

# The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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AMONGST the mythical narratives in *Genesis* we read the ancient Hebrew fairy tale of the origin of language. As and when considered as "Literature" and not as "Dogma," to adopt Mathew Arnold's famous distinction, the legend is picturesque and not without merit as imaginative fiction. Presumptuous men, eager to scale the celestial abode of the Elohim (gods), set to work to erect a lofty tower which would penetrate the clouds and eventually reach up to the abode of the gods. However, the gods did not take kindly to this prehistoric "five year plan" to equate men with gods by building a "Gate of Heaven," so they hit upon the ingenious plan of endowing the too presumptuous builders with different languages, so that they could no longer co-operate effectively, nor understand each other. In short, the builders of Babel became a kind of "Disunited Nations"! \*

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## The Tower of Babel

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

**Ancient Fiction**  
Such is the ancient Hebrew "yarn" which purports to explain the origin of language. As an ancient fairy tale it is ingenious and dramatic; as an historical explanation of one of the most complex and puzzling of human phenomena, it is on the same mythological level as the other famous stories of the Garden of Eden and the Flood.

**An Age-Long Problem**  
Like the other legends in *Genesis*, the story of the Tower of Babel is fiction trying to explain fact. For, if the "explanation" suggested is fiction, the fact which, and the origin of which, it seeks to explain, is indisputable. To a philosophical observer, the apparently permanent inability of human beings endowed with precisely the same physical organs of speech, to evolve any common universal language, despite the overwhelming advantages that such a world-language would offer, must always seem one of the strangest and most distressing of human limitations. It struck even the ingenious barbarians who first wrote down the story of Babel, and it recurs in the preamble to the arguments of most modern Esperantists and other contemporary proponents of a Universal language.

**Language and Ideas**  
The problems raised by language are very grave ones, and their influence extends far beyond merely linguistic questions. To-day, as throughout his entire history, "Homo Sapiens" (self-styled!) has to rely for his organs of expression upon the crude physical organism of a primitive anthropoid ape. The most subtle abstract ideas, the most sensitive musical and artistic emotions of which the human mind is capable, depend for their physical execution upon the elementary physical organs of an aboriginal forest ape. Human speech presumably originated from the love-cries and voracious war-whoops of wandering ape-like creatures seeking to satisfy their primitive lusts of hunger, love and hatred, in the primeval jungle. One may relevantly inquire whether physical organs still sub-

stantially the same as those of our prehistoric animal ancestors amid the sub-soil of the animal world, are ever capable of being evolved into organs capable of discussing ultimate, or what appears to us as ultimate reality, or even of conveying adequately the more subtle thoughts and exquisite sensations of the human mind in its most highly evolved phases.

### Language is "Positivist"

The present writer, unlike his distinguished predecessor in the editorial chair of *The Freethinker*, does not profess to be a specialist in philosophical questions and/or problems: his own studies have lain in less speculative and more positive fields. However, it has always appeared to us that human language and the primitive physical organs upon which it is still completely dependent for its expression, lend powerful support to the "Positivist"-Agnostic view, as expounded in modern times by such thinkers as Comte and Spencer, as, earlier on, by some ancient Greek and Indian philosophers, including, perhaps, the original Buddhists. The larynx of an ape is not the appropriate vehicle for the effective discussion of the abstract. Though it is all that we have to go on, it is, none the less, true, that philosophy is permanently inhibited by the inadequacy of its sole vehicle for expression. Consequently, the human mind is effectively limited by its sense-organs, and, in particular, by its primitive organ of speech, to the narrow field of sense-experience with which its organs were evolved to cope. There, alone, it can function effectively; what lies beyond is, what Spencer termed, "The Unknowable."

### A Social Curse

Whatever the truth may ultimately be upon such abstruse questions as are suggested by what we may, perhaps, term as the philosophy of language, it is, at least, indisputable that, on the social and practical plane, mankind's linguistic divisions have represented a social curse, and have proved one of the most effective stumbling-blocks to human progress. The presence and mutually unintelligible use of, literally, thousands of separate languages represents one of the most curious anachronisms in our contemporary modern world of rapid transport and inter-communication. The primeval curse of Babel still works! The magical voodoo pronounced on the early Babylonian builders still holds the world in thrall!

### Imperialism and a "Universal" Language

Actually, Rationalism, the extension of human reason to all walks of human existence and activity, has had little influence on the language question. Indeed, such partially successful attempts as have been made to overcome the curse of Babel by the adoption of a universally spoken and written tongue, have been due to force rather than to Reason; to Imperialism rather than to any genuine growth of spontaneous cosmopolitanism. It was the actual military growth of the Roman Empire rather than the diffusion of any supra-national theory, which caused Latin

\* Bab-Il-u, abbreviated to Babel, means "The Gate of Heaven." In the *Genesis* narrative, a literal "gate"!

to become, successively, the "universal" language of the Roman Empire and of the Roman Church. Similarly, it was the rapid growth of Arabian Imperialism under Mohammed's successors that transformed Arabic, the tongue in which the Holy Koran was written, into the "Universal" Church language of Islam. The same process of political and economic penetration in modern times is also responsible for the contemporary world prevalence of English or, in a more restricted expansion, Spanish and French.

### English versus Esperanto?

How shall we seek to realise a Universal language? This, obviously, raises the further question as to what sort of language do we seek to evolve? Broadly, there are, at present, two divergent conceptions of what a future Universal language would be like: the conception of an

*artificial* language which would supplement, if not supersede the present tongues in use; and the conception of the further evolution of one of the more widely used existing languages into such a Universal vehicle of human intercourse; from the point of view, respectively, of these two rival conceptions, Esperanto and English would seem to be, at present, the most likely aspirants to the eventual role of the future Universal language.

