

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE criticism, scientific, historical, and literary, of the doctrines of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, has now proceeded uninterrupted for about two centuries, ever since the time of Voltaire and of the great *Encyclopædia*. During this period the right to criticise has been conceded in all lands in the western world, with merely temporary interruptions in a few backward lands such as, for example, present-day Spain, Portugal, and Eire. On the whole, this great critical movement has been astonishingly successful. This is indicated not only by the now substantial and growing minorities who avowedly repudiate any connection with organised religion in every civilised land but, perhaps even more significantly, by what we may, perhaps, term the progressive evaporation of Dogma *within* the churches themselves.

The Decay of Dogma

In this last respect there has been a revolution or, from the point of view of the churches, a landslide. It was less than a century ago when, in the University pulpit of Oxford, the most famous University in Britain, one of the leading churchmen of that day, Dean Burgon, could publicly declare that every *syllable* of the Bible was the "unerring and infallible Word of God"; and when the most brilliant English political figure of the day, Disraeli, could state, also publicly, that, in the current controversy about evolution, he was "on the side of the angels" against the apes when it came to tracing mankind's terrestrial or celestial ancestry. (The ineffable Dean Burgon, a little later, actually went a stage further with the historic adjuration: "Leave me my ancestors in paradise, and I will gladly leave you yours in the Zoological Gardens"!.) No leading political nor even ecclesiastical figure dare talk in such a strain to-day. The effects of the modern intellectual revolution have been nearly as profound *inside* the churches as outside them. Christian dogma is, to-day, in full decay. The only places where the old verities are still preached with the same blind unquestioning Faith are in semi-illiterate sects on the fringe of Christianity; sects, the mentality of whom is too low even to understand the new position created by modern criticism, and who only live in name in the *modern* world.

Rationalism and Religion in 1954

One can say, accordingly, that on the intellectual plane, the modern movement of what we may broadly describe as "Rationalism", has achieved an almost complete victory. Its successive landmarks, Copernican astronomy, Darwinian (evolutionary) biology, even to a considerable and increasing extent, the assured results of modern Biblical criticism are either accepted or, at least, are not seriously combatted by educated Christians. It is only amongst the most illiterate of the Christian rank-and-file believers that the old beliefs in the verbally-inspired Bible

and in a Jesus who ascended bodily to a physical heaven, not to mention belief in what we may term the comic-opera miracles, in talking donkeys and in prophet-swallowing whales, is still held with the old unquestioning faith. It usually happens, in religion as elsewhere, that the beliefs of the uneducated majority gradually conform with those of the educated minority. If that be, indeed, so, then one may assume that the final evaporation of these old beliefs is only a matter of time. However, this is not to say that, in 1954, Christianity itself is on the way out; for the Christian Churches represent not only, nor even primarily, a system of dogma, so much, particularly nowa-days, as a social and political power.

Christianity in the Modern World

Despite the undeniable contemporary decline of Dogma and the virtual disappearance of so many beliefs once held as an indubitable part of "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints," it is obvious that Christianity is still a powerful force in the modern world. Whilst its intellectual influence has declined, its political and social influence is, in some respects, greater to-day in 1954 than at any time since the Middle Ages. It would seem that, whilst the intellectual assault of Rationalism on the citadels of Christianity has effected irreparable damage, its concurrent attack on the political and social power of the churches has been much less successful. In the now two-century old assault on Christian Theology, the Freethought Movement has made such headway that all that really remains to be done is to keep on driving home the implications of the positions already admitted. In the social and political fields occupied by organised religion, the current position is, however, much less satisfactory.

The Churches in Current Society

If one surveys the official relationships still existing between civil society in contemporary Britain with the organised Christian Churches, it is clear that this still current position bears very little relationship with the actual state of current religious belief. Whilst only a diminishing minority of the present British population either attend a recognised place of Christian worship or manifest any serious belief in the doctrines of the Christian Churches, the official relationships still existing between Church and State remain substantially unaltered since the Middle Ages. We still have in both England and Scotland a State-Church, whilst the Sovereign must make an official profession of Christianity in the dogmatic formulae prescribed, respectively, by the Anglican "Thirty-nine Articles" and by the Presbyterian "Westminster Confession." As, automatically, State officials, the majority of the Bishops sit, ex-officio, as legislators in the House of Lords, where they can pursue undisturbed their boycott of all legislation likely to affect the spiritual and still more the temporal fortunes

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Critique of Religion

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

of Christianity. Moreover, this official recognition is backed effectively by other unofficial but, perhaps, more damaging forms of Christian "action" in contemporary society. The most obvious and, perhaps, the most practically damaging of such forms of Christian pressure is represented by the virtual religious monopoly of the B.B.C., which substitutes, in effect, a radio clerical censorship for the now extinct mediaeval clerical censorship of literature. In addition, we have such current phenomena as the still powerful Christian influence on the Law; the Divorce Laws represent an obvious example. Whilst the officially unofficial political pressure of the Catholic Church on behalf of its schemes of sectarian education, represent one of the most sinister forces operating in our contemporary society.

