

The Freethinker

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Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

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THE science of comparative religion indicates that what theologians term "the religious sense," and what Rationalists might prefer to call "the myth-making faculty" in man has taken, historically, a great many forms. These various religions, all alike, claim superiority to all others and, usually, infallibility for their theological dogmas and ethical precepts. Amongst these religions, two stand out, historically, by virtue of their long duration and wide diffusion; also on account of the tenacious resistance which, even to-day, they offer to the spread of modern knowledge and of the scepticism which it engenders. These two creeds, both international and both claiming to be universal in character, are, respectively, Christianity and Islam.

Christ and Muhammed

Whilst these two dominant creeds are alike in certain of their tenets, they differed widely in the actual circumstances of their origin. The entry of Christianity into the world was, as we have often pointed out in this column, gradual, and the very reverse of spectacular. Its founder, or founders, are still largely unknown, and their existence, guaranteed at best by a doubtful ecclesiastical tradition, is unknown to secular history: even the historical existence of the alleged Founder is far from being certain, and much—perhaps most—of what is ascribed to him is certainly mythical, even if we concede him a shadowy existence. With the Founder of Islam, on the other hand, we are on firm historical ground. No one, as far as we know, has ever doubted the historical existence and the, at least, substantial accuracy of the biography of the Arabian prophet. It is true that contemporary history is as silent on Muhammed as on Christ. But the Arabic religion took on a *political* form soon after, if not actually in the lifetime of the prophet, and Arabic imperialism subjugated half the known world in the course of the first century of the new religion. Muhammed traditionally appealed to the sword to spread his gospel: whether that were so or not, it was the triumphant use of the sword by his immediate followers that guaranteed both his own historical existence and the startling success of his religion. Unlike its Christian rival, there was nothing obscure or gradual about the entry of Islam into the world: its entry was, contrarily, rapid and spectacular beyond that of all known religions.

The Bible and the Koran

In the precise language of Muslim theology itself, both Christianity and Islam are "religions of the Book." For both conceive unalterable truth to be contained in a special Divine Revelation contained between the covers of a single volume: in the case of the Christian Churches, of the Bible; in that of Islam, of the Koran. However, there, again, the resemblance ends. For the Bible, it cannot be repeated too often, is *not* a book: those, including misguided Freethinkers, who habitually call it one are

actually accepting *the* basic claim of Christianity! For the "Bible" is a collection of books, of uncertain date over about a millennium (c. 800 B.C.—A.D. 200), and of very unequal value. We repeat: it is not *a* book. Contrarily, this is, precisely, what the Muslim "Bible," the Koran, actually is: a single book, written at a definite date (A.D. 610-32, the period of Muhammed's prophetic career), and written either by Muhammed himself or, at least, by his followers under his inspiration. However, whilst the Holy Books of Islam and Christianity are in flat opposition, as far as their nature and authorship are concerned, both, in the opinion, alike, of their Christian and Muslim de-

votes, are supernaturally inspired as the direct and infallibly inspired "Word of God." In this last respect, indeed, Islam has gone further than any form of Christianity. For not only is the Koran verbally inspired, but even the *language* in which it was originally written is eternally sacrosanct and unchangeable. It is, to-day as in the past, the rigid dogma of orthodox ("Sunni") Islam that the Koran may only be read in the Arabic in which it was originally written or, according to Muslim theology, dictated by Allah (God) to the prophet. This goes beyond anything which even the most "Fundamentalist" Christian sects have ever claimed for the Bible!

[e.g., One of the heresies committed by the late Turkish dictator, Kemal Ataturk, was to order the Koran to be recited in *Turkish*.]

Judaism, Islam and Christianity

Both Christianity and Islam are theistic religions, which claim to be monotheistic. To the strict Muslim, however, the *unity* of God is the central and fundamental tenet of his faith; to Muslim theology the doctrine of the Trinity is heresy, and the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the central tenet of Christianity, a shocking blasphemy. We assume that Muslims regard Trinitarian Christianity as a polytheistic, and not as a monotheistic, creed. Islam is, in fact, far closer to Judaism than to Christianity: indeed, most non-Muslim scholars hold that Muhammed, who had been a merchant in his pre-prophetic days and is known to have met Jews and Nestorian (Unitarian) Christians who were active in the Arabia of his day, ultimately derived his fundamental doctrines from Jewish sources, and actually started his prophetic mission as a Jewish heretical reformer. For example, Muhammed originally instructed his followers to turn towards Jerusalem in prayer and, even to-day, Jerusalem is one of the three holy cities of Islam.

"Jewish Catholicism"

In the present writer's opinion, Islam may be accurately described, as we have actually termed it elsewhere, "Jewish Catholicism": that is, Judaism deprived of its racial characteristics and raised to the cosmopolitan or "Catholic" ("universal") level. In which respect it is

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Christianity and Islam

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

the Koran which is the authentic "New Testament," the actual successor of the Hebrew "Old Testament." Both books are of Semitic origin and preach the same monotheistic Unitarian creed. *Our New Testament* is a Greek collection of books written by Greeks, or by Greek-speaking Jews, and is full of Greek ideas, like *The Word* (Logos) or the Virgin-Birth. Muhammed, the Arabic prophet, was a prophet of the same type as the Old Testament Hebrew prophets. The ethics of Islam, which allow polygamy and chattel slavery, and enforce circumcision, are merely a continuation of the Hebrew ethics of our Old Testament, as Allah is a non-racial and universal edition of Yahveh (Jehovah), the Hebrew tribal god.