### Secularism versus the Tower of Babel?

Whatever the ultimate outcome may be, it is not open to doubt that any secular civilisation concerned, as such, solely with *this* world and with *human* welfare, would benefit greatly from, and by the adoption of a Universally comprehensible language: it would undo the work of Babel and give the gods a salutary reminder to leave mankind alone to attend to its secular affairs.

## Manifesto

(Issued by the Fourth Annual Sessions of the All-Ceylon Buddhists Students' Union)

MANY people are feeling the delusion of their failure to think creates the greatest barrier for seeing the truth. The quest for truth is the desire to discriminate between illusion and reality. But as only very few can, less care, and still less dare to think, the quest for truth is paralysed by prayer, dogma and ceremonies. Thus reason is sacrificed to faith.

We intend to disturb the serenity of mind of those who in their faith are unshaken—not through the firmness of their conviction, but through the failure to think for themselves. Our appeal is primarily to the more educated classes from whom we may reasonably expect a certain amount of discrimination, because the safest basis for any movement lies *in the intellectual plane*.

In a materialistic world where science rules supreme—in a scientific world where matter itself is reduced to energy—in an energetic world which seems to awaken to reality—in that world we want to be real and waken others from their dream-state.

Religions do not face reality as long as they are *content with speculations about a life to come*. Hence we rise in protest against those systems which keep in faith and dogma the mind enslaved in eternal bondage. But we believe in freedom of the mind to think—for freedom of thought alone can lead to truth; for thralldom of any kind is unnatural and untrue.

We rise in protest against those systems which in their crawling spirit of prayer and submission degrade man's noble nature to the level of a worm. But we believe in nothing but self-help; for in self-reliance the spirit of initiative and of creative thought is developed, crushing the slavish mentality of imitation, internal strength is increased, as all hope of outside help is cut off; the necessity for action is made evident, as no interference of a helpful nature is expected or even wished for.

We rise in protest against those systems which hinder in their doctrine of fate and destiny man's progress even in this world. But we believe in the power of action to make of this world itself a better and happier state. We realise that the quest for truth in a society where poverty and ignorance prevail would at best meet only with limited success. We realise the need to urge, therefore, that active steps be taken to build up a society where equality of opportunity is the ruling canon of social life, where there is sufficiency for all before there is superfluity for a few. For action alone can lead to progress, physical, intellectual, cultural and spiritual; and progress alone can lead to freedom.

We refuse to believe in the existence of a spiritual world separate from the material one, but we accept the manifestation in nature as the basis of the reflections in the mind. Thereby we reject categorically all ideas of a supernatural nature.

We do not believe in a force higher than nature.

We do not believe in rebirth other than that of action.

We do not believe in merit other than the good effects of a deed.

We do not believe in sin other than the evil results of ignorance.

We do not believe in a soul more substantial than an individual thought.

We do not believe in purity of blood and race, but in purity of mind and spirit. By purity of mind we mean respect of all social virtues of honesty and unselfishness, adherence to truth and readiness to serve. By purity of spirit we mean sincerity of intention, singleness of purpose, uncompromising devotion to the truth.

But we believe that truth can be found in this itself. Truth does not require a supernatural revelation, but a keen alertness to the working of nature itself. We believe in nature and in the absolute equality of men who have equal rights according to their nature. We believe that this equality of rights can be made an equality of life, by giving man a deeper knowledge and a better grasp on the meaning of life, without developing the instinctive greediness.

We believe in action which is never individual, but dependent on environment: education, influence and tendencies. Thereby we acknowledge the debt we owe to the community in the formation of our actions and character; we acknowledge the duty we have towards that community of which we form an integral part, in helping to share itself and to make progress to that freedom from struggle and want which is man's most inherent and natural birthright.

From *The Liberal*, U.S.A.

**GOD AND THE UNIVERSE.** By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Professors Huxley, Eddington, Jeans and Einstein. Price, cloth 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.; paper 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

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**SOCIALISM AND RELIGION.** By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s.; postage 1½d.

# A Chronology of British Secularism

By G. H. TAYLOR

(Continued from page 363)

1858. The Rev. Joseph Barker, returning from America, and himself an ex-opponent of secularism, debates with Brewin Grant at Halifax. Another of Grant's opponents is an earnest young inquirer aged 25, who has been converted to secularist opinion by attending lectures and offering his opposition to secularist speakers; his name is Charles Bradlaugh. Holyoake publishes his *Trial of Theism*.

1859. The benevolent society of the secularists is now enrolled under the Friendly Societies Act. The *Investigator*, of whose editors Bradlaugh has been one, ceases. Bradlaugh is now turning out anti-Christian works and holding debates on the merits of the Bible. He is also acting as secretary for the Truelove Defence Fund, Truelove having been arrested for libelling the Emperor Napoleon III; the case is dismissed. Bradlaugh has a noteworthy adventure at Devonport, where the police interfere with his meeting and unlawfully arrest him. Determined to resume his lecturing on the same site, near the shore, he convenes another meeting. The Mayor, replete with Riot Act and military support, and a strong band of Christian witnesses in the shape of a Young Men's Association, assemble to hear the forthcoming blasphemy and to take action. The scene is set on the river's brink. In the words of the famous judge, Sir Edward Parry, "Bradlaugh walks quietly towards the Gate, steps into a little boat, rows out to a barge moored a little distance from the shore, and there, nine feet without Devonport Jurisdiction, delivers his lecture: 'Pocket your Riot Act, friend Mayor; Right About, hence to Barracks, ye Military. Home, home, and gnash your teeth in seemly privacy, ye Young Christian Men.' This is not, it seems, a man to be easily persecuted, to be trampled under foot, or to be whiffed off the face of the earth by plugshot volleys of dull Bigotry"