Secularism, Destructive and Constructive

As we remarked above and as is, we submit, obvious to any observer of current affairs, the *practical* influence of organised Christianity remains far greater than is now its intellectual influence as indicated by the present acceptance of its now visibly decomposing theological system. Does not this appear to call for a new orientation of the present and future secularist attack? The attack on dogma will, of course, continue as long, that is, as there are any dogmas still vital enough to attack. But the importance of this attack will, of necessity, diminish along with the acceptance of the discredited beliefs against which it is directed and which it has already so effectively undermined. What,

to-day, appears to be more urgent is an increased concentration on the *practical* influence of organised Christianity, on, for example, the absurd anomaly of the mediaeval establishment, with State-assured privileges, of the Church of a shrinking minority; on the clerical stranglehold on the B.B.C.; on the primitive anthropological conceptions, bound up, ultimately with religious magic, which underlie so much of our still largely mediaeval legal system; on the sinister intrigues of religious "pressure-groups" in the political field. Such a line of attack appears to the present writer to be both more immediately necessary and as likely to pay bigger dividends than an exclusive attack on dogmas which, in scriptural phraseology, have already been "weighed in the balances and found wanting" in the current estimation of the modern world.

Evolution and Secularism

Evolution exists and is universal: it applies—even to evolutionists! The historic era of the assault, primarily on religious dogma, which began (in England) with *The Age of Reason*, has now largely succeeded; in the sphere, at least, of Christian Theology, "The Age of Reason" has largely arrived! The most daring speculations of "Tom" Paine can now be found in books signed by Bishops! The mediaeval stranglehold of the Christian Churches on Society, however, still remains, modified but substantially unaltered. The coming era will, we hope, see the end of "Christian civilisation" and of the Christian State, along with religious dogmas.

A Note on St. Peter and Rome

(from the French of G. Ory in the Bulletin of the Cercle Ernest Renan of Paris)

THE dominating personage of early Christian Rome to whom was dedicated all the early baptisteries and most of the early churches in the Eternal City was not Peter, but John, and not the Apostle but John the Baptist.

The first cathedral was that of St. John Lateran, and the Popes had their residence adjoining until after the fire of 1308. It was not until the return from Avignon in 1377 that Gregory 11th settled at the Vatican.

The interest in the Apostle Peter and his remains is a relatively late development. It required thirteen centuries for the legend of a connection between Rome and Peter to become generally received. This ignorance of so important a matter as the founder of their Church on the part of the Early Roman Christians raises some doubts in the mind of a sceptic to-day. Is the Vatican basilica really built on the spot where Peter was buried?

The recent excavations have shed little light on the enigma. The learned and detailed study by Paul Lemerle which appeared in the *Revue Historique* of November, 1952, is convincing to the unbiased reader and refutes in advance the very tendentious arguments since put forward by Jerome Carcopino who could have made a better use of his vast erudition.

Let us note that the Vatican cathedral was built on the site of a pagan cemetery which was not earlier than the second century and which ceased to be used shortly after the fourth. In this cemetery there are few traces of Christian burial and these are late. If this had really been the site of Peter's tomb one would have expected the contrary. Among the graffiti, later than the burial place itself there is not a single mention of the Apostle. When Justinian in the VI century asked for some relic of Peter, he was informed that the tomb was inaccessible. The Book of Miracles by Gregory of Tours (end of the VI century) confirms that the tomb of the Founder of the Church was invisible and inaccessible.

The legend that Peter was interred in the Vatican, originating perhaps in the second century, became current in the sixth, but the site of his tomb was unknown. In the Middle Ages there existed near the first church of St. Peter only one house which dated from the time of Pope Symmachus of unsavoury memory (498-514). This indifference appears extraordinary especially if compared with the crowds who to-day come in pilgrimage to Rome.

Perhaps the truth is quite different. Worship was given to the saints Peter and Paul jointly at the place called "ad catacumba" where now stands the church of St. Sebastian. It was Pope Sylvester who placed the remains of Peter in the vicinity of the Vatican circus and those of Paul near the road to Ostia, the legendary sites of their martyrdoms. This was about 336 A.D., and two basilicas were erected, one on each of the spots, but the authenticity of the relics is by no means assured (Guignebert, *Le sepulchre de St. Pierre, Revue Historique*, 1931).

It is possible then that the Vatican church was built to receive the remains of Peter transferred from the catacombs. Why at the Vatican? Was it to replace some ancient and adored trophy? Was it perhaps to mark a victory over Mithraism, which had been formerly centred at the Vatican?

Mithra, mark you, was born of a stone, and surnamed Petros long before the story was told of Simon called Peter on which rock the church was to be built. Is Peter then the successor of Mithra? It would not be astonishing, particularly when one considers that the two superimposed churches of St. Clement at Rome are erected on the top of a Mithraeum.

English by C.B.B.

ROBERT TAYLOR. The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844). By H. Cutner. A detailed account of a remarkable Free-thinker and his work. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

The New Spanish Concordat and the Children's Education in Spain

By HISPANICUS

TO speak on Spanish education can appear to-day a childlike matter. But the new Concordat is not childlike matter, and freethinkers all over the world must reflect seriously on the human type which teachers of Franco are educating under the Church's pressure. The question is so as they are when the Hans' book, *Comparative Education*, was published, at the year of 1949. We can read at the page 111:—

"The Catholic Church and the Jesuits openly sided with the Franco régime. Spain is the only country in Europe where the Catholic Church is in open alliance with a Fascist régime. Educational progress cannot take place in such conditions, and Spain is destined to remain a backward country until the next change of régime."

The Spanish law on children's education dated from 1945. The 5th article of this law orders:—

"The primary education, inspired on the Catholic sense, consubstantial with the Spanish scholar tradition, will be adjusted to the principles of the Catholic dogma and moral according to the articles of the Canonic law."