Two Totalitarian Creeds

Both Christianity and Islam are, in present-day political phraseology, totalitarian creeds. From the moment that the Christian Church came to power in the Roman Empire it ruthlessly suppressed all opposition in its age of Faith. Islam, likewise, though apparently more tolerant to rival "religions of the Book," as Muhammed is reported to have described Judaism and Christianity, has ruthlessly suppressed both "idolators" and Muslim heretics.

With regard to the former, the "Jihad," or "holy war"—borrowed by the Christians and renamed the "crusade"—still remains a primary religious duty in Islam; and its merciless memories still constitute a factor in Indian politics. With regard to the destruction of "heretics" the terrible religious massacres which followed the departure of the British from India are still fresh in human memory. But Islamic orthodoxy, like the Christian Inquisition, also kills in cold blood. A leading authority on the Muslim East informs us that "repeatedly in 1924

and 1925 members of the Ahmediya sect were stoned in Afghanistan for apostasy from Islam." The learned author adds: "When, early in 1925, Gandhi spoke out against the stoning of adherents of the Ahmediya sect for apostasy in Afghanistan, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan answered in defence of the Afghans' action that to people blinded by modern scepticism Islam's unrelenting attitude in the matter of apostasy might seem to be a challenge to the liberty of the human conscience. Such people, however, should reflect that Islam was not merely an institution for the guidance of those who professed it, but a State which must require loyalty of its subjects, just as a subject of the British Indian State (in 1925—F.A.R.) could be hanged for high treason and could not escape his fate by pleading that he was free to throw off his allegiance to King George, so a Muhammedan who revolted against the authority of Islam might with equal justice be made to pay for the deed with his life." (cf. *A History of Nationalism in the East*, by Hans Kohn, 1929, pp. 346 and 405). Substitute Christianity for Islam, and the Spanish Inquisition would have subscribed to every word of this!

Christianity, Islam and the Future

To-day, both the creed of Christ and that of Muhammed face fundamentally the same crisis: how to survive in a world-order based on industry and science. So far, it is Christianity which has borne the brunt of the present scientific onslaught. But the current industrialisation of the East is bringing Islam into the firing line. What will be the ultimate outcome is unknown to the present writer; but we do not think that either the Bible or the Koran are any better informed. No prophet prophecies the end of his own religion!

Mensuration and The Flood

By GEORGE ROSS

FLOOD legends are world spread. The Hebrew versions of the Babylonian flood legend are canonised in Genesis as Divine Revelation, Inspiration, and Spiritual Truth, not to be gainsaid; Various flood myths are recorded in Sir J. G. Fraser's *Folklore in the Old Testament*; and the British Museum has issued its *The Babylonian Story of the Deluge*. In his *Lectures and Essays*, R. G. Ingersoll aptly examines the Bible Stories of the Deluge in his essay *Some Mistakes of Moses* (Second series, pp. 1-80). He cites some of the absurd theological "explanations" connected with the Deluge, and some of the comments, such as that of Dr. Scott: "The suspension of the ferocity of the savage beasts during their continuance in the ark is generally considered as an apt figure of the change that takes place in the disposition of sinners when they enter the true Church of Christ." Ingersoll points out that God destroyed man because "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and because every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," and that God would not any more curse the ground for man's sake because "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"; and inquires: "Will some gentleman skilled in theology give us an explanation?" He also remarks that Adam and Eve, after their expulsion from the garden, were, as to their food, placed upon an equality with the lower animals: thus the antediluvians were vegetarians, and this may account for their wickedness and longevity.

The Babylonian myth, about 1777 B.C., was discovered in A.D. 1872. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, 586 B.C. The Jews had no knowledge of writing before 900 B.C., and the post-exilic (i.e., after 536 B.C.) school of Ezra (or Esdras, in Greek) fabricated a very successful forgery mill of Old Testament literature, shaping tradition of the past for the good of the present.

Many Christian theologians have asserted that "the Bible, like its Author, is pure, unchangeable truth—truth without admixture of error." Many appear to agree with St. Bernard's condemnation of the application of reason to theology because such application was presumptuous and intolerable. Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford wrote: "If he [clergyman] ceases to believe (e.g., in the literal, historical truth of the account of Noah's Flood . . .) he is bound, in common honesty, to resign his office; and, if the dullness of his spirit does not allow him to apprehend that necessity, the Church is bound to remove him." This brings Bishop Colenso, Bishop Gore, Bishop Barnes and other "Lords spiritual" into the charge of "dullness of spirit." Honest Bishop Colenso was wakened from his somnambulating faith by the questions of an intelligent Zulu, and was persecuted for showing that the Pentateuch contained a mass of errors and absurdities. It reminds one of the hope by an English clergyman (writing the Preface to Clayton's *The Bishops as Legislators*) that "the Church of England will not be judged by its Bishops."

Simple arithmetic and simple mensuration would seem to rival mathematics, in the middle ages, as a "Black Art," for, arithmetically, the Deluge is absurd. Yet Fundamentalists abound and search has recently been made in the mountains of Ararat for remains of the Ark some 4,000 years after its alleged date. The excavations in Mesopotamia by Mr. Woolley and the contentions of Sir C. Marston have led to misleading of, or misunderstanding by, the public, who conclude that the Bible Universal Flood has been proved to be true. What says arithmetic?