1860. Charles Southwell dies at 46. The freethinkers of Bradford, Halifax and Sheffield form a company and found the *National Reformer*, the co-editors being "Iconoclast" (Charles Bradlaugh) and Joseph Barker; Charles Watts, aged 24, son of a Wesleyan minister, is on the staff. Another conference still plans in vain for a national secular organisation. The lot of the secularist lecturer is hard; his arguments are being met with hoots, stones, pepper and sometimes personal assault; Bradlaugh records a particularly stormy session in his attempt to educate Wigan. His three nights' debate at Liverpool with a Dr. Baylee show Bradlaugh the complete master of a splenetic opponent. Among Bradlaugh's publications of the year we find *Is There a God?*

1861. Bradlaugh, adopting the neo-Malthusian principles of the Place-Carlile agitation for birth control earlier in the century, makes birth control advocacy part of the *National Reformer* policy, and also starts a Malthusian League, which, however, does not prosper. Not all secularists are yet prepared to champion birth control, and those in opposition include Joseph Barker, whose services are accordingly dispensed with by the *National Reformer* company. In order to unite forces a National Secular Association is proclaimed, but it does not operate and in three months disappears in dissension. For the prospects of national unity it is unfortunate that at this stage the greatest factor making for unity collapses, namely, Holyoake's publishing and printing concern at "Fleet Street House." With its termination the *Reasoner* ceases, and the general atmosphere is far from congenial. Holyoake

being accused of the private gain motive. He starts a new monthly, *Counsellor*, which closes when Holyoake is given three pages of the *National Reformer*. This latter arrangement is soon ended, and Holyoake starts the *Secular World*. The Leicester Secular Society is officially inaugurated after a somewhat nebulous existence (there was, of course, a Revolutionary club at Leicester as far back as 1785). Events in Italy claim the attention of both Holyoake and Bradlaugh at this time. Bradlaugh also writing on a variety of topics but always finding time to defend atheism and secularism in pamphlet and on the platform, and even conducting a lengthy epistolary debate with one Lawson on *Has Man a Soul?* John Watts, brother of Charles, adds his quota to the secularist literary output.

\* \* \* \*

I am pausing here to consider two matters which cannot be pocketed into any particular year; they are the progress and activity of secularism as a whole, and the reasons why national unity was not attained.

Inside the ten years 1851-1861 some sixty secularist groups appear. Amalgamations and disappearances render it quite impossible to estimate how many were in existence at any given time. A third of them are in London, well diffused and with perhaps a slight bias towards East London. One is North London Secular Institute. Scotland and Wales are represented by Edinburgh and Abergavenny respectively, and possibly the Eclectic Society of Glasgow or any similar forerunner had affinities with secularism. Of the remainder, the South has three, Midlands seven, Lancs fourteen, Yorks eight and the North-East four.

The several directions of agitation show the best reward in the fight for the freedom of the Press. Holyoake, especially keen in this struggle, served on the committee of a national body for removing newspaper duties, the "taxes on knowledge," and their efforts were successful. On the other hand an affirmation bill failed in spite of numerous petitions for oaths equality, already enjoyed by the Quakers. In the fight for educational reform secularists gave help, though it had to be unobtrusive, to a Manchester association for secular education. Meanwhile the secularists had their own schools on Sundays and week nights, maintained by local secular bodies, in London (six), Birmingham, Ashton, Rochdale, Halifax, Huddersfield, Keighley, Glasgow and probably other places. They also kept up the agitation for disestablishment and for the right of public meeting in parks. Besides all this they maintained the direct attack on church doctrines, especially on those of God, immortality and the Bible, regarding these as the essential foundation for secularist practice. This leads us to the question of disunity.

Is the theoretical attack necessary or advisable? That was the problem which did more than any other single factor to split the ranks. Roughly speaking, Holyoake said No, Bradlaugh Yes. The former, in his earlier career, often broke his own rule and attacked theology, but as time went on he became more concerned with the fruits of secular philosophy than with its theoretical basis. In his (unpublished) reminiscences Sidney Gimson, son of Josiah Gimson of Leicester, has referred to Holyoake's readiness to placate liberal clergymen for the sake of advancing on common ground. It cannot, I think, be denied by Holyoake's most ardent admirers that he had the religious streak in him. I have, for the moment, of course, left the factual account and am indulging a personal opinion which the reader may not share.

(To be continued)

## This Believing World

One does not hear much these days from Swedenborgians, but there are still plenty about; and in a recent lecture, Mr. Clifford Harley told his audience that "as everything depends on something else, there must be a final something," and "this original or final something was God." It is quite refreshing to find God now claimed as "the final something," as in the past the Deity was the "creator," the "beginning" of everything, occupying space long before he thought of "creating the heavens and the earth" and "the stars also." But Mr. Harley admitted that no proof for the existence of God was possible, "it is a balance of probabilities."

But what happens to the unbeliever after he has balanced the "probabilities," and found that they were *against* the possibility of any "Creator"? Swedenborg and his followers are, of course, immune from any doubt, the followers even swallowing Swedenborg's twaddle about the spirits he was always having conversations with. The truth is, of course, that the science of astro-physics, properly understood, must inevitably lead to Atheism, Swedenborg notwithstanding. No Theist can possibly explain the reason why God made the planet Jupiter, which is many thousands of times bigger than the earth, and has a crust of ice 12,000 miles thick, and a dense, poisonous, atmosphere about the same thickness. Does Jupiter supply one of the "probabilities" of the existence of God?