What news are in the Concordat?

Pius XII, as the world knows, delayed the signature of this Concordat during fourteen years. Pius XII, it is very well proved, has been a good diplomat in Spain's case. And on August 27, 1953, crowned his work of the greatest bungler of our century. And we say that Pius XII is a bungler because he has signed a Concordat with the most rabid enemy of mankind, with the general heir of Hitler and Mussolini, the two monsters of our generation. Peoples all over the world have a living memory of the great tragedy finished with Vatican's backing and blessings. And who ignores the Vatican's intrigues must read Manhattan's books. And whoever believes Manhattan's books are originated by the author's bias, then there is Spain, my loved country tyrannised by a régime at whose head is the most beloved son of Pius XII, that is to say a paradigm of Catholic State. They can come in. But to come for the truth.

What are the educational questions in the primary school?

To the educational problem the new Concordat dedicates the following articles: XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV. That is to say, one-third of the Concordat is consecrated to education. The Catholic Church knows perfectly that modern culture is her death. Like a cockroach, the Vatican's sons disappear when the light arrives. And this is the reason: because the Vatican directs his most sure shots toward the Ministry of Education when it wishes to subjugate a country. The Church of Christ and Franco have fallen on, as hungry wolves and thirsty vultures, body and entrails of my loved Spain, tied from head to foot. Thus my martyred home, they think, educated into mediæval utter darkness of hell, will not break the chains of its slavery.

The co-operation between Church and school, between teacher and priest, commanded by the article 57 of the law, is practically the total subordination of the teacher to the priest. And the Spanish teacher trembles before the priest, because he knows that if the priest knits his eyebrows, the price of lentils can go very high—the death by hunger for him and for his family.

All Spanish teachers who would work at the school must obtain a certificate of the priest. As we know, the priest of

the Catholic Church only knows as good the sons of Church. Then, if a teacher goes not to the Church; if a teacher is agnostic, freethinker, he cannot be teacher.

All Spanish teaching institutions teach to-day according to the most monstrous dogmas. A mediæval dogma to the service of the most hateful totalitarian State.

Frequently, the Vatican's papers write on religious persecution behind "iron curtain." Recently, the bishops of England have published a report on this matter, with a list of four bishops and 886 priests "murdered" by the Communists. But we never have read or heard nothing from these bishops about Catholic persecution in Spain.

If the Vatican has worked behind the "iron curtain" as it works to-day in my loved Spain, then how wonderful is it that "the Communists" permit yet 1,405 priests in Roumania, e.g., the greatest enemy of progress, the rabid enemy of people is the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is always against the true education, against the truth, against real science, against justice—against the freethinker. And without freethinking no progress is possible. If a people will progress, if the men of a country will advance in the road of civilisation in order to state a society of brotherhood, the first step will be the total extinction of this cancer of mankind which is the Vatican. The question has no other solution. The English freethinkers give us the true way toward the people's salvation.

We Spaniards who know the Vatican's tyranny can affirm that proletarian dictatorship is a children's play, a heavenly blessing, if we confront this dictatorship with the Vatican's hellish dictatorship. Readers of this paper who distrust our assertions have before them this way: to visit the peoples' democracy and to visit Franco Spain. People's democracies contend against the Catholic Church, and this contention is the most demonstrative example of its true democratic spirit.

Peoples democracies close the "schools" of the Church. Who knows how works a *catholic school*, how the *catholic teacher* poisons every day the children's souls, cannot wonder at pedagogical policy of governments behind the "iron curtain." Thus, the fruits which the Vatican collects now behind "iron curtain" are the same fruit which his most loved son will collect tomorrow, when the Spanish people break the chains of the present tyranny.

And then, broken the chains, Spaniards will know, as in other historical days, to judge inexorably all souls who, by fear, by cowardice, by ignorance, by weakness, by commodity, treasoning the voice of the collective conscience, permitted the approbation and practice of this new Concordat in the school, in the education of the present generation, without to talking loud and haughtily of protestation.

Writing these lines we invoke freethinkers all over the world to fight against Franco's totalitarian State, the most dangerous régime in the West, which is educating the new generation according to Vatican's dictates: for the new war in which Pius XII has placed all his hopes of universal domination.

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1953

Volume 73

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This Believing World

The **Houdini** film which is now being shown has deliberately softened down the intense opposition to Spiritualism the great illusionist felt for many years before the "accident" which killed him—much to the delight of Spiritualists. A bigger opponent of Spiritualist claims never lived—and while he lived, he was hated and feared by the fraternity. Now, our spiritualist journals are doing their best to claim that all he was against was the "fraudulent" medium, and that really, in his heart of hearts, he was—well, if not quite a believer, almost one. This claim is an unmitigated lie as any reader of his book *A Magician Among the Spirits* can find out for himself.

Houdini left some message which, if Spiritualism were true, he intended to send his wife again after his death and, of course, the message came through—according to all Spiritualists. The truth is that some medium got hold of the message from Mrs. Houdini when she was ill and he triumphantly produced it when she was well. It is as big a piece of humbug as is the story of the R 101 disaster being fully told through a medium by its dead commander.

