

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIV—No. 18

Founded 1881

Editor: F. A. RIDLEY

Price Fourpence

FREEMASONRY, developing by imperfectly-known and tortuous channels from its mediaeval "underground," first made its public appearance in England in the early eighteenth century. Coming at a period when the scientifically enlightened minds of advanced thinkers were beginning to throw off the "deadhand" of mediaeval theology, the masonic cult was quickly transported to the European continent where it spread, as the saying goes, "like wildfire." For the past two centuries the masonic cult has represented a powerful force in European society. Exactly how powerful is a little difficult to determine. According to its detractors, who see a mason, so to speak, "under every bush," the activities of the "craft" were ubiquitous and omnipotent. According to others, "the Royal Art" is merely a kind of "Mayfair Slate Club," as the present writer once termed it, for the "Upper" classes, a kind of social-charitable association, probably the ultimate truth lies about midway between these two extreme views?

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Christianity & Freemasonry Two Secret Societies

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

result, in England, the social and charitable aspects of masonry, what we have elsewhere termed the "Mayfair Slate Club" aspects, have predominated. Masonry in England has never been political, at least openly. Nor has it ever been, as on the continent, a menace to the existing social order. Since its earliest days, a member of the high aristocracy, often of the reigning dynasty, has held the Grand-Mastership of English masonry. It is, for example, noteworthy that, even during the furore in England against "secret societies" during the French Revolution, itself widely regarded as due to the secret activities of Freemasonry, no action seems to have been contemplated against the British Masonic Rites. To this day, the Masonic "cuckoo" reposes peacefully in its English nest!

Rome versus Freemasonry

On the continent, in particular, in Catholic Europe, a very different state of things has developed. What Arthur Singer has aptly termed, "Rome's war against Freemasonry," has been bitter and prolonged. Like their Freethinking and Protestant forerunners, masons perished at the hands of Catholic tribunals; from its earliest days to our own time the Catholic who joins a Lodge risks excommunication. Faced with such a menacing situation, masonry has reacted vigorously. Unlike their English brethren of the "Craft," they became aggressively political, often revolutionary in the State as well as against the Church. Even if bias has exaggerated their revolutionary activities, it is certain that the masons and their "left-wing" offshoots, the "Illuminati" and the "Carbonari," played an important part in the revolutionary sequence which overthrew Feudalism and absolute Monarchy on the European continent in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. "The animal is wicked; it defends itself when attacked." Such was the role of the Masonic Lodges in Catholic Europe during the past two centuries.

Exit the "Supreme Architect"

This sharply divergent attitude between masonry in Protestant and Catholic lands came to a head in 1878, when the French "Grand Orient" Rite, in the heat of its embittered struggle with Catholic and feudal reaction, removed the declaration of belief in "The Supreme Architect of the Universe" from its initiation ceremonies. Henceforth, atheists could become bona fide masons. The present writer is interested in the social realities behind Freemasonry, not in its archaic abracadabra and mystical mumbo-jumbo. We understand that this action of the continental mason was, and still is, repudiated by the masons in Britain and in other Protestant lands?

The Religion of Deism

What is the historic reason for the long and often bloody struggle between Catholic Christianity and Freemasonry? Actually, there would seem to be two reasons: one, theo-

The Churches and the Masonic Cult

The Church of Rome, from the very first, took up an attitude of extreme hostility to the new movement. That of the Protestant Churches has been, on the whole, hostile, but has varied from time to time. High officials of the Protestant Churches have been, and still remain, "on the (masonic) square." In the Church of Rome such a dual membership would be impossible. The German author, Arthur Singer, in his book, "Rome's War Against Freemasonry" (in German), has detailed an impressive list of condemnations hurled by the Papacy against Freemasonry, from the initial Bull of condemnation issued by Pope Clement the Twelfth on April 28, 1738, entitled "On the Eminent Watchtower of the Apostles" down to quite recent times. In the Papal States, before their incorporation into Italy in 1870, masonry was always illegal; and modern Catholic States, such as Spain and Portugal, still rigorously enforce this prohibition.

Freemasonry in Catholic and Protestant Lands

Broadly speaking, the evolution of Freemasonry has differed sharply in Catholic and Protestant lands. In fact, it would probably be true to state that it is the nature of its relations with, respectively, the Catholic and Protestant Churches that has decided the precise character taken by the Masonic Movement in various lands.