Another refreshing change will be found in an article in the *Islamic Review* for November. As all readers know, Jesus is always put forward by Christians as the greatest ever—the greatest poet, orator, business executive, boxer (look how he tackled single-handed that dirty bunch of money changers in the Temple), carpenter, medium, Prince of Peace, God of War—in fact, everything. Now comes Mr. K. K. Ud-Din writing a strong article on "Why I Regard Muhammad as the Greatest Man in the History of the World." This article will, no doubt, displease our Reverent Rationalists quite as much as it is bound to displease Christians, but Mr. Ud-Din puts up a strong case.

One of the points he makes is that "Muhammad, and Muhammad only, and no one else, established monotheism in its purest form." That is a smack at Trinitarianism and no mistake; but what of those of us who see no more virtue in believing in one God than in a thousand? A TV set is not any better made through having only one maker than if it had a dozen craftsmen—surely? And, after all, one of the minor Gods could always be blamed for making Jupiter or tapeworms or cancer—leaving the one successful God as the creator of cows to give us milk, or hens to give us eggs, or big business to give us dividends. Now what exactly is the advantage of believing in one God rather than in a thousand?

Mr. Ud-Din is quite right when he says people used to worship the sun, moon, and stars, and even trees, cats, bulls, and golden calves. The special names given for these gods have, in some cases, been changed into "saints" and these saints are still being worshipped in the Roman Church. Why not? They do no more harm (if they do anything at all) than when they were Gods; and Allah himself, we are pleased to assert, is just as harmless, and does just as little, as Jehovah or Siva or Jesus. Or in other words, these Gods (and there are scores) never do anything except that they provide good copy for religious journals or for books—and even for *The Freethinker!*

**Just one more word.** It is claimed that Muhammad "was the first teacher of a religion that made religion and science helpmates one to another." This is a new one on us. That some of the Moors and Arabs kept science going 1,000 years ago is quite true; but we always thought that the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians were expert astronomers and made religion and astronomy "friends." In any case, what scientific discoveries does the Western World owe to Islam? Are we following Islam or is Islam following us? As a matter of fact, it was not until science became free of all religion, of every religion, that it made true progress. "Freethought" is the real Saviour of Mankind.

## Theatre

**The Living Room**, Graham Greene's first play, which is having great success at Wyndham's Theatre, is one of those plays which are events in theatre history. It deals with a Roman Catholic dogma and its impact on the mind of a young girl who has to face her first real problem; that of being in love with a married man.

Michael Dennis is executor of the estate of the girl's mother, and delivers her to her surviving relatives. They are Father Browne, who is old enough to know reason but believes that the mercy of God must come first, and his sisters Teresa and Helen. These are three old people who know death is not far away, and who live in a large house with most of the rooms empty and locked, because every time there is a death the room is closed.

Dennis, who is married and a practising psychologist, is in love with the girl and she with him, and they spend the night together before arriving at the Brownes'. Through a telephone call from Mrs. Dennis they discover the truth, and Helen—who wants to stop the affair—obliges her to stay by forcing Teresa into an imaginary illness. But the girl continues to meet him three afternoons a week, and when confronted by the family admits to Father Browne that in three weeks she has committed adultery 27 times. The girl, though brought up an R.C., does not accept Father Browne's advice to pray for help, for she scorns prayer and states deliberately that she does not believe. But what turns the tide is the wife's appearance as a half-demented woman who cannot bear to lose her husband. In the girl's own mind the problem magnifies: she does not want to give Dennis up but feels that the obstacles put up by religion are insurmountable and cannot be reconciled with her own sentiments. Moreover, she is faced with having to live with three eccentric old people who have shown her no love but only religious preaching, so she takes her life.

Dorothy Tutin, as the girl, gave a truly sensitive and impressive performance. John Robinson, as Dennis, did not give sufficient variation to his expression. May Violes was perfect as the intimidated elderly sister. Violes Farebrother gave evil severity to domineering Helen. Esmond Portman did not act sufficient age into his part, and Valerie Taylor was thorough as the disappointed wife. There is much more in this play than can be given in brief synopsis. It expresses the trend of Christianity in England to-day, old and tottering like the survivors of the family Browne.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS

## RAUCOUS

"Where's yer 'orspitals and lunatic asylums?" is a very odd jibe of Christian crusaders. Freethinkers need not trouble about this sneer. In common with their fellow citizens, they contribute to the support of such institutions. Maybe, Christians have a special interest in lunatic asylums. Christians may subscribe to them; certainly the victims of religious mania help to fill them.—MINNERMUS.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

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Lecture Notices should reach the Secretary of the N.S.S. at this Office by Friday morning.

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

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.:

FRANK ROTHWELL.  
Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday, 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, noon: L. EBURY.  
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Thurs-

day, 1-15 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Accrington Discussion Class (King's Hall Cinema, Whally Road).

—Sunday, November 22, 6-30 p.m.: Debate, "Christianity or Secularism?" ALDERMAN BROWNBILL, M.P.S., and JACK CLAYTON, N.S.S.

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, November 22, 6-45 p.m.: J. C. SIDMONS, B.A., "Some Aspects of Marxism."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 24: Mrs. LAN FRIED and H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A. Debate: "Do we need Ethics?"

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 22, 6-30 p.m.: DIANA PURCELL (Nottingham), "My Visit to New Poland."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Cross Street Chapel).—Saturday, November 21, 3 p.m.: W. TAYLOR, "Modern Trends of Education."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, November 22, 2-30 p.m. Debate: "The Trinity Square Scheme." For: Ald. G. H. WIGMAN. Against: R. G. HILL.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 22, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, Ph.D., "Darwin and the Origin of Species."