The earth is an oblate spheroid with polar diameter 7,900 miles and its equatorial diameter 7,927 miles. Its surface area is given as "196,900,000" square miles. This
(Continued on page 99)

Saints in Hell

The worker-priests of France

By P. C. KING

WHILE Mr. Cesbron is not relating personal experiences—though a Catholic he is not a priest, worker or otherwise—he has evidently had close contact with the movement. His description of working-class conditions has a convincing grimness and stark realism.

In his story Pierre, the son of a coal miner, takes Holy Orders, and with the permission of the Hierarchy, becomes a worker in a factory in the environs of Paris. The point about the worker-priest is that he is a full-time operative; in terms of *time* his labour comes first and his priesthood is a leisure occupation; in terms of objective his purpose is to infiltrate into the working-class and having gained the confidence of his fellow-workers, to bring them into the Catholic Church. In this struggle Pierre wins the friendship of Luis, a Spanish anarchist, and Henri, the local Communist Party secretary. The crisis of the tale comes when one of the workers, a member of the Communist Party, is brought before the Court on a criminal charge and both the worker-priest, Pierre, and the Communist Party secretary, Henri, give evidence in his favour. The accused gets off. As a result, however, both the witnesses are removed from their posts by their respective organisations, Henri, because he has continued his friendship with Pierre, when the Party line has changed from co-operation with worker-priests to opposition to them, and Pierre because he has openly co-operated with Communists.

At times the author's style is sentimental and sanctimonious to an irritating degree, in spite of his Orwellian descriptive power of the sordid and wretched conditions of the exploited workers and their families. Nor does this

Mensuration and The Flood—(contd. from page 98)

corresponds to a sphere 7,917.75 miles in diameter, which gives a surface area of 196,948,680 square miles, and a volume of 259,898,401,845 cubic miles. Fifteen cubits above earth's highest mountain give a height of 5.497 miles.

Assuming average height of the earth's land mass to be one mile or 29.2 per cent. of earth's surface, that evens out to equal a land surface of .292 miles high over earth's total surface. This leaves 5.2 miles as the actual height of the flood water over all the earth. That gives a daily rainfall of 8,236 inches for 40 days, or 2,196 inches for 150 days. On the Ark alone, 500 ft. by 83 ft. 4 ins., the total rainfall is 31,828,076 tons, that is, 795,701 tons on each day for 40 days, or a daily rainfall of 212,197 tons for 150 days. The total flood water over all the earth is the total volume of a sphere, 7,917.75 miles in diameter, deducted from the total volume of a sphere 7,928.15 miles in diameter, and works out at 1,025,477,955 cubic miles of flood water; and a cubic mile of pure water at ten pounds weight, and 277.274 cubic inches, per gallon contains 4,095,324,674 tons of water, 224 gallons to the ton. It is incorrect to multiply the surface of the earth by the depth of the flood; the circumference of the flooded sphere is fully 32.5 miles more than that of the normal earth. The error amounts to a shortage of 1,344,819 cubic miles.

The earth's *pure* water is given as 293,031 cubic miles. If that is so, the Deluge required 3,499 times that quantity. Whence came the water?

The Deluge is impossible and absurd.

The Church of Rome, from 1 Peter, iii, 20-21, entertains the arbitrary allegory of the flood as baptism and the Ark as the salvation of those in the true Church of Christ.

Compare the forementioned comment of Dr. Scott. If the Jewish borrowing is inspired, so is the Babylonian original. Of what use is such "inspiration"?

worker-priest, sympathetically drawn as he is, have any real solution to the conditions he feels so sorely, except vague murmurings about brotherly love and the mercy of Christ. He does not come out as a champion against the capitalist system of profit accumulation and its concomitant, the oppression and exploitation of the working-class.

Man is greedy, grasping and cowardly, while at the same time designed as a social animal he is unable to escape the obligations of his community. Hence the continual conflict of egotism and altruism. A class divided society breeds fear—fear of insecurity and oppression on the part of the worker and fear of losing the security of privilege on the part of the owner. It is useless to talk of brotherly love between workers, to whom it means demanding they shall love those who destroy them body and soul, and the owners, to whom it means sacrificing what they consider their hard-won security. Only in a social order where distribution is according to need, could one begin to hope for brotherly love. But the Christian, Pierre, does not face this issue: he demands still further sacrifices, still greater resignation on the part of the workers, and on the part of the owners such charity-giving as would, if pursued to its logical end, land them in the bankruptcy court—and back among the workers! *Saints in Hell* is the skilful diagnosis of the disease by a doctor who has no cure for what he finds. So much for Mr. Cesbron's story. The case of the worker-priests, however, is very much to the fore these days. Mr. Cesbron was writing in May, 1951: since then there has been a denunciation of the worker-priest from the highest quarters, from the Holy Father himself! There is to be an end of full-time workers and spare-time priests. Three of the top Dominicans (Provincials) and four of the Order's most distinguished Fathers have been removed from their offices; they have made their submission. (The parallel to a Stalinist purge is too obvious to need to be pressed!)