The English Masons

For example, in England where the "Craft" started, at least, publicly, "the glorious revolution" of 1688 had already overthrown both the continental-style absolute Monarchy of the Stuarts, as well as the Church of Rome. Neither the merchantile classes who had succeeded to power, nor the easy-going "Latitudinarian" Church of England of the period was interested in religious persecution and no action was taken against the masons. As a

logical, another, social. The first, theological one, is the more publicised, but is, actually, the less important. It consists in the indisputable fact that the theology of masonry is Deistic, not based on any dogmatic creed or special revelation. Whilst, or so we understand, the complex masonic ritual is a hotch-potch, much of which is derived by circuitous routes from the tenets of Gnostic heresies condemned by the Christian Church and, perhaps, from still more ancient and downright pagan cults. Thus, it would appear that masonic theology is the precise antithesis of the *exclusive* dogmatism of Catholic Christianity. Freemasonry, in fact, may, we think, accurately be described as the religion of Deism, as an offshoot, under a mystical form of the Deist Movement with which its earliest public manifestations were contemporary?

Two Secret Societies

Such seems to be the *theological* reason for the repeated condemnation of masonry by the Vatican. The other, in our submission, more important *social* one is to be found in the fact that both the Catholic Church, with its exclusive motto, "Outside the Church there is No Salvation," and the "Craft," with its terrible initial oaths of secrecy, are, essentially, secret societies and, as such, are mutually antipathetic? This applies, in particular, to the Jesuits and to their historic feud with the Masonic Lodges. Everyone who has studied at all deeply the history of the famous "Company," knows that its distinguishing feature from that of all other Catholic Orders is that it is "a Church within the Church." Or, within our present terms of reference, a secret society within a secret society!

BOOK REVIEW

LIFE

PITY it is that we have to be reminded that there is such a thing as life; but as most of us are too occupied with existence to think about living, perhaps it is as well that our snouts be jerked from the swill once in a while. The fault with most books which presume to show us where we err in our attitude to the vastness of our little orange is that such books are written rather to buttress their writers' beliefs than to inspire their readers. But now and then a book does appear, with the avowed intention of making us happier and better men, which bears the marks of an adult who, out of a large understanding of human perplexities, offers a *modus vivendi* that will elevate to courage, confidence and self-expression.

Such a book has made its appearance, written by Mr. C. G. L. Du Cann.* Like all Mr. Du Cann's writings, this book is distinguished by lucidity and conciseness, by sensitivity and humour. It has the first virtue of any piece of writing, that of being readable.

What after all is Life? It is not the formula of the scientists nor yet the ghost-ridden direction of the men of God. Rather is it the recognition of all the things in this world and the courage to face them—alone. Most groups are merely the refuges of the defeated, men who cannot face the music without hearing-aids, coalesced under a slogan to keep off reality. All gods are false, whether they be named God or Science; yet so potent is superstition that science-religion is becoming just as much an incubus on man's development as god-religion, against which sloth no doubt a future Bradlaugh will arise. In a conceivably adult epoch it will be wondered why men whose chief contribution to civilisation was the means of destroying it were not chastised as mischievous children but were on the contrary regarded as superior beings. No doubt this

* *Getting the Most Out of Life.* (Thorson's, 8s. 6d.)

Catholicism, Christian totalitarianism, has always banned secret societies, from the Freemasons to the "Irish Republican Army"! For that matter, the Masonic "Craft" is banned in Fascist states and, we understand, in Communist states also.

A Postscript on the Church of England

Protestantism is not totalitarian and, in its modernist, more liberal forms, does not appear to be incompatible with what is known to the outside world of Masonic Deistic theology. The present Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Fisher, is said to be a mason, and the recent apologist for Christian Masonry, who writes under the pseudonym of "Vindex," would appear to be an advanced Modernist. In the recent controversy in Anglican circles on the compatibility of membership of the Anglican Church and Masonry, it was noticeable that all Dr. Fisher's critics came from High Anglican circles. The Anglo-Catholic critics of Masonry, such as Fr. Hannah, whose *Darkness Visible* fiercely attacked Christian Masonry, and has just been followed by a new book, *Christianity by Degrees*, are Catholics without the Pope. They are in the wrong Church. They should join the Old Firm, the oldest secret society!

["Vindex" repudiates the Atheism of the French "Grand Orient." "There are indeed Grand Lodges and Grand Orients which we do not recognise. They have departed from certain unalterable landmarks, chief among them being belief in the 'great architect' and the non-political nature of the 'craft'." —(cf. *Light Invisible*, p. 135. "Vindex" should study the actual history of *Continental* Masonry, he would then find, *inter alia*, that the famous slogans of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," first emerged from the Masonic Lodges.)

aberration will be put down to our fear of life, the primitive urge which invariably demonstrates itself in destruction—in envy, malice, and suchlike wasting diseases. Any *weakling* can be brutal (and usually is when given the opportunity); it needs strength to be gentle. And unless a philosophy's purpose is to eradicate primitive destructive urges it is not worth the paper it is written on nor the hire of the platform from which it is bellowed forth.