West Ham Branch (Community Centre, Wanstead, two minutes from Wanstead Station).—Thursday, November 26, 8 p.m.: Open Meeting.

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.).—Sunday, November 22, 7-15 p.m.

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON, M.A., "Books that have made me."

## NOTES AND NEWS

To-day, thanks largely to the noisy and intolerant activities of Senator McCarthy and his notorious committee, the U.S.A. has not got, nowadays, a very good reputation in the sphere of toleration. It is a far cry from the fine Humanism which has characterised such great Americans in the past as Jefferson, Lincoln and Ingersoll, to the current "witch hunts" in the U.S.A. Similarly, at least, if we are to accept the statistics so liberally supplied by the Churches themselves, the U.S.A., "God's own country," is now doing something to live up to the latter designation. Here again, we note a departure from earlier days, when no less a person than George Washington went on record with the historic affirmation that "the government of the U.S.A. is, in no sense, founded upon belief

in the Christian religion." "Times change, and we change with them"!

Under the above circumstances, it is most pleasant to be able to record that it is still possible to put the Free-thought case, even in popular magazines. We are indebted to our esteemed American contemporary, *Look*, for this information. For, in its issue of November 3, this fashionable American weekly published an interview with the famous English philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russell, to which our attention was drawn by our valued American contributor, Leon Spain. Under the self-explanatory title, "What is an Agnostic?" Bertrand Russell exposed in his inimitably lucid manner some popular fallacies and hackneyed religious objections against the Agnostic case. We propose in a future issue of *The Freethinker* to refer in more detail to the specific points raised by our distinguished countryman. Meanwhile, we must congratulate the editors of *Look* upon their courage in defying the current wave of hysteria, largely inspired by religious, particularly by Catholic sources, in publishing the arguments of this eminent Rationalist.

Amongst the numerous publications from all parts of the world which arrive in the office of *The Freethinker*, we may mention *The Anti-Militarist News*, published by the "League for Freedom and World Friendship," of Sydney, Australia, and edited by K. J. Kenafick. In the course of its comprehensive indictment of the current militarist activities in Australia, our contemporary gives some telling facts and figures about the warmongering efforts of the Churches, in particular, of the Catholic Church, which, as we have indicated before, is extremely powerful in Australian politics. Whilst Mr. Kenafick pays a generous tribute to the minority Catholic and Christian pacifists, he makes it quite clear that, "down under," as nearer home, the religion of "The Prince of Peace" is, to-day as in the past, a militaristic and imperialistic institution which is willing to back any kind of aggression that it thinks will strengthen its temporal and "spiritual" power.

An interesting article in our contemporary, the London Co-operative *Home Magazine*, entitled "The Seven Tongues of Britain," by Philip Baker, bears out the contention advanced elsewhere in this issue, of the extreme difficulty which attends the adoption of a common language. Even in the British Isles, Mr. Baker demonstrates, seven languages are still actually spoken. Two, Irish (Erse) and Norman-French, are official languages, alternative to English, in, respectively, the Republic of Eire and in the self-governing Channel Island of Guernsey. Two more, Welsh (Cymric) and Gaelic, are actually increasing as spoken languages. Over a million people still speak Welsh, chiefly in non-industrialised North Wales; and something like a quarter of a million speak Gaelic, in the Scottish Highlands. Both languages are on the increase, and original literature is appearing in both: the sure sign of linguistic vitality. With the spread of education it is now becoming somewhat unusual to find in the British Isles people who do not speak any English. However, there are still 50,000 in Wales, and a few thousands in Scotland and Ireland. The other two tongues listed by Mr. Baker, Cornish and Manx, are now purely literary. As late as 1935, however, there was, we learn, a village in the Isle of Man where not a word of English was spoken! Mr. Baker's illuminating statistics will come as something of a surprise, we imagine, to many people in England, the home of the "world-language," English! Esperantists will probably find fault with him in not mentioning Esperanto as an eighth spoken tongue.

# Dialectical Materialism

By H. CUTNER

READERS may remember that an article on the above subject appeared in our April 10 number. After carefully reading it I decided it would be best to let it die a natural death, if possible, for I had rarely read such a mass of incoherences. I, therefore, contented myself with asking exactly what sources of knowledge were open to Dialectical Materialists not open to me? The writer of the article, Mr. Jim Graham, correctly answered, "none"—but added that Dialectical Materialism was a "guide" and he asked me to reply to his article. I am now able to do this and I should add that I often get requests to explain what is the difference between the historic or "mechanistic" Materialism I hold, and that which is believed in so devoutly by Mr. Graham?

Firstly, I may say that I have had the greatest difficulty in getting to know what Dialectical Materialism really is. Mr. Graham does not give us any definition whatever—which is rather remarkable, as he called his article "an Introduction"; and I am forced to the conclusion that Dialectical Materialism shares with Christian Science and the Holy Roman Empire, a similar characteristic. As we all know, Christian Science is neither "Christian" nor "Science"; the Holy Roman Empire is neither "Holy", "Roman", nor an "Empire". And as Mr. McCabe in his *Rationalist Encyclopedia* says, Dialectical Materialism is neither "dialectical" nor "Materialism."

Secondly, as far as I have been able to understand it, any Christian can be a Dialectical Materialist. Not only is Professor John Macmurray a devout Christian, but so is the Dean of Canterbury; and both are thorough believers in Dialectical Materialism. And in Russia there must be millions of fervent believers in both Christianity and Dialectical Materialism. Whether I am right or wrong in opposing it, therefore, I can insist that at least no Christian could possibly believe in Mechanistic Materialism.