The worker-priests, however, have most unexpectedly offered resistance to Papal decree. Seventy-three worker-priests have published in the well-known French daily, *Le Monde*, a long protest against the decision. And listen to the phrasing of this protest: "these measures," they cry, "will trouble the consciences of Christians engaged in the struggle of the working-classes. The worker-priests claim for them and for all Christians the right to effective solidarity with the workers in their just fight." Shades of Marx! Such phrases must indeed have sent a shiver through all Catholic Christendom! Nor is the revolt by any means ended; 31 of the 73 return to the charge, demanding the right to choose which they shall give up, their status of worker or their priesthood—telling the Archbishop that the Church is "incapable of sensing the essential aspiration of the workers," and—unkindest cut of all—"we feel we are sacrificed to the inhuman (*sic*) exigencies of a plan of defence which once more will immobilise the Church."

No, the case of worker-priests is by no means ended and for that reason Mr. Cesbron's novel is the more opportune and may be recommended to readers of *The Freethinker*.

[*Saints in Hell*, by G. Cesbron, Secker and Warburg: 12s. 6d.]

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This Believing World

We note that the Archbishop of York is imploring all "Church" people to read their Bible above everything else. He admits that Christianity is fighting an almost losing battle against unbelief and indifference—but he appears to put the failure down to the fact that the people don't know their Bible. Of course this is just nonsense. It's mostly the people who do know their Bible who become either entirely indifferent to the claims of religion, or active in attacking Christianity.

Take for example the Archbishop himself. He knows his Bible, but what chance would he have with a Free-thinker who has made the study of the Bible his speciality? Of what earthly use would it be for the Archbishop to hurl texts at his opponent, or indulge in the merry game of "How we got our Bible"? No book in history has been analysed and discussed as much as the Bible, and it would have to be a pretty smart Archbishop to be able to say something new about the Precious Word which is not known, or, if "Proving a God," which has not been pulverised by common sense.

The biggest believers in religion and Christianity are those who know very little about the Bible, and who therefore believe everything on "Faith." They will swallow the most incredible nonsense merely because they are told it is in the "Holy" Book. And they will never discuss anything with an unbeliever. It is they who form the backbone of Christians everywhere—and certainly not those who really do know their Bible.

There can be no doubt that so far the Rev. B. Graham is attracting huge crowds to hear him deliver the Gospel of Christ, and to help him sing many old hymns familiar to our childhood when they really meant something to our very immature minds. But it would be a mistake to imagine from this that he is particularly welcome. The Rev. F. Martin, of the *Sunday Graphic*, is not at all impressed, and almost tearfully implores his readers to ignore the revivalist, and go to Church as much as possible without bothering about the appeals for this purpose emanating from Harringay. Trust yourself to God Almighty is his pathetic cry and never mind the Rev. Billy. For Mr. Martin feels that this American Revival, with its blatant publicity, is really a stunt, and not at all the "true" Christianity which he himself stands for—and, it may be added, for which appeals often get even into this journal.

Still there's nothing like a little good healthy competition. Mr. Graham is competing with Mr. Martin and even our Archbishops, and he's attracting huge crowds every night. While "true" Christianity hasn't a chance with the cinema or the radio or TV. It's a lovely dilemma for the Churches—and they can work out their own salvation. If they can.

But all our religious leaders should be cheered by the good news that Jesus Christ has at last returned to this Vale of Tears, though we are not informed how many "light years" it took for him to travel from the far-away Galaxy in which reigns the Lord in all his greatness. Full particulars will be found in a work just published, *The Book of Revelation*, by Burning Sand, the name of the "guide" of a medium, Miss L. Hill. Burning Sand's Jesus has often appeared on this earth—as Buddha, Lao Tse, Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, and no doubt—though B.S. does not say so—as Mrs. Besant. Perhaps any of us may

rub shoulders with him in the Underground, though Jesus will not be easy to recognise if he wears a bowler hat and a pull-over (embroidered) and carries a briefcase and a folded umbrella. What a joke for the Churches if the Rev. B. Graham turns out to be after all Jesus Christ himself!

What happens when two all-believing Christians, one a bishop, and the other a scientist, attempt to talk about Religion and Philosophy for children? This took place the other day, and cynics could easily declare that they were funnier than the late Tommy Handley—both trying to impress each other that if Jesus Christ was the highest Religion could give the world, so Jesus Christ was the highest that Science could give the world, and both utterly failing. What schoolchildren—if they listened to it—could possibly have made of the drivel they spouted we cannot say; but that it was drivel was as clear as the noonday sun. Both the Bishop of Bristol and Prof. Coulson excelled themselves in broadcasting nonsense—and we can only hope that the B.B.C. will stage further shows of the kind. Children must be shown what "true" Christianity really is.

Religious Precept and Royal Practice

THE Queen of this realm has on several occasions voiced a high regard for the Holy Bible, a copy of which was presented to her ceremonially at her now well-nigh forgotten Coronation. I do not suppose that it is her fault when she acts in a manner that departs from the spirit of the book to which she pays lip-service, but when I read in the Press of the little Australian girl who jumped on her lap at a children's rally and tried to kiss her, only to be seized and borne off struggling by the Queen's security guard, Chief-Inspector Tom Clark of Scotland Yard, I could not but compare the event with another told in St. Matthew's Gospel.

The fable that, when little children were brought to Jesus to be blessed, and the disciples objected, he said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven," stands out for me as the most charming of the few incidents with a truly human touch related of that mythical character. The story is a revelation of the humanity of the unknown writer, living in an ignorant age, but one that was free at least from the fear of germs and contagion that appears to have assumed undue proportions in the minds of the Queen's entourage.