Already Bernard Shaw has "returned" to various medium, but the funniest account is that by Hannen Swaffer who had to postpone the spirit visit until he (Mr. Swaffer) had time to receive it (or him). As soon as he had time to sit, Shaw immediately came through—not quite directly but through a Guards officer. One could never expect Shaw to come through anybody less aristocratic—a dustman for instance, especially as Shaw was so highly democratic. In Summerland, Shaw appears to be very friendly with Ellen Terry, and as the dramatist was over ninety when he passed over, he must naturally appeal to the great actress as a most glamorous spark. And in addition, he is having plenty of "pow-pows" with G. K. Chesterton. Are there really people who believe this hopeless balderdash?

Although miracles are quite impossible in real life—except in the Church of Rome which can produce them to order at any time—they can always be performed on the cinema screen. In "The Robe," Peter is pictured healing the dying quite as effectively as Mr. Harry Edwards, though his cures are not quite as numerous. No doubt there will be a film made one day of Mr. Edwards and his spirit guides and miracle cures galore which will make the cures performed by Jesus and Peter very small fry. It would be safe to say that a film like "The Robe" will be believed by most Christians as literally true—or, at least, that such incidents did really happen. It will be seen by millions of people and we may well ask—what can we, the sworn foes of superstition, do about it? Is not the call for more aggressive Freethought stronger than ever?

How much freedom there is in Roman Catholic circles can be seen in the Province of Quebec where the film of Martin Luther is completely banned by the Board of Censors. Did anybody expect anything else? And we wonder what would happen to a cinema proprietor if he showed the film? Would there be an auto da fe? Would he have his cinema burnt down by an infuriated gang of Catholic roughs? Or what? How much longer will these people and their impudent religious intolerance be tolerated?

While we do not believe that the old-fashioned "Bible-banging" of 100 years ago is now effective, what are we to say to such pamphlets as that produced by the British Council of Churches entitled *God's Word Our Guide* with

the slogan "The Bible speaks for itself?" It contains 20 services, specially got up for schools, based on the Bible, with headings, God's Approach to Man, Man's Response to God, The Good News—the Saviour of the World, and the Hope of Glory. This is the kind of thing which is designed to do its utmost to bring all children to Christ. And we wonder what Rationalists, who so strongly are opposed to "aggressiveness" in Freethought, now say?

In addition to this, courses on "Religion and Philosophy" are again forced on to school children by the B.B.C.—the first lecture being by Mr. E. F. Caidin who lectures on *chemistry* in Leeds. He has a very simple way of proving that there is literally no conflict between religion and science—it is that in science there are "laws," and therefore there must be a "law giver," and that law giver must be God. Who else, he blandly asks, could give the laws which govern our solar system but God? And this infantile nonsense is broadcast to children!

Great Unbelievers

A correspondent wants us to name a number of "unbelievers" who have "done more for humanity than Christians." This is, in a sense, hardly a fair question, for Christians have taken good care to murder, torture, imprison, or boycott all unbelievers for over 1500 years. They have forced people to "believe" or die at the point of the sword, or submit to heavy punishment. They have destroyed as many anti-Christian works as they could for centuries, and have passed ferocious "blasphemy" laws. It was not easy for an unbeliever to declare his "unbelief" in a Christian society. So that it is not surprising to find no big names for many centuries.

But in spite of that, a full list would be a most astonishing one, and we give here just a few outstanding people as they occur to us asking our correspondent to note that they were **not Christians**: Shakespeare, Shelley, Byron, Beethoven, Wagner, Chopin, Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Herbert Spencer, Hume, Voltaire, Diderot, Zola, Walter Crane, William Morris, George Eliot, Lincoln, Washington, Goethe, Heine, Henri Dunant (founder of the Red Cross) and Mirabeau. There are hundreds more, but these will do to go on with.

Theatre

Crime and Punishment at the Arts Theatre is an adaptation by Gaston Baty of Dostoevsky's great novel. It is impossible to condense a work of such magnitude into the length of a play, but judged purely as a dramatic piece of work it has been well done.

Kenneth Griffith makes a great character-study of the student Raskolnikoff, who—with a philosophy akin to the Jesuits—toys with the belief that by right of superior birth and intellect there are people who should stop at nothing to achieve their ends. So he kills an old woman pawnbroker and is then so engrossed with the nature of his crime that he overlooks the main spoils and escapes with a few jewels. Although he has been cunning enough to hide his traces, it is his conscience that betrays him into confessing. This last short scene is a masterpiece of crowd grouping: it is the crowning scene of John Fernald's very fine production.

Harold Kasket as Samiotoff proves himself to be a noteworthy actor, and there were many cameo performances by a large cast which helped to bring realism to the play.

RAYMOND DOUGLAS.

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

A. R. WILLIAMS.—Thank you for your contribution, which we hope to use shortly.

W. E. THORNE.—You will find the current situation regarding tithes in the article on "Tithes" in the current (1950) edition of *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, which should be in any local library.

A. YATES.—Thank you for your article, which we hope to use shortly.

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.

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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.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Bomb Site).—Every weekday, 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: F. A. RIDLEY.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, February 7, 6-45 p.m.: E. D. McDOWELL, "Thoughts on Education."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 9, 7 p.m.: T. B. BOTTOMORE, "The Idea of Progress."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 7, 6-30 p.m.: E. TAYLOR, "The Coming of Iron."

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (Cross Street Chapel).—Saturday, February 6, 3 p.m.: Alderman W. BROTHERTON, J.P., "A Humanist Religion."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, February 7, 2-30 p.m.: S. FLETCHER, "The Bruderhofs Community's Challenge to a Modern World."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Sunday, February 7, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The Pageant of Civilisations."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road).—Sunday, February 7, 7-15 p.m.: TOM MOSLEY, "The Ancient Christ and the Modern Jesus."