Let us, however, look at some of the most convincing illustrations Mr. Graham can give us to show how inerringly perfect is Dialectical Materialism. One of them is the Nebular Hypothesis, and particularly the reply made by Laplace to Napoleon about the "Creator"—a reply which some of us must have read hundreds of times, and which has done duty in Freethought literature for 150 years at least. First, "This hypothesis became one of the most devastating in astronomical history" Mr. Graham tells us. Second, he adds, "The fact that the Nebular Hypothesis is not now generally accepted by astronomers as the origin of the solar system is irrelevant." And third, "Sir James Jeans has said, there is scarcely any part of the universe to which it cannot be applied except in the solar system." And where in all this is Dialectical Materialism? Does anyone know? Does Mr. Graham? In plain truth, it has as much to do with it as with jam tarts. I knew about Laplace years before I ever heard of Dialectical Materialism, and so have most of us.

Then we are told that the Greeks were "close reasoners", and that Heraclitus said "You cannot step twice in the same river", which is true, as the water moves on. And similarly you cannot sneeze twice in the same time for time moves on. So what? I don't know and I am sure Mr. Graham doesn't know—so where are we?

We are then introduced to Hegel who "was one of the most important" of Idealists. He was "born in a revolutionary age" and "Dialectics are revolutionary"; which sounds to me as if one said—with as much reason—that "John was born a fat baby" and "pork pies are fatty." What has this got to do with Dialectical Materialism? I simply can't connect the two. But—ah!—am I not aware

that "Marx took certain of the methods of Hegel's system of dialectics but instead of the absolute idea of Hegel as his base, he took material conditions regarding the idea as the derivative. In many ways, his system was the opposite of Hegel's. Hegel's system was standing on its head. Marx set it right side up." This leaves me breathless. I am (painfully) aware that Dialectical Materialists seem unable to write about Marx and Hegel without telling us about Hegel standing on his head and Marx putting him right. This ought not to be surprising for if Hegel was an Idealist and Marx a Materialist, they would be bound to clash. But what I have never found are the exact passages which show Hegel standing on his head, and Marx putting him back on his feet. Would Mr. Graham oblige us with these passages? And would he tell us what, in any case, they have to do with Dialectical Materialism?

In passing, I might add here that I have not read Hegel except in the pages of G. H. Lewes' brilliant *History of Philosophy*, and that—for me—he is almost unintelligible. Lewes considered him half mad so that there can be nothing remarkable in Marx answering him where he is intelligible. As far as I can see, the only reason why Hegel is constantly coupled with Marx is because he was Marx's teacher, and Marx never lost Hegel's influence. So I shall be particularly gratified to have the exact passages about standing on his head given to me.

Mr. Graham says that "students of dialectical materialism must keep in mind not only the activity of objective processes but also their own social activity in their attempts to change their environment for the better." If this has any meaning—am I to understand that only "students" of Dialectical Materialism should bear in mind "the objective processes" and "changing environment" or what? I, who am not a "student" of this kind of "philosophy" (or is it a guide?) can go to an "objective bus, and change a slum environment in a few minutes for a beautiful countryside, without worrying in the least what Hegel or Marx thought, or even caring two hoots at Mr. Graham's ludicrous attempts to "introduce" Dialectical Materialism.

In any case, who cares a brass nail what Marx did to Hegel? Over 100 years ago, Schopenhauer knocked Hegel almost into oblivion without any help from anybody; and except for a few Idealist philosophers, Hegel is as dead as his unreadable works. As a Mechanistic Materialist, I don't ask anybody who wants to learn about it to worry about any Idealist. If he wants a good text book, let him read Buchner's *Force and Matter*. That great book once mastered, any "student" can laugh, not only at Marx and Hegel, but at Dialectical Materialism.

Just one word more. We do not say that we can explain everything, or that we won't accept anything we do not understand. Anti-Materialists are always putting up idiotic Aunt Sallies to shy at without, of course, any authorities. They simply make up what they say about Materialism. That is why what they say is no more true than "Gospel" truth. And Dialectical Materialists are no better. oppose them both.

## Our Loving Father

"When men were children they invented a loving father to whom they could fly as chickens do to a hen, and they invented life with all the unsatisfactory features of this one left out. Science set out to find proofs of the existence of this loving father and of the perpetual holiday after death; and it must be confessed that it has failed completely in its quest."—PROF. LANGDON-DAVIES, *Man and His Universe*, p. 15.

# The Temptation of St. Anthony

By LESLIE HANGER

ST. ANTHONY sat outside his cell and gazed across the empty, barren desert. It was a favourite view of his, he had been looking at it off and on for a long time. He seldom looked the other way, for there lay the valley with its fruitful soil and cool river. That way lay the ways of men, so St. Anthony turned his eyes the other way, for he was sure that in the desert lay the ways of God.

Here on the edge of the desert few people came, but he was not lonely, for hobgoblins and foul fiends often assailed him. They came roaring through the air or burrowed up suddenly out of the earth, insistently tormenting him in his dreams and rarely leaving him alone by day. Not that St. Anthony took much notice of them now, he had grown quite used to their ways and would have been rather put out if they had no longer visited him. They proved the mettle of his sainthood; the stronger their attack and the larger their numbers, the more merit in resisting them. Three times had Satan, the monarch of all devils, visited him, and St. Anthony hoped he would soon come again.

Then St. Anthony heard a sound that made him blench. It disturbed him more than all the weird and fearful howlings of the evil spirits. It was the light and gentle footstep of a woman approaching from the valley.

The woman placed a bundle at his feet and kneeled before him. She told him she lived in a distant village and, having committed a grievous sin, she had been directed to do penance by coming to him with an offering of food and drink, to confess her sin and ask his forgiveness.

