomical Theology is founded; and which are to be steadily borne in mind, as they will be constantly referred to:—

- I. Nothing is to be believed.
- II. Conviction is to be withheld as long as possible.
- III. Nothing is sacred.
- IV. Nothing is contemptible.
- V. Nothing is either above or below nature.
- VI. No two truths can possibly be opposed to each other.
- VII. No ideas of more modern origin can possibly express the meanings of more ancient terms.
- VIII. No original word could possibly have consisted of more than one syllable.
- IX. The nature and operations of the human mind have in all ages been the same.
- X. There never was any means or possibility of knowledge to man, but by and through experience.
- XI. Nothing but the phenomena can authenticate the hypothesis; and the phenomena must always precede the hypothesis.
- XII. The hypothesis which solves the phenomena is truth.

The tenth axiom, that all we know is *experience*, is particularly modern and the other axioms show how independent was the cast of Taylor's mind. The admirable treatment meted out to a man of his calibre meant the loss to the world at large of a fine and original thinker, and there never were at any time many to spare in the world of ours. For the rest, the lectures on various aspects of the solar myth make intensely interesting reading for those who are studying the problem. Always is Taylor engrossed by questions of philology and "word-play" and even if one does not agree with his conclusions, he makes many provocative suggestions.

(To be concluded)

Secularism and Pacifism

(Published in "Peace News," July 10, 1953)

By P. VICTOR MORRIS
Secretary, National Secular Society

AS *Peace News* has recently contained articles on the attitudes of various religious denominations towards pacifism, a statement from a representative of a body of people who most strongly reject the religious outlook and most enthusiastically embrace a secular philosophy of life should be of interest to readers of this journal.

The National Secular Society, which describes itself as "The Organisation of Militant Freethought," was formed in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh, and has always been identified with opposition to all supernatural beliefs as being contrary to reason and inimical to human progress; but, along with its criticism of religious creeds and institutions, it has consistently promulgated a programme of educational and social reforms in line with the most advanced and humane opinions current during its existence. Its "Principles and Objects" as accepted by all members contain this clause that should find an approving echo in the minds of readers of *Peace News*: "To promote the fraternity of all peoples as a means of advancing universal peace."

The Society's list of "Immediate Practical Objects" represents the majority views of the members, but they need not be accepted *in toto*. Individuals work for those they uphold most strongly. The objects include freedom of speech and publication, legal and economic equality for the sexes, improvement of marriage and divorce laws, abolition of penalties upon opinions, abrogation of laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for recreation and entertainment, humaner methods of dealing with social misfits, protection of animals from cruelty and blood sports and so on. It should be significant to pacifists that at the 1952 Annual Conference of the Society, when the "Immediate Practical Objects" were revised, the following was placed at the head of the list: "The promotion of peace between nations, the substitution of arbitration for war in the settlement of international disputes, and the countering of militaristic propaganda, leading to the recognition that modern war is futile and can only bring about the ultimate destruction of civilisation."

How members of the N.S.S. seek to realise these objects is left to their own choice, which is natural amongst people who advocate complete freedom of discussion of all questions. So far as pacifism is concerned, some, I know, belong to the Peace Pledge Union. Others have resisted conscription and served prison sentences in consequence. Others have, temporarily at any rate, held that military aggression makes military resistance a regrettable necessity. I do not know of any who have emulated the politicians who were "conscientious objectors" while of military age and war supporters when no longer liable for the call-up. I know a number whose development has been in the opposite direction to this. Myself, for example.

Secular, as distinct from religious, pacifism claims no divine sanction for its practice. It rests on the observed futility of war and the necessity of ending the threat of militarism to all human achievements worth preserving. It arises from the affirmation of the supreme value of free proof of the force of ideas is naturally destructive of blind faith in the idea of force, it is not surprising that many secularists regard reliance on armaments as just another superstition from the past, based on fear and ignorance,

to be exposed along with other beliefs they hold to be erroneous and mischievous.

This should not prevent their working with other pacifists against war and the war machine, irrespective of the grounds on which others may base their ideals. It is sometimes difficult for them to do so, because bodies of opinion exist in most progressive and humane movements which regard secularists with disfavour and are not willing to allow them to co-operate on equal terms in efforts to prosecute aims held in common. Fortunately this attitude appears to be less widespread than it was, and we have the heartening spectacle of articles from *The Freethinker* being recently reprinted in *Peace News*, and *vice versa*.