NOTES AND NEWS

If we are to judge by the amount of subsequent correspondence that arose out of the article, our recent editorial, *The Tower of Babel*, received more attention than any other article recently published in this journal. We have been positively inundated with letters, not all of which we were able to publish, asserting the pros and cons for and against our suggested candidates for the future rôle of a universal language: English or Esperanto? Nor, certainly, do we think that this problem, whilst not directly concerned with religion, is out of place in the columns of *The Freethinker*. Certainly, it is scarcely doubtful that the universal adoption of an auxiliary language would solve or, at least, assist in solving many of the current problems of mankind. To a Secularist philosophy of life, and to a Humanist culture, the adoption of such a cosmopolitan language would, in our submission, represent sheer gains. Language barriers, like religious myths, belong to the childhood of our race!

Interest in the question of an universal language is not, however, confined to this side of the Channel. In a most interesting article in the well-known French Syndicalist paper, *La Revolution Proletarienne*, the distinguished French social historian, Monsieur Robert Louzan, deals at length with this question. He argues powerfully in favour of *English* as the coming universal language. In support of which contention, M. Louzan uses arguments which, if used by an Englishman, might well appear to savour of chauvinism! He argues the superiority of English as the most fitting medium for the universal language of the future, both on account of the political and economic pre-eminence of the Anglo-American powers in the present-day world—evidently our French author does not regard "American" as a separate language!—as, also, on account of certain advantages of a linguistic nature, which the learned Frenchman describes in detail. Our Anglo-Israelite friends will, no doubt, argue that the inherent superiority of English affords yet a further proof of the descent of the Anglo-Saxons from the lost ten tribes! However, the word now lies with the Esperantists—or, perhaps, the Chinese? As M. Louzan points out, the fact that the Republic of India has now voluntarily adopted *English* as one of its two official languages makes English a prominent Asiatic, as well as European, American and African language!

Talking about India, we have just learnt with much regret of the death of the famous Indian social historian, rationalist philosopher and former revolutionary leader, M. N. Roy. In an obituary notice our contemporary, *The Manchester Guardian* (27.1.54), describes Mr. Roy's stormy career as, successively, nationalist politician, one of the founders of the Communist International—which he represented in China in the early days of the Chinese Revolution—and, in his later years, as one of India's leading rationalist philosophers and cultural pioneers. In this last capacity, Mr. Roy was a vice-president of the Indian Rationalist Association, and we had the honour of republishing in *The Freethinker* his brilliant address to the Indian Rationalist Convention. Mr. Roy was the author of many books on philosophy, sociology and political history. He was, perhaps, the best-known Indian intellectual to pioneer the philosophy of Rationalism in the sub-continent. We convey to our Indian comrades our deepest regrets and sympathy at the sad loss of this brilliant pioneer.

Square Pegs

The moon has a baleful eye, so wise men say:
In London Town we drank the moon away,
And heeded not her pale and mournful eye,
But drank our fill and let the night go by.

Hard by a glittering star where night woos long
The slattern sky, the wine was red and strong
And parched our gullets with a loud desire
To drink again, to drink and quench the fire.

Beds to the women and men who lightly pass
Free of the pitfalls hidden in rich grass:
We are the men who ponder and are lost.
Upturn the glass! we drink at any cost.

The moon has a baleful eye, so they have said,
Wise of their years and sober of the head.
Drink to the moon! She smiles, and so do we.
She is apart, but unafraid. We but hope to be.

JOHN O'HARE.

More Light on Jesus—2

By H. CUTNER

THE real difficulty in dealing with such a book as Mr. Ahmad's *Jesus in Heaven on Earth* is that, to be quite fair, one would want a similar volume of 500 pages in which to examine the many statements made by the distinguished author. How very difficult it would be to check every one of his statements and quotations. I note in passing, for example, in another book on the same subject—*Where Did Jesus Die?* by J. D. Shams—the "Foreword" by Dr. Dudley Wright, and his statement that the "inquiry is generally shirked" as to who saw the Ascension of Jesus; and Dr. Wright says it was shirked among others by W. R. Cassels. Anyone who has *Supernatural Religion* can test this silly statement for himself—for, of course, Cassels did not shirk it.

In any case, Mr. Ahmad deals so fully with so many subjects that I must confess it is difficult to know where to begin.

He devotes many pages to the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, and does his best to show that our modern Afghans and the inhabitants of Kashmir are their descendants. But it seems to me that his first duty was to prove to his readers that there really were these Ten Lost Tribes. For this, he should have shown us that there was an Abraham as described in Genesis, that he had a son called Isaac, and a grandson called Jacob and Israel, who had twelve (or thirteen) sons. If he believes in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as historical personages, that is his own affair, and the Christians for whom he has no doubt written his book. But I hope he will not complain if I say that these three patriarchs are absolutely *mythical*, and had no more a real existence than Aladdin or Sinbad. I advise him to study the 49th chapter of Genesis where Jacob is shown blessing his sons—and describing them as the Signs of the Zodiac. Reuben was as "unstable as water"—that is Aquarius. Simeon and Levi "are brothers" that is the two fishes—Pisces. "Judah is a lion's whelp"—that is Leo. "Issacher is a strong ass"—that is Cancer. "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path." That is Scorpius. And so on. The whole of this chapter is full of astronomical or astrological allusions, and how anyone can believe it was "history" passes my comprehension.