Yet do men continue to ruin themselves with spleen for the "good" of the cause, in support of blinkered theories. Illusion must be defended at all costs, for illusion is their only shield against the power of life. They exist, their "life" being mostly other men's remarks. Take away their "authorities" and they are at once futile, even as a pyramid of acrobats, no matter how agile, cannot endure the departure of the man at the base.

The tragi-comedy of the echo, the man with his one bee (a borrowed one) in his only bonnet, lies in his conviction that the insistent buzzing is the whole hive, and his head-gear is the only wearable type of hat. Any apiarist and hatmaker would tell him different; but deafness to real authority is a basic necessity in the make-up of the utterly convinced.

The man who is alive is the man who has realised that all experience, all knowledge, all richness, can come only out of himself, and whose years, from cradle-yelp to grave-croak, are an unremitting fury of discovery; the man who is never penned in the cul-de-sac of intellectual monomania, is never unaware of the sun and the splendour beyond the farthing-dip frugality of even the most excellent of his fellows, and through the very vitality of using himself utterly is incapable of pettiness. Out of that man comes all that is best and most permanent in human society. Out of his absence comes a great stain of smoke from sea to sky, an Iron Curtain, and all the bitterness of unfulfilment.

The way to get the best out of life is to live it. As simple as that. Mr. Du Cann's book is there to show just how simple it is.

J. O'H.

Dogma and Reality

Written on the occasion of the centenary of a dogma and of the Marian Year

By ARTHUR SEEHOF (Hoellstein/Lorrach)

(Translated by F. Ransome)

WHEN 100 years ago, on December 8, 1853, a papal edict proclaimed the dogma of the "immaculate conception of the Holy Virgin" the Vatican, to all practical intents and purposes, merely gave finality to a movement which, in the early days of Christianity, had been set afoot *inter alia* by Gnostics and Manichæans, but above all by Orthodoxy and, in particular, the orthodox Cyrillus of Alexandria (381 and, in 444) when the Church, after having been given official recognition by Constantine and having thus attained a position of strength gave to Mary or "Mirja, mariée dans Bethlehem à un pauvre homme" (Voltaire "Examen important de Milord Bolinbroke"), "a poor peasant woman, earning her livelihood by spinning" (Celsus "Sermo Verus": True Word) the title of a virgin and the name of the Lord's Mother, which, compared with previously prevailing superstitions, was really nothing new. Already the mothers of Dionysos, Demeter and Istar, as well as the mothers of Pythagoras, Plato and Alexander of Macedon and of a good many others including Maja, the mother of Gautama Buddha, had been declared holy virgins with "immaculate" conception. According to reports by Seneca maidens at the time of Nero likewise had been sitting on the Capitol for many days and nights waiting to be "made with child" by Zeus in an "immaculate manner" and without losing their virginity. . . . Thus, in fact, the old superstition of a virginal mother of a god (Alexander of Macedon, for instance, had declared himself to be a god) had, without any diminution, been resurrected by Christianity and the dogma of the "immaculate conception of the Holy Virgin" proclaimed at the behest of Jesuits is, in fact, nothing but the purest superstition. However, not only this dogma consists of nothing but lies and frauds. . . . S. E. Verus shows and proves in his work "Comparative Summary—complete synopsis—of the four gospels unabridged" (published in Leipzig in 1897) that these gospels are mere fancy and fairy tales and originated "in quarters full of crude superstitions." The so-called gospels had "been written for their period and not for the present or even for 'all times'." And in the "Christ Myth" (published in 1910) the conscientious historian Arthur Drews submits "that a historical Jesus as described in the gospels and as he is still believed in even by present-day liberal theologians has never existed, but that the faith in Christ has originated independent of any historical personalities (and, therefore, of course, also of Mary, the legendary Mother of the Lord) known to us." The "historical" Jesus and even more so the "historical" Mary are of a later date than Paul and as such have "always lived only as ideas, as pious fancies in the heads of the congregations." "And not the New Testament with its four gospels pre-existed the Church, but the Church existed first, whilst the gospels emanated from the Church, and therefore, fully at the service of clerical propaganda and cannot, in any way, lay claim to historical significance." (Just as little, I like to add, as the Books of the Old Testament.) All these are facts which, long before Drews and Verus, other thinking persons had recognised and proved. Persons, for instance, as, above all, Jean Meslier, Hermann Samuel Reimarus or Frederick II of Prussia who said: "I have reason to doubt whether Holy Scriptures and Jesus Christ ever existed." Spinoza, Lessing, Charles Francois Dupuis ("Origine de tous les cultes, ou religion universelle"), Bruno Bauer, David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig

Feuerbach, John M. Robertson, Andrzej Neimojevski, and, I might add, a large number of other names and works. After the works of Verus and Drews there appeared the "Jesus Legend" by Georges Brandes and "Origin and Development of Christianity. History of a Faith," by Oswald Torstion. Brandes says: "Everything has been imagined on a large scale and is unreal," after he had previously drawn a comparison with the Tell legend (which had reached us from Persia and the far North); thus Torstion (somewhat like Drews) states that the legends of the gospels (of which there were far more than four) developed under later conditions as cult-legends of the, as stated before, later Christian mystery-religion.