To sum up, while making no claim that one hundred per cent. of the members of the National Secular Society are such ardent pacifists and anti-militarists as is its Secretary, I am certain that the large majority of them are prepared to co-operate with other active movements and individuals aiming at the ending of all war by methods that go beyond the customary lip-service paid to peace. They ask no favour, but they expect fair treatment, meaning the equal right with others to voice their pacifism from the standpoint of their personal opinions.

The Buddha Business

[We are obliged to *Freedom* for permission to reprint this article.—EDITOR.]

IN the last issue of *Freedom*, a correspondent, Max Flisher, takes me to task for my analysis of the Buddhist rôle in Burmese politics. Anarchism, of course, can have no integration with any religious authority whatsoever, and it is an illusion to believe that one can be of "an anarchist turn of mind" as he puts it, induced by the reasonings of priests of whatever calibre. He may well mistake self-abnegation for personal liberation.

Like many Westerners, he tries to rationalise his beliefs by saying that "Buddhism must be termed rationalist, agnostic and free-thinking" and is an ethical belief rather than a superstitious one. Exactly the same excuses are made, on a higher level, for Christianity and other illusions. Even a Spanish Catholic priest, exhibiting pieces of the cross oozing blood on Good Friday or some such twaddle, will explain to the hard-headed that this is only a "representation", although he will not reveal the same thing to his flock.

Naturally one cannot say much against the essential spirit of goodness, etc., etc., that figures in place of God as the result of a rationalisation of Buddhism, Christianity and other religions. Heinrich Heine remarked that "perhaps this new God-pure spirit this parvenu of Heaven who is now so ethical, so cosmopolitan and universally cultured, harbours a secret resentment against the poor Jews who keep reminding him in their synagogues of his one-time obscure national connections. Perhaps the old gentleman wants to forget that he is of Palestinian extraction, and that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that his name was then Jehovah."

Some similar remarks might be made of the Buddha, who seems to be trying to pass off in Vedanta and Theosophical societies in the West as a similar "ethical cosmopolitan"! We had better take a look at the god's

"obscure national connections" in India. The legend has it that Sidharta Gautama "attained enlightenment" under a tree in Rajgir. This tree has now much the same adoration attached to it as the cross in Christianity. The royal monk, Asoka, cut it down when he was a pagan king, but on becoming a Buddhist venerated it, as it had the habit of sprouting again. His jealous wife cut it down, and up popped the tree again. After 2,500 years the same tree still exists! The enormous wealth extracted from the peasants has built a shrine nearby that cost a fortune, and has been emulated by similar pagodas throughout the Buddhist world. Enlightenment?

Standards of poverty were enforced upon generation after generation throughout the Buddhist world because of the desire of rulers to build image after image of the god Buddha, as Gautama came to be considered. A somewhat exacting god, pleased at the sight of his own image repeated countless times in temple after temple throughout the east, the level of his freethought may be judged by the sacrifices offered such as the famous offerings placed by Tensing recently on top of Mount Everest.

The Western ethical cosmopolitan Mr. Buddha is not of much danger, perhaps, exacting no forced tributes in the way of temples and images nor able to impose an army of lazy monks upon an impoverished population. But a certain political danger lies in such assumptions as made by Max Flisher in his letter. He says "that it exists peaceably beside Marxism is merely a continuation of its 2,500-year-old history of non-dogmatism and benevolence." I do not quite know what he imagines the Marxist-Buddhist "Red Star" Communists are doing in the jungles of Burma. They are not peaceably contemplating their navels any more than the Socialist-Buddhist Government, but engaged in a long-drawn-out bitter, bloody, fratricidal and tyrannical war. While they co-exist "peaceably" as regards each other, they do not do so for any peaceable or benevolent purpose and as for non-dogmatism, it is hardly necessary to relate what happens to those who do not wish to fight alongside them.

I have dilated on this subject because Buddhism is little known in this country, except the watered-down variety. In the East, no less than the West, the gods, no less than the kings and leaders, have to be destroyed in men's minds before they can hope for freedom.

INTERNATIONALIST.

Correspondence

A TESTIMONIAL FROM CANADA!

SIR.—As a new subscriber I want to say I wish those Ridley articles were a lot longer. Great stuff, okay. The world needs telling. So I pass Freethinker along—being always ready to duck! Most folks have no idea of how come a body "gets that way"—being a freethinker. I was brought up church and I know. The general notion of an atheist is laughable, come to con it closely. He's considered just wrong-headed and wilful, not honest and sincere. That he knows God to be of man's own invention is never allowed. The "faith" wallahs believe he's just another faithy, only wrong. I don't forget my churchy outlook. How lovely to be free in your mind! Wish there was something I could do to help others to attain the same blissful state.—Yours, etc.,

JAMES F. KIRKHAM.