The Ten Tribes were necessary for the ten Sons of Israel but they soon get lost. But for Mr. Ahmad, every narrative in the Bible is as true or almost as true as the Qur'an—and they are *always* true if they are referred to in the Qur'an. Against such faith and trust the ordinary rules of logic are helpless.

All we can say is that some time at the period ascribed to David (who is quite mythical) there emerged two small tribes one calling itself Israel and the other Judah (or some such names). I think it would be truer to say that these names were *given* them later by whoever wrote Ezra. In any case, the captives who came back to Palestine after Cyrus had freed them about 536 B.C. belonged, according to Ezra, to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and not at all to Israel. And for those who believe the Bible, the Ten Tribes were thus for ever lost. Mr. Ahmad, however, finds them in Afghanistan and Kashmir because, and he produces many witnesses and authorities, the people in these two countries look like Jews!

The real truth is that they look like themselves, and it is impossible to say what a conglomeration of the different peoples who comprise the Jews really look like. In general, "you can always tell a Jew" simply means that you can always tell a foreigner. The European Jew is a white man, and if he has a few Oriental characteristics, it is because there is in him some mixture of the Arab, or whoever was

"originally" called a Judahite or a Hebrew. Most of these were wiped out in the three wars waged by the Romans against Palestine. The survivors made proselytes among white peoples. No doubt, also, some of the inhabitants of Palestine were white—possibly they were the Hittites. No one knows for certain.

But just as Mr. Ahmad, with a sheaf of authorities, is certain that the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes are now inhabiting Afghanistan and Kashmir, the people who are propagating the British-Israel theory are certain that it is the British people who are the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes. And the most amusing thing about what they say is that their descendants do *not* look like Jews. They claim either that they were all white—they prove this by saying that David's face was "ruddy," or that in the journeys undertaken by the Tribes to the Elbe where they eventually settled, they *became* white. There they were known as Saxons, that is, Isaac's sons, abbreviated to Saxons, and that ought to be good enough proof for anybody. What is not clear even from the overwhelming proofs provided by our British Israelites is why the Judahites from whom our modern Jews (they say) are descended should have been as brown as Arabs, while their cousins, the other members of the family of Jacob, should be as white as the Swedes.

Now who is right? Is Mr. Ahmad who says we must go to Afghanistan and Kashmir for the true "Israelites" because they look like Jews—and he can only mean white Jews—or the British Israelites who claim they are the true Israelites spoken of in the Old Testament (as distinct from the Jews who come from Judah) and who, of course, do not look like Jews; or Freethinkers, most of whom claim that the Biblical Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are mythical, and that, therefore, there never were any Ten Lost Tribes, no matter who inhabited Palestine when history first took any notice of it? I submit that Mr. Ahmad's authorities are not worth a tinker's farthing for all or most of them looked upon the "Sacred Narrative" as genuine history and it is nothing of the kind. Not a scrap of evidence has been produced by any archaeological discoveries in Palestine that any of the Biblical narratives have any basis in fact except some of the stories of the "kings" of Israel and Judah. Not a line has been found relating either to David or Solomon—and, of course, nothing whatever about Jacob or any of his sons. We are always in fairy land.

That is one of the difficulties I have in dealing with Mr. Ahmad. Over and over again he goes to the Bible account to "prove" his case—as if the Bible was an authority. It is not any more than is the Qur'an. If it proves anything, it is that mankind as a whole is supremely superstitious, ready to believe anything until intellectually freed by science. The Roman Church was quite right in its opposition to science and to knowledge generally. What man who has imbibed modern learning can ever again grovel on a mat before Allah, or before a Cardinal, or deem it an honour to kiss the Pope's ring? Is there a more dreadful story of a great man than the one describing Newman grovelling before a Catholic priest? A man with Newman's intellect!

Let us be quite clear as to what I mean by what I have written. I do not say that it was impossible for some of the Palestinian tribes and in the surrounding countries at some period in history to have emigrated into what we now call Afghanistan and Kashmir. That is possible, and it may even be that some of them took some of the so-called Jewish beliefs with them and some of the words and names

(Continued on next page)

The Divine Interpretation of Scripture

"The Divine Interpretation of Scripture: A Reply to Cardinal Manning," by "Saladin." Being a Paper read at the Cassadaga Conference, New York, by S. P. Putnam, Secretary, American Liberal League.

(Continued from page 35)