I should have felt a warm glow of appreciation for the young mother, separated from her own children, if she had told the security officer to leave the child alone for a while, and had herself made much of the little four-year-old in accordance with natural human instinct. What a pity that the pomp and traditions of monarchy permit her neither to exercise freedom in the realm of opinions nor to respond in the normal manner to the common incidents of everyday life! Still more deplorable is the convention that prevents honest comment in the Press and elsewhere on such shortcomings of the monarchical idea.

How much more admirable would be a Secularist world, in which all could express their honest thoughts about the beliefs presented on every hand, and in which nobody needed to be protected from the spontaneous caresses of an exuberant child!

P. V. M.

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

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

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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.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, March 28, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY (President, N.S.S.), "The Idea of Progress."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, March 28, 6-45 p.m.: Open Night. Free discussion.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 30, 7 p.m.: STUART MORRIS, "Does Pacifism Offer a Practical Way to Peace?"

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, March 26, 7-15 p.m.: J. H. LLOYD, "Social Humanism."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 28, 6-30 p.m.: Dr. J. N. FREMLIN, "Science and Ethics."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, March 28, 2-30 p.m.: IAN WINTERBOTTOM, M.P., v. F. BARTON (I.L.P.), "Is Conscription Necessary?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Sunday, March 28, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "The Road and Life."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road).—Sunday, March 28, 7-15 p.m.: F. A. HORNIBROOK, "My Freethought Scrapbook."

Notes and News

Mr. J. Barrowman, the secretary of the Glasgow Branch N.S.S., writes:—

Mr. F. A. Ridley, President of the National Secular Society, closed the lecture session of the Glasgow Secular Society on March 7, when he spoke on "The Menace of Rome."

Before introducing Mr. Ridley, the chairman, Mr. R. M. Hamilton, paid a fine tribute to the work of the late Mr. Chapman Cohen. He spoke of Mr. Cohen's long life of service in the cause of Freethought; of his abilities as lecturer, writer and debater, and ended with the phrase, "truly a great man"—sentiments appreciated by an audience which had not been deterred from attendance by the inclement weather.

Mr. Ridley commenced his lecture by tracing the origin of the Roman Catholic Church through its most powerful period in the Middle Ages to the present time. He emphasised the essential character of the Catholic Church as totalitarian, and aptly described it as "ecclesiastical fascism." He covered the globe—Spain, France, Germany,

Switzerland, America, Canada and Australia—exposing the machinations of Rome. The aim of Catholicism was to become world-wide and universal. It claimed to be the only repository of truth and desired most of all to preserve its own power, prestige and privilege. When and where in a minority it posed as the champion of freedom and liberty; when and where it was dominant it used its power to crush all critical opposition.

Mr. Ridley's lecture, while carrying a serious warning for vigilance in curbing the insidious propaganda of Rome, nevertheless, sparkled throughout with his own special brand of impish humour. The historical truth that Rome owed much of its world power and prestige to the potato famine in Ireland, is an example.

An important pamphlet has just reached this office, *Le Problème de Jésus*, by the eminent French Rationalist scholar, Monsieur Prosper Alfaric, who discusses the whole problem of the historical existence of Jesus Christ with profound scholarship, and with truly Gallic lucidity. The distinguished author is, to-day, perhaps the most eminent of living Rationalist scholars.

In the extent and depth of his knowledge, his only possible equal is, we should say, our own Joseph MacCabe. Unlike Mr. MacCabe, who believes in an historic though of course, entirely human Jesus, M. Alfaric is a "mythicist," who reaches the conclusion that the "Jesus of the Gospels" is an entirely mythical figure. The problem, though of little practical importance—since, for Christianity, it is the god, and not the man who counts as essential to their faith—is of profound interest as an historical problem, and distinguished Rationalist scholars can be quoted on both sides of the argument. M. Alfaric's new pamphlet on Christian origins, originally published in Paris by the "Cercle Ernest Renan," will, we are sure, prove a valuable contribution, from the "mythicist" angle, to the age-old controversy. We hope that an English translation will eventually be available. The notable work of this eminent scholar is too little known to English-speaking Rationalists.

Mr. H. Cutner writes:—

It is with sincere regret that we have to announce the death of Woolsey Teller, which took place on March 11 last in New York.

A brilliant and forthright Freethinker, he had contributed to the New York *Truth Seeker* for many years, paragraphs, comments and articles of outstanding merit. It was not only against religion that he tilted with success. He had no use for half-baked theories, and anything in the way of humbug, superstition and credulity he exposed with great acuteness. He attacked not only Judaism and Christianity, but all supernatural religions; and he had no use for Astrology, Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy, Telepathy, Psycho-Analysis and, least of all, for unintelligible Metaphysics.

His book, *The Atheism of Astronomy*, based on the work of famous scientists and astronomers, is a sledgehammer blow to the Design Argument; while his *Essays of an Atheist* is a full-blooded defence of Atheism against such philosophers as Hegel and Whitehead and many others who imagine that a page full of words and words may bring back, if not the good old Jewish God Jehovah, something in the way of an "Absolute" or an "Unknown" and meaning the same thing. Nobody had a greater contempt for Christian (and metaphysical) gullibility than Woolsey Teller. It was a personal privilege to meet him, as I did two years ago and, needless to say, I found him simple, modest and charming to a degree. I could hardly get him to talk about his own work. Freethought has again lost one of its doughtiest champions.