Annoyed as he was at this interruption, St. Anthony could not deny that food and drink was very welcome. True, anything that bound him to the world irritated him almost beyond endurance, yet he had no desire to arrive in Heaven before he had made the most of his earthly career. He intended to do a great deal, the more to enhance his sainthood, before departing this life. He intended that his fame should range wide in the memory of the Church on earth, and that many godly people would offer up prayers to him. This would enhance his prestige in Heaven and he would sit in the foremost rank of the Saints.

The poor girl, finding that the Saint was barely listening to her, faltered and became silent. She feared his displeasure, for she dared not return without his blessing. Seeking some other way to please him, she suggested that she clean out his cell, the filthy condition of which appalled her.

St. Anthony shuddered; the ignorant girl was unable to comprehend the sanctity of such filth. Involuntarily he was reminded of his wife; she too had been unable to comprehend such things. He wondered what had become of her and the children?

This girl would no doubt be married before long. He looked directly at her for the first time; she was not unattractive, according to the standards of the world. Despite her tawdry, ill-fitting garments, he could see the gentle roundness of her hips and breasts; doubtless some man would find her a good wife and she would bear him children.

Memories came flooding back into his mind. He saw again his old home, looking out towards the Nile, where the kindly floods came every year and left the good rich mud that made all fertile; and within the house his wife, going quietly and diligently about her tasks, cooking and cleaning. How neat and tidy every room, and how satisfying the meals she cooked. Somewhere at the back of his mind hovered a longing once more for a good square meal from her hands.

He looked a second time at the girl. She would make a very good wife, he felt sure; the man who married her would do well. Vague half-formed ideas flitted across his mind, a desire that he had not experienced for a long time arose in him. For one brief moment he saw himself again as a married man with a wife and family.

Then the whole horror of it came to him. To be an ordinary man again! The thought was not to be endured. It seared his soul that he should contemplate once more leading a normal life. God would damn him for ever if he did not cast such a fearful thought from him instantly. He saw now that this was no simple girl, but Satan tempting him to deadly sin. Uttering frightful yells, he fled into the desert.

Open mouthed, the girl watched him out of sight, then she gathered up what she had brought and returned to her village. There was really nothing else to do.

## First Underwater Statue PROJECT NEAR PORTOFINO

Rome, Nov. 4.

What is described as the first underwater statue in the world is to be erected on the sea bed of the little bay of San Fruttuoso, a few miles west of Portofino on the Ligurian coast. It will be a statue of Christ, intended to protect all whose work or recreation takes them beneath the sea—submarine crews, divers, and the relatively new underwater fishermen.

The statue, in bronze, will be eight feet high and weigh 8 cwt., or 20 tons with its concrete base, and is to be designed by a Genoese sculptor and cast in Milan. It will be set at a depth of about 45 ft. in order not to hamper the fishing boats which use the bay, the clear water of which will allow it to be visible—for what it is worth.

—From *The Times*.

## The Lost Days

I will build you a song for the battle, a song for the flash of spears;  
I will make you a song for laughter, a song for the gleam of tears;  
I will colour your days with my magic, draw blood from the heart of a stone;  
But who will give me the lost days, the days when I made songs alone?

Deep was the vault of the night-time, and hungry the stars overhead,  
And never the lost and the lonely found all of appeasement in bread.  
From the depths of the world I will bring you a song to reveal life's deep heart;  
But who will give me the lost days, the days that held me apart?

Beauty you only have dreamed of, music you never have heard,  
The ultimate vision of passion, unflawed as the song of a bird.  
In all of my songs I will bring you to comfort, enchant and caress;  
But who will give me the lost days, the days of the heart's wilderness?

JOHN O'HARE.

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

## Correspondence

### DESTINATION HEAVEN: SOME MOST INTERESTING PROBLEMS

SIR,—Owing to the great interest that is being taken in space travel and the attention given to the matter in your issue of *The Freethinker* dated September 4, a certain problem presents itself in connection with the journey of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to Heaven.

There are different methods which she could have employed to accomplish her voyage, and the question is which was the one used? I list all the possibilities here:—

1. Levitation, a practice much in vogue with Spiritualists.
2. Dematerialisation, another Spiritualist accomplishment.
3. Vanishing, a method employed by conjurers, witches, dabblers in black magic and ghosts.
4. Space travel, with or without a flying saucer, scientific contrivance or mechanical contraption.
5. Space travel, sitting astride or side-saddle on a broom handle (a method used by the writer of this letter).
6. Plain, ordinary flying, bodily through space.

It seems to me that the Church would not approve of 1, 2, 3 and 5, which leaves the choice between 4 and 6, and it would be interesting to know which was the means employed; and even 4 might not be approved because of the association with scientists.

I do not think you were correct in stating that Our Lady was the pioneer in space travel, for surely this honour belongs to Elijah, the Holy Prophet; this will become quite apparent if reference is made to the Bible: 11 Kings, ch. 2, verse 11, where it is clearly recorded that Elijah went bodily to Heaven in some early type of flying saucer—a Mark 1, no doubt—in the year 896 B.C., so that he must be nearly 1,000 years older than Our Lady. It seems from all this that the only two people bodily alive in Heaven are of the Hebrew race, and they must now easily hold the record for longevity—Methuselah was a poor third.

Our Lady appears to have made the journey quite frequently, as she often returns to earth to visit such places as Walsingham, Fatima and Lourdes.—Yours, etc.,

“MOONSHINE.”

[Elijah had mechanical assistance.—EDITOR.]

### AN EXPLANATION

SIR,—I should like to explain to your readers that my letter in the issue of November 6 was not intended for publication. It was, in fact, addressed to the Secretary of the N.S.S. and was a personal report of my actions on behalf of that body.