In this state of affairs what did your Divine and Scripture interpreting Church do? What wine and oil and bread and consolation did it give to the scared and famished remnant plague and pestilence had left? Your holy Bernhardt of Thuringia turned to the twentieth chapter of Revelation and preached the immediate end of the world. As the clock struck midnight on December 31, 1000, the Devil would break his chains and, with blood and fire and misery, make a prelude to the Day of Judgment. The clergy of your Church took up the cry of Bernhardt. It was howled from every abbey; it was thundered from every cathedral; and frantic monks, with cope and stole and cord, appealed in town and village and hamlet to a still more frantic populace. Portent and miracle, wraith and apparition, dark shadows on earth and blood-red signs in heaven, bore evidence to the near advent of the Day of Doom. Europe was all but ruined; but what matter that?—your "divine Church" was enriched. Kings and nobles rushed to the sanctuary to endow it with lands and wealth which they had won by carnage and fire. With the sword they had gained place and power by doing the work of the Devil, and now they devoted all to the service of God, since they should have to part with everything, anyhow, by the time the clock struck twelve, ringing in the awful millennium and ushering in the end of the world. Kings and nobles, whose pastime was slaughter as regarded men and lust as regarded women, in spite of the dominance of the Church, grew suddenly penitent, and flung away the sword for the monk's shirt of hair. William of the Long Sword, Duke of Normandy, was fain to abandon his ducal rank and take shelter in the monkish cell. Hugh, Duke of Burgundy, was anxious to throw up all to find shelter in the monastery against the terrors of the Day of Doom; and Hugh, Count of Arles, was like minded. The Emperor, Henry II, crownless and unkinged, presented himself at the abbey gate of St. Vanne, howling piously from the psalms: "This shall be my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have a delight therein." Numbers of nobles left lands and castles and all to the Church and hastened to the Holy Land, barefooted, ragged, and penniless, in the cunningly Church-inspired hope that those who, at the crack of doom, were found in the sainted clime in which the Redeemer had died would have certain immunities from the horrors and terrors about to be wreaked upon the rest of the human race. Others stubbornly and desperately remained in the doomed castles and on their estates, left to barrenness and weeds, and did not impiously attempt to propitiate the vengeance of God. But the altars were loaded with, and the Church floors strewn with, legal instruments, venerable parchment, and dusty vellum, representing gifts to the Church of some of the noblest estates in Europe, and thousands upon thousands of serfs and vassals. The Church took them all, just as if the Day of Judgment had not been close at hand. The monks, Cardinal Manning, were themselves the conveyancers, and the deeds of conveyance began with the stereotyped words: "Seeing that the end of the world is now approaching, and that every day accumulates fresh miseries, I Baron ———, for the good of my soul, give to the monastery of ———," etc. The last day of the world was the harvest-day of the Church, and the twentieth chapter of Revelation was, for the time being, worth more

than all the remainder of the Book of God. And gloriously your Church interpreted it, my Lord Cardinal, in the interest of your order. The nobles you had under your thumb by this divine gift the Church has for putting the correct meaning upon Scripture texts; and, as for the common people, they forgot all the instincts of human nature in their abject terror. They wallowed in ignorance, filth, and vermin. An eclipse of the sun became visible to the Emperor Otho's army on their march. They at once recognised in it one of the apocalyptic "signs in the sun." They are paralysed with fear. They dropped their weapons, broke their ranks, and such of the screaming and disorganised rabble as terror did not render motionless fled to the mountains, literally calling on the rocks to hide them and the hills to fall upon them.

On dragged the awful weeks—coming nearer and still nearer to the instant when heaven and earth should pass away. At length, at the end of the most terrible December the world has ever seen, came the last week of the year 100 A.D. Then there was such agonising suspense, such paralysing fear, and such abandoned frenzy as never before or since have cursed such masses of the race of man. Your Church, my Lord Cardinal, had indeed vindicated its claim to be "the divine interpreter of Scripture." You took up the twentieth chapter of Revelation, and, by your interpretation thereof, exalted the hierarchy and well nigh ruined the world. During this terrible week the work of the world was utterly suspended. For the ring of the anvil there was the yell of the maniac; for the whirr of the shuttle there was the shriek of the madman. Drearly rose the sun, and drearily set in the last few days before his light was to be extinguished for ever. Men held their very breath in terror. Blanched white were the dark-brown locks that so lately shaded the smooth and open brow of youth. In the halls of luxury, where the arras was of the richest, where patines were of gold, and where the air was heavy with odours, now lay the dead and dying comingled, no sexton to bury and no thief to steal the vessels of gold, and where the air had been heavy with odours were now the filth of the living and the putrescence of the dead. Beauty was beautiful no longer, heroism was extinct, and valour was no more. The deer and the boar roamed in the greenwood unscathed. No household fires were lighted to shed a warmth through the wintery air. The wine cask was unbroached and meals were no longer prepared. Men, women, and children, of all ranks and classes, lay huddled together, clutching each other convulsively in imminent expectation of the crashing of chains that would herald the release of Satan and of the trumpet blast that would signal the end of the world. Love was banished, hate was forgotten, and terror was master of all.

(To be continued)

MORE LIGHT ON JESUS

(Continued from previous page)

found in the Old Testament. Why not? Emigration and immigration were constantly going on. What I insist upon here is that there never were Ten Lost Tribes, and therefore the Bible as such had no more to do with a personage called "Issa" who is supposed to be Jesus, than with red herrings. Who is "Issa"?

I will try to deal with him in later articles.

(To be continued)

Correspondence

A DISCLAIMER

SIR,—When, at the Social Evening organised by the Humanist Council, I heard from the platform the remark that the Secretary of the National Secular Society was reputed to have said, "Apart from the fact that Humanists do not believe in God, they are no different from Christians," I had difficulty in restraining myself from creating a disturbance. Of course, I have never said anything of the kind, and I claim your assistance in rebutting the suggestion that I have.

Possibly a critical reference by me to those Humanists who describe Humanism as "a new religion" has been exaggerated into the statement that I am alleged to have made. In fact, I am a whole-hearted supporter of the closest co-operation between the different sections of the Freethought movement.—Yours, etc.,

P. VICTOR MORRIS,
Secretary, N.S.S.

MR. HECTOR HAWTON

SIR,—Although I have great respect for Mr. Cutner's writings, I feel compelled to remark on his review of *The Rationalist Annual*, 1954, which reads very much like an attack on Mr. Hector Hawton.