More Light on Jesus—4

By H. CUTNER

THE one thing which has constantly surprised me reading Mr. Ahmad's *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, is how a man of his great ability can pin his faith in the supernatural and the marvellous on such flimsy grounds. I could fill a volume with the passages I have marked in his book and my comments. How can anyone read the Acts of Thomas and not see he is in the land of make-believe, the land of the *Arabian Nights*, or Grimm's *Fairy Tales*? Yet Mr. Ahmad appears to believe every word in the book which was even too much for the Church to stomach. And judging from the fantastic stories put out by the Church of Rome of their "martyrs," there must be precious little that the Church cannot stomach.

First, it will be remembered that Mr. Ahmad claims that Jesus did not die on the Cross but only swooned, and soon revived after he was taken down. He was, of course, seen by some of the people who knew him, and this led to the belief in his Resurrection, and eventually to his disappearance with Mary, his mother, and Judas Thomas, his twin brother, and they wended their way to India. In proof of all this, Mr. Ahmad quotes dozens of books which detail various "traditions" of a traveller from the West named "Issa" who came to Kashmir with his mother and brother, and eventually died in Srinagar.

One of the books quoted is entitled *The Unknown Life of Jesus*—the "unknown" being those parts missed out of the "canonical" Gospels. Not that Mr. Ahmad makes any distinction whatever between the canonical and the apocryphal Gospels for he quotes them all as Gospel Truth whenever he wants to.

This *Unknown Life* was written by a Russian, Notovitch, who claims that he compiled it from notes taken in the Buddhist monastery at Himis, the library of which contained the "memoirs" of Issa, that is, Jesus. When he returned to Europe, the Vatican opposed the publication of his book and eventually insisted that Notovitch had made up the story himself. In fact, the *Unknown Life* was said by some Christians to have been invented by an American Atheist who had never even left America. It really is a matter of small moment if this is or is not true. Dozens of "unknown" lives of Jesus have been compiled—four of which, as everybody knows, have done duty in the New Testament. They are all of equal authenticity, in this equalling the passages in the Qur'an about Jesus. Even now, "unknown" lives of Jesus can always command a ready sale no matter how fantastic they are. I am quite sure that one of these days Jesus will be shown manning a space ship and undergoing amazing adventures going to Sirius or Arcturus.

I do not doubt for a moment that "traditions" about Issa or Jesus have been preserved. When the early Christians began to proselytise, they no doubt left tons of "traditions" explaining Jesus from a thousand angles to the primitive peoples they met. Look at the incredibly silly stories we get about Krishna or Siva, and look at the way they are swallowed, not only by the ignorant peasants of India, but by "western" people who talk learnedly about Hindu philosophy as if most of that philosophy was not the most veritable twaddle ever conceived.

Mr. Ahmad gives some names very well known to Kashmir history and geography which contain the words "Issa" or "Yusa," that is, Jesus, as if that proves anything more than the word or name Issa was applied to the tradition. Even Mr. Ahmad has to deal with the "tradition" that Yuz Asaf (Jesus again) should really be *Bood*

Asaf. *Bood* is the Buddha, of course, and therefore, as a good Muslim, Mr. Ahmad has to reject the implication that the Tomb of Jesus in Srinagar is merely a Buddhist tomb. How can it be proved to be anything else? It might well be that it never was a tomb at all. In any case, its design is certainly of a very much later date than the first century.

There is no doubt that, when Islam began to make converts, Jews and Christians who went over to the new Faith, took with them—as Mr. Ahmad admits—their several traditions; and can anyone give a reason why they never elaborated these traditions? Of course, Jesus went to Kashmir and became, if not a genuine Muslim, at least very nearly one—as near as a Messenger from God could become. I am quite certain that "tradition" of this kind has done more harm to genuine history than anything else. No wonder Henry Ford said—I think—that history was "bunk."

It is most interesting to note, however, that almost all the European travellers who have written on Kashmir have ignored the tomb of Yuz Asaf (Jesus); and even the two lady writers who have called attention to the tomb say it is that of a *disciple* of Jesus. So Mr. Ahmad has to rely on Muslim writers, whom he quotes, but because they are Muslims they have to conform to the Qur'an as he has to. Of what value is their testimony? Some of their books were written many centuries after the supposed date of Jesus; and some of them introduce "angels" guiding Yuz Asaf safely into the country and talking to him. This is "evidence," this is "testimony." Let me quote the kind of thing on which Mr. Ahmad relies: "It is said that a prophet, Yuz Asaf by name, appeared for the guidance of the people of Kashmir. He is buried in Mohalla Khaniyat. During his life he invited people to his religion. He lived near about the reign of Raja Gopadatta who has also built a temple on Mount Solomon." This is a typical proof that Jesus Christ is buried in Srinagar provided for us by Mr. Ahmad.

That wandering "holy" men have travelled through India from long before our era is true—most of them would be considered, if they did the same now in England, as hopeless and ignorant bores. A good many of them in India considered it their duty to go about naked though covered in cow dung. They are responsible for the "traditions" so implicitly believed in by Mr. Ahmad. I am quite certain that most of these "holy" men were just insane.

I hope that what I have said will not be considered "personal," but only as criticism which an unbeliever like myself was bound to give.

At the same time, I do want to say that I have read this book with the utmost interest, for it is full of scholarly research. Indeed, I can hardly fancy anybody interested in the problem set forth by Mr. Ahmad so lucidly failing to admire the way in which he has arranged his material and authorities. If he has not persuaded me, it is because I am a heretic; and even the most persuasive Christian or Rationalist work has not yet convinced me that there ever was such a person as Jesus Christ. And to that view, I am persuaded, must all students of religion ultimately come—though the time may yet be in a distant future. It will not be in my time.