A fair report to *The Freethinker* would have given more space to the other speakers, Mr. Bonner and the Rev. Holt, and had I thought of publication that would have been done.

Mr. Morris informed me that he had passed the letter on to you, but I wish that it had been edited before it appeared in print.—Yours, etc.,

C. McCALL.

[We are sure that our readers will agree that Mr. McCall is much too modest, and that he gave an excellent report of the Manchester meeting. As the representative of the N.S.S. he naturally stressed his, and its, contribution.—EDITOR.]

### RELIGION AND TRUTH

SIR,—Parson Paris says we Freethinkers have no regard for objective truth—the whole handful of us. For a flat-earthite—as per bible—that's not bad. The religionist has no regard for any sort of truth but his own inherited delusions. Thus, the mistakes of the past are never corrected and the holy ones live in a mental vacuum. Objective truth, indeed! Pipe dreams—that's religion. Sheer blind clinging to ancient habit, is what it all boils down to, and the appeal is to fear and ignorance. One thing the “true believer” certainly does lack is a sense of reality.—Yours, etc.,

J. F. K.

### THE MENACE OF TOLERANCE

SIR,—Whilst intolerance has two sides, the wicked and the good, tolerance has only one side, and is entirely negative.

Tolerance is, and has always been, the doctrine of slaves. Tolerance means stagnation. If the tolerant had always had their way there would be no progress, and we would still be living in caves and burning rush lights.

It was the apathy and stupidity of the tolerant that placed Hitler in power and brought death to thirty million people. The intolerant powers of the wicked side have always expressed great love for the tolerant, for the more tolerant a people the easier it is to delude them.

In religion, which is the best paying racket of all, it is the tolerance of the masses that still makes millions of Roman

Catholics and the American and Russian fancy religions believe that a God in 4,004 B.C. made out of nothing this little earth in six days; but by only saying: “Let there be light,” the sun, a million times bigger than the earth, came into being. All atheists are intolerant of such nonsense, and irrespective of a few rationalists who ask us to be tolerant and go a little way with them, will fight against this lunacy with all their might.

Unlike the wicked intolerants, we do not want to torture the believers—we only want them brainwashed.

The atheist must have a Gilbert Harding sort of attitude and care not a damn about annoying them as a short term policy, for he knows that in the long term he will do them no harm—by giving them a jerk it finally does them good.

It was the good side of intolerance that gave birth to such great characters as Thomas Paine, Ingersoll, Bradlaugh, Foote, Cohen, and others who had the courage with their good “intolerance of superstition” in exposing the wicked intolerance of religion, and brought into being the Secular Movement; but they had to fight the stupid tolerance of the multitude.

This tolerance by the multitude delayed the French and British revolutions and the abolition of the divine right of kings for centuries.

It was the intolerance of a few Freethinkers at the horrible conditions of the masses that gave birth to Trades Unions, the Co-op. Movement, the Temperance Movement, etc., etc.; but unfortunately, through the apathy of the tolerant, these movements have now been captured by the wicked intolerants who are now using them as covers for their villainy.

Finally, we atheist intolerants must always fight against intolerable conditions, whether they be religious or secular, and whilst the wicked intolerants teach, what they say is by order of Lord God Almighty, that “the poor must always be contented in whatever station of life it has pleased Him to place them,” we must inform the poor, ignorant, tolerant multitude that this God never said such a thing, and that good houses on earth are much more important than a reward for tolerance of a mansion in the sky.—Yours, etc.,

PAUL VARNEY.

### TRUE DEMOCRACY?

SIR,—It was with obviously unconscious irony that the dogmatic W. H. Wood reappeared in your pages with an article entitled “Rationalism and Tolerance.” On seeing it I took a deep breath and tried to believe philosophically that such things are sent to try even rationalists, and I hoped that the comparative lack of the italics Mr. Wood formerly liked so much was evidence that he had placed a welcome curb on his somewhat over-bearing exuberance.

My resolve to grin and bear it was premature. His latest letter, bristling with thumping superficialities, is only too typical of one who, calling himself a rationalist, shows no sign that he has a rational approach to political matters. I am not concerned to defend the views of Mr. Warhurst or his oddities about tidal waves induced by atomic explosions, but in fairness to him he did not say that the British Empire contained slave camps, as implied by the customary bombast by Mr. Wood. Mr. Warhurst called the British Empire a huge slave camp, which seems to me to be an over-simplification designed for effect. However, one can elaborate by pointing out that the present world alignment is suggestive of a slave organisation in which over three-fifths of the inhabitants have constant experience of starvation and mass suffering as part of a system under which some of the other two-fifths live in comfort. No true rationalist would be so foolish as to say that this is the deliberate design of evil men; but I hope it rational to conclude that it is the inevitable result of a world economic system that does not produce for use, but for private gain. The privations of the majority of mankind will never be ended under existing economic relationships, which are also the root causes of war.

One does not expect Mr. Wood to have much sympathy with this argument. His exhortation to Mr. Warhurst to go and live in Russia, and his ridiculous assertion that one “ism” is much better than any other “ism”, are on the lowest level of political illiteracy.

As for his cliché about his belief in true democracy “if there is such a thing”, my interest in reading what he means by it is sufficient to overcome temporarily my distaste for his style of writing. I therefore look with gloomy anticipation for an article by Mr. Wood about true democracy; I am sure it will be remarkable.—Yours, etc.,

J. W. B.

MORTGAGES: Larger mortgages arranged, existing ones paid off; also second mortgages on houses, shops, flats, businesses, cinemas, factories, hotels, farms, etc.—Ashley's (Dept. A 53), 67, Cambridge Road, London, N.W. 6.