WAGES

SIR.—What is the basis of Mr. Paul Varney's assertion in *The Freethinker*, August 7, that the Trade Unions "have succeeded in demanding two million pounds per day more in wages than the nation is earning"? If that were really the position, what does Mr. Varney think that section of the nation not Trade Unionist is living on? If there were not a surplus derived from the labour of the working classes, there would be nothing for the other classes to live on.

The Economic Journal last August (1952) in an elaborate analysis on this subject gave figures showing that the working classes' share of the total product of the country was 2 less than it was in 1881, a period when wages were very low.—Yours, etc.,

C. H. NORMAN.

GOD AND SYNGMAN RHEE

SIR.—In Christian Political Theatre on stage in Korea appeared very good known actor Syngman Rhee. This time he wants to take camouflaged main role to make suitable peace or armistice for white Christian diplomats.

Christian armies from God's own land and other Christian countries containing God-fearing Christian soldiers coming from chosen nations, very proud of their pure hundred per cent. Americans and . . . men, etc., failed with their modern deathly arms. What Rhee will do with his heartbroken, discouraged and ruined people, with handful of men against China and Russian giants, with tremendous war industries behind the Communists, when Rhee has not his own modern war industry behind him? Christians see that they were forsaken by their own God in Indonesia, China and other countries, now nearly free from Christian superstition, crimes and exploitation. Camouflaged Rhee wants to use his yellow pagan South Korean troops against his yellow compatriot pagans, North Koreans, already partly God-less pagans due to Communistic anti-religious propaganda.

Nations sending Christian missionaries to pagan countries and printing Bible in many languages, failed in Korea. Forsaken by their own God, they sold, bought and fooled. Some known reasons make the peace or armistice in Korea difficult, even impossible.

1. Weakness of Christian armies north of 38th Parallel, long war in Korea, and disagreement of Christian diplomats in Far East encouraged the Reds.

2. Increased work in war industry was necessary in God's own land to decrease the unemployment, but unemployment is nationwide trouble and step to Godless Communism. It is not secret that during two World Wars God's own country sold war materials to both fighting sides. Munition manufacturing was in private hands, with Church having shares in such business. How long will it go on?

3. War in Korea gives time and opportunity to make armistice expected big scale war. Korea itself is research station where new deadly arms can be tested on living human targets and every thing can be destroyed without responsibility.

4. War does not affect Russia. She was raised to power by white Christian Anglo-Saxon diplomats in Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam. Anglo-Saxon diplomats annexed to Russia German slave people with modern industries in Eastern Germany, Poland, Chechia and Hungary. Before free people, now they are slaves in Soviet war industry, producing arms for Russia and Korea. Anglo-Saxon diplomats gave to Russia millions of slaves. Industries belonged before to free cultural nations and many raw materials we find in satellites. There is war in Korea, but Christian black marketeers and smugglers sent many forbidden goods to Soviet Union. Of course, Christian God forgives every crime called by believers sinning, and the officers of law can be bribed. Yes, sir, business is business, especially in war-time.—Yours, etc.,

K. LIDAKS.

TOLERATION?

SIR.—Supernatural religion to me is essence of human indignity. Insisting men are helpless, sinful worms of earth with no freedom in them. Secularism is the opposite. Dignity by power through understanding to make this earth O.K. for human felicity. Can man be a trifle patient, maybe, but tolerance? Is it right or thinkable?

Under the cloak of religious unrealism evils creep unheeded to their fruition in catastrophe. Picture the sorrows of men and ask "Toleration"?—Yours, etc.,

HARRY FIDMAN.

ANSWER TO PRAYER

SIR.—The "Proof of Prayer" story by Mr. James F. Kirkham in your issue of August 7 reminds me of another one about "The Greatest Prophet Since the Eighteenth Century."

Your readers may be interested to learn that the above Prophet Evan Roberts, was an answer to the prayers of Rev. Seth Jones who had been constantly praying for years before the "Revival" for God to take a lad from the coalmines or from the fields to revive his work in Wales. ("Living Echoes of the Welsh Revival" by Rev. Robert Ellis, B.A.)—Yours, etc.,

"SOSPAN FIDMAN"