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION. By F. A. Ridley. Price 1s. 3d.; postage 1½d.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)

Mr. Morgan and Music

By E. G. H. CROUCH

IN his second article (12/3/54) Mr. Morgan favours us with a definition of evolution: but he evidently means evolution in ethical theory, not evolution in the scientific sense. He declines to define "Mind" as no knowledge of it can be gained via the senses. It is refreshing to note an idealist accepting this materialist attitude to knowledge, but if he realises that Mind is essentially meaningless, can we persuade him to use only words such as brain, whose meaning is clear?

I would like to tackle in some detail one subject to which Mr. Morgan refers: music and the appreciation of the arts. We may ask ourselves what processes are involved when one listens to music. How is it that the brain finds music attractive and significant, and in what way does it give pleasure?

In its normal receptive state the brain welcomes all data as potentially significant. Incoming signals are flashed throughout the brain and, if they are recognised, action is taken. One can instance the hearing of a dinner bell or the reading of a book. In both cases the "significance" of the data depends on its being recognised and initiating activity. This question of activity is the essence of the problem. If there is a choice of several interesting sets of data the brain focuses its attention on one of them to the exclusion of all others. This "focusing" is no mysterious device: evidently the brain's whole conscious activity is involved by the data received and it is unable to spare effort for other data. Thus the brain continues in one occupation until it ceases to be interesting, and then takes note of any other data that presents itself. We have here two alternating opposites: continuity, variety.

In general the arts are not looked upon as sources of information: drama, poetry and fiction can be sometimes, though even here the main attraction lies in the imaginative aspect and emotional overtones of the work. Music never is, yet (as with reading a book) unless some sort of activity is induced the attention will waver. This activity is usually emotional or physical, and surely the reason why music is called the most abstract of the arts is in its complete divorce from words and other communication symbols and its intimate connection with the inherent structure and processes of the brain. All must have experienced the way the brain makes tunes out of the beat of railway wheels. Even the persistent ticking of a clock induces mental activity.

Herein lies the real yet very simple distinction between university lecture and orchestral concert, between communication for information and pleasure: both must awaken activity, but the latter does not involve the experience, knowledge, civilised superstructure stored in the memory in any way.

The reference to the physical reactions to music is most applicable to dance music, of course, but since dance music was probably the earliest form, this is not out of place. So far as the genesis of the art is concerned, it should be remembered that not only do primitive savages perform war dances and ritual dances often of sexual significance (e.g., fertility rites), so do other creatures: as Konrad Lorenz tells in his *King Solomon's Ring*, certain fish have ritualised, war dances, and almost all creatures have strict courting routines. How one describes this when it occurs in fish or birds may be a matter of debate, but when it occurs in man one describes it as working up the emotions to the required pitch. It may seem merely facetious to point out that in ballet the movements originated in duelling postures and motions, and the *pas de deux* is actually a love-dance, but it seems to emphasise

the way these matters are associated, their intimate fundamental connection.

No doubt the other arts can be traced back just as far. Thus prehistoric man painted hunting scenes on the walls of his cave, and an interesting analogy to modern art is found in "releaser mechanisms." For example, if a male stickleback is confronted with a model stickleback, perfect in detail but without red belly, it shows no inclination to fight it, yet if it is shown a grotesque parody of a stickleback, with an eye marked on it and the lower half painted red, its reaction is powerful. Picasso knows a trick or two on how to evoke reactions despite lack of any real physical resemblance! Konrad Lorenz tells of how jackdaws recite their various calls, accompanied with the appropriate behaviour, just as the aborigine re-enacts the day's adventures, or the storyteller recites sagas of ancient heroic deeds.

It remains to consider the question of pleasure. Pythagorus demonstrated that chords consist of notes whose frequencies are in simple ratios; W. G. Walter (*The Living Brain*) describes pleasure and frustration in terms of theta-rhythms in the brain; one simple definition of pain is "That which interferes with the normal working of the body," and this ties up with the idea that "enjoyment" is essentially providing the brain with something to do, with continuity and variety. It is interesting to note that Stravinsky described the art of writing music as devising a pleasing alternation of similarity and contrast, which are the same pair of concepts to which we have just referred. This criterion can be applied elsewhere: those who read the *Amateur Photographer* will know that their pictorial analysis is given in terms of continuity of line, ease of scanning, subject to the proviso that sufficient variety exists to make the photograph interesting. Again it is the form, not the content, which is most relevant.

I have tried to give my own picture of the nature of music and other arts, necessarily in a general manner. Of course, it is not for the materialist to construct an explanation of the universe, since it is the scientist who must provide the facts. It seems to me that the materialist is in a very similar position to the atheist, since each begins with the denial of an idealist concept, in itself negative, but clearing the way for constructive thought. Let Mr. Morgan oppose these ideas with his own solution in idealist terms.

Obituary

GEORGE DANTON BAZIN

A secular funeral service has no set form, is not read from a book, and deals exclusively with the life of the deceased and the feelings of the bereaved. Thus whoever prepares and delivers the address shares in the emotions of kin and friends present more than a minister of religion is likely to do at an orthodox service. This is especially the case when tribute is paid to a man like the late George Danton Bazin, whose death and cremation were not announced in this journal at the time (towards the end of January) owing to the heavy demands on available space.