Mr. Cutner deplors the shyness in attacking Christianity in the articles appearing in the *Annual*, and it is good to know that he draws attention to a point which will gladden the hearts of all Rationalists in knowing that the spirit is there. But the war against Christianity many years ago took a victorious turn, and it may not be many years before we strike the last blow.

What is not consistent is that Mr. Cutner takes exception to Mr. Hawton's article attacking war, remarking that his readers are as opposed to total war as he is himself. The war against war is far from being won, and should we be as near to lasting peace as we are to conquering Christianity we could relax with some satisfaction. Let us attack war relentlessly as we attack religion, and as we should attack all enemies of free thought. At the same time I think we should avoid being unsubtle in our writings, but attempt more to interest the reader in what we have to offer rather than in what we are out to destroy. People always cling to old ideas and will resist under compulsion.

Christianity, or any religion, is not the first and last enemy of the Secularist and Rationalist. Any subject of humanist, social and cultural value can be suitably approached if the author has the right type of mind. It is the thoughts and feelings behind his writings that will seep through and help to propagate the kind of outlook we wish people to acquire. So why not have articles on all subjects from religion to total war, from psychology to Einstein's relativity and from art to delinquency? We are not concerned with anything less than a totally free thinking world.—Yours, etc.,

R. DOUGLAS.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

SIR,—I have read with much interest the correspondence hereon which has recently appeared in *The Freethinker*, and what should be the attitude of Freethinkers when the National Anthem is played in public. Despite occasional indications in your columns as to the necessity, or desirability, of Kings and Queens, I am not prepared to discard the Monarchy as we find it in *England to-day* (and a "good" Monarchy is better than a "bad" Republic!), but as the whole tenor of the words used in the National Anthem is an appeal to the idea of the existence of God, I refuse to offer verbal supplications by joining in with the multitude, so (as a sign of formal allegiance) I merely rise to my feet—and remain mute!

I adopt a similar attitude when attending a funeral service to pay my last respects to a dear friend, and to show sympathy to those who have been bereaved, but never join in the singing of hymns, because—as an atheist, or even an agnostic—it would be sheer hypocrisy on my part. Neither do I attempt to join in the "mumbo jumbo" incidental to the prayers—which may, possibly, give some temporary comfort to my more orthodox friends—so to be consistent, and true to myself, I sit in the pew with a stiff back—and here again in the capacity of a mute! Incidentally, when I see some of my friends (and many who are not) bend their heads on taking their seats, it has often been a mystery to me as to the precise wording used when they are "communing" with this God of theirs. To me it seems just the survival of a habit forced upon them in childhood; a habit which they have never bothered to use their brains to challenge, or reason out for themselves; because to hold anything approaching unorthodox views on religion is fatal to people in business who have to depend on the "goodwill" of the Christian community—with all its uncharitableness and bigotry.—Yours, etc.,

G. H. HOLMES.

EVOLUTION AND MATERIALISM

SIR,—I read with interest Mr. Wood's letter on Evolution and particularly his remarks on Materialism. In my opinion he assumes too much when he suggests that Mind is the "purposeful design" of Evolution, thus making Man once again "Lord of Creation." As Man evolved from a lower type it is possible for a higher type to evolve from him. Conditions may favour a physical type who will argue that therefore strength is the "purposeful design" of Evolution.

If we grant that some Mind independent of physical structure did evolve Man, it has obviously evolved human personality in a close relation to physical structure, and has in fact so intimately interconnected men with their bodies that their existence without these bodies is inconceivable. Physical and Mental are interdependent and truly one, so that one is as important as the other and indeed one cannot exist without the other.

Of course a three-dimensional universe is false, as Einstein has shown. But no-one has so far proved that matter does not exist. If it is "composed of nothing more solid than radiations of energy"—to quote Mr. Wood—this surely defines it rather than proves its non-existence. If it can be destroyed this also proves its existence, as it surely must exist in order to be destroyed.

Mind and Matter must co-exist; they cannot be mutually exclusive without making the universe incomprehensible. To explain the universe in terms exclusively material is just as irrational as to explain it in terms exclusively mental.—Yours, etc.,

G. L. DICKINSON.

B.B.C. NONSENSE

SIR,—Listening to "Home for the Day" (Light Programme, Sunday) Wyn Griffith, rural (very rural) schoolmistress, described her village school. She said the curriculum was based on a firm basis of Christian teaching. She related a child's question: "You say Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, could a piece of it have been broken off and used in boiling potatoes?" The reply was: "Potatoes were not known at that time." She continued: "I don't know if I said the right thing!"

What can you expect of the rising generation from such dishonest teaching?—Yours, etc.,

J. R. DUNCANSON.

Obituary

FRED HAIGH

Bradford Branch announces with regret the passing of a valued member. Until the illness which ended his life in his late seventies Mr. Haigh took an active interest in our movement and was for some time a member of the branch committee.

He was a keen naturalist and had a wide knowledge of astronomy, subjects on which, in his quiet way, he was a competent lecturer.

The circumstances surrounding his illness and his death were such that it was not until after the funeral—a religious ceremony—that we were able to pay him our last respects. This we did in response to a finely worded tribute from his old friend, our branch treasurer, Mr. Searle.

W. B.

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on Saturday, 27th February, 1954

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