The service bore witness to the steadfastness of his loyalty to principles of freedom and humanity. A conscientious objector in the 1914-1918 war, he refused to take part in any kind of war work all his life. Although practically blind, he strove for social and scientific progress until the end. After his death the hospital he attended accepted his bequest of his defective eyes for research to benefit others. His widow and son shared his idealism, and the latter has now joined the N.S.S.

P. V. M.

CONSCIOUSNESS

To be conscious is to think; to think is to put together impressions and ideas; and to do this is to be the subject of internal changes. . . . Under its most general aspect, therefore, all mental action whatever is definable as the continuous differentiation and integration of states of consciousness.—HERBERT SPENCER.

G.B.S.

(Sometime contributor to *The Freethinker*)

Throw his ashes on the garden,
Let them go into the grass,
Let the wind and weather steal them,
Let them pass.

Where lies king and where lies poet?
Where the laurel and the crown?
Not in marble snug contentment
In the town.

Let the fools in all their folly
Play sad music to the tomb,
And for smaller men make largely
A last room.

Let the solemn-faced procession
By the coloured windows tread
Taking little men to mingle
With the dead.

Let a bishop speak the phrases
From the book beneath his hand,
Making Death a ceremonial
In the land.

Let them put the politician,
With the sanctimonious knave,
Side by side within the abbey
And the grave.

Let them call the Lord to witness
Of the greatness gone to God,
While the hypnotised beholders
Gravely nod.

Ask the worms what is the answer.
See the names upon the stone:
Never one who reached the summit
Stood alone.

Where lies Keats and where lies Shelley?
Where is Shakespeare?—Who were they?
This is not the place to wonder
But to pray.

Now he's gone who laughed so lightly,
Lived so largely, saw so well
All the flaws in man's fair heaven
And his hell.

Now he's gone who laughed so largely
In a world of secret grins;
No holy place to coffin neatly
All his sins.

He who pulled away the tinsel,
Ripped the bandage, threw the gage,
Put all human sores and failings
On his page.

He who stood within the sunlight
Pointing out each human wrong,
For the frailness of the temple
Is too strong.

He would start a revolution
In the shuttered house of quiet,
And with resting pomp make havoc
And a riot.

Let the saints continue sleeping:
Let the heroes rest secure:
Leave the mediocre tranquil
To endure.

Let him have the world to cover,
He who made the world anew,
For a world is what we owe him
And his due.

Throw his ashes on the garden,
Let them go into the grass,
Let the wind and weather steal them,
Let them pass.

JOHN O'HARE.

Correspondence

WHY ESPERANTO?

SIR,—It seems odd that many students of international languages feel impelled to suggest "improvements" to the language after reaching a certain stage in its study. Most of the contemporary projects to Esperanto perished through the activities of these misguided enthusiasts, and Esperanto itself with difficulty survived a similar crisis in its history in the early part of this century, due to the efforts of some of its adherents. It would seem that your contributor G. L. Dickenson is attempting to carry on the "good" work.

Fortunately for Esperanto, it was decided long enough ago that the language is as near perfection as is possible to be, and most "improvements" would be in fact a step backwards.

To refute Mr. Dickenson's points one by one would take up too much of your valuable space, but it is apparent that he looks at the international language through "English language eyes"—an insular failing. There is nothing seriously wrong with the construction of Esperanto, 67 years of development without fundamental change have proved that.

Having attended four great international congresses in different countries where Esperanto only was the official language used, I am quite convinced of its suitability.—Yours, etc.,

J. BROWNLEE.

A NEW READER WRITES:

SIR,—As a new reader of *The Freethinker* (I have now read about ten consecutive copies) I feel I must congratulate you on your ability to supply me with a first-class intellectual kick in the teeth each Thursday morning.

Your paper is nothing if not belligerent, a rare and stimulating quality to find in a periodical these days—when an arid conformity of pandering to the lowest common denominator is the general rule and I find much entertainment from the brisk and conversational (dare I say rhetorical?) style of your leader "Views and Opinions."

I feel your paper must be provocative to stimulate the very interesting correspondence you often print, but I think a few longer, and more meaty, articles would be welcome—though I appreciate, of course, that your space is limited.

Provocation, I find, is your most valuable function, however, and I seem to have more food for thought than usual after I have opened my Thursday morning post, and imbibed your dose of mental tonic!

In closing I wonder if any of your readers would be amused by the deftly-told story of the discovery of the Holy Lance at Antioch, related with beautiful and telling restraint by Steven Runciman in his recently published "History of the Crusades" (Vol. I)? The whole work, incidentally, is a nice corrective to the more familiar Latin Christian accounts of the organised brigandage of the late eleventh century, and Christians who point with pride to the disgraceful excursions of Western Christendom at that period should be instantly referred to Dr. Runciman's "History"—his references are very full, and unimpeachable for verity, all but a few having been the work of Christian authors!—Yours, etc.,

JOHN R. PHILLIPS.

THE REAL ENEMY

SIR,—Why all this stushy about matter and mind? Surely mind is inherent in the atom itself, and increases in complexity according to the combinations thereof, ultimately attaining that fuddled result, the human mind.

Whether we talk of the atom and its compounds as mind, matter, or charges of electricity is a matter of convenience and circumstance.

I suggest contributors to our paper should soft pedal on all this cheeseparing twaddle and concentrate on the only real job of work left to Freethinkers, i.e., the neutralisation of the Vatican and all its works.—Yours, etc.,

G. S. BROWN.