However, what does real historical research and admission, what, even in our day, do authentically proved facts mean to the Church? Nothing at all, unless it is to its advantage. And that being so, the present occupant of the Holy See has simply instructed the faithful in all solemnity to praise for a full year—from December, 1953, to December, 1954—the dogma of the "immaculate conception of the Holy Virgin" which was proclaimed a century ago, and to believe in that dogma in exactly the same manner as in the fantastic dogma proclaimed only a few years ago (1950) of the "corporal ascension" of the legendary poor mother whose "holy body did not decompose in the grave" and of the not less legendary poor Jehoshua which means nothing but "Jehovah help" (Jesus being Greek).

Demon Justice

Accompanied by Virgil, down I went,
Down, down, down, down; out of the light;
Down, till we saw no more the firmament;
Down to the shades of everlasting night;
In that pitch darkness much I feared to tread,
But that great poet saw; I followed where he led.

Soon we saw flames, and shrieks assailed our ears,
The smell of brimstone to our nostrils came;
We slowly nearer drew, despite my fears,
And saw that screaming men writhed in the flame.
I turned towards my guide and to him said,
"Tell me, who are these tortured souls? Alive, or dead?"

"These souls," said he, "were Princes of the Church,
Who, for opinions, burned other men *alive*,
Just Heaven has left these prelates in the lurch,
Their bestial cruelty could never thrive.
Their god, though just, is similarly cruel:
To keep Hell's fires burning, a demon-god needs fuel."

"All even-handed justice must be cruel
To cruel men, or it would not be just;
Justice is Balance; balancing is dual;
Burning for burning; pain for mortal lust."
"But where is Christ's great mercy; tell me, where?"
I turned, but Virgil, guide and poet, was not there.

BAYARD SIMMONS.

THE BIBLE HANDBOOK. By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball.
Price 4s.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)
SHAKESPEARE AND OTHER ESSAYS. By G. W. Foote.
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This Believing World

As was to be expected, the B.B.C. took full advantage of Easter Week to pour out as much religion as was possible on the radio and, as a start, we had a kind of successor to Miss Sayers's play, "The Man Born to be King," with "Caesar's Friend," in which, of course, the Jewish High Priest was shown to be terribly jealous of "a carpenter" called by him "this young vagabond from Galilee." This was the play shown on TV and repeated on the eve of Good Friday so as to prepare all good Christians for the World's Greatest Crime (as it is called), in spite of the fact that God Almighty sent His Only Son, that is, Himself, to die so that all mankind should be saved—even the Jews. Though this obstinate and wicked "race," alas, rejected him! It is all so very sad.

Then we had repeated on the radio "The Story of the Bible" and, needless to add, it was as "Fundamentalist" as the most innocent female member of the Salvation Army. The Bible is "God's Word," every syllable and dot of which is "Holy" and "Inspired." That there ever was any Rationalist criticism of it is not even hinted at. There was a kind of apology that, in copying the Bible, "mistakes" had crept in, but subsequent revisions had put that all right, and we were told (for the 10,986th time) about the billions of people who had derived so much comfort and consolation from reading it, even from reading the faulty Bibles.

There was a lady relating bits of the progress of the Holy Book through the centuries, and a gentleman who, in a typical parsonic voice, "reverently" read portions of it. All this must have forced listeners to realise that the Bible *must* be God's Precious Word. We wonder what G. W. Foote who wrote his scathing *Bible Romances* over 60 years ago, a book which tore the Holy Bible into shreds and roused the mocking laughter of his readers, would have thought of this sorry performance in perpetuating such pious gullibility in 1954—if he could have heard it? And now, should "Bible banging" be barred from Free-thought propaganda?

Spiritualist "faith-healing" is not altogether having its own way. Many rivals are in the field—as an example, let us take Cardinal Griffin. He told a congregation at Launceston the other week that he had suffered ill-health for years until he was lucky enough to get hold of "Blessed Cuthbert's" skull, lent him for a fortnight by a bishop. Blessed Cuthbert was one of the unlucky R.C. priests "good" Queen Elizabeth I had hanged, drawn and quartered and so became a "Blessed." The Cardinal *immediately* got better, thus confirming his faith "in the heavenly power of this great martyr." What can a faith-healing Spiritualist believer say to that?

Considering the "apparent" lack of religion in Britain a reader of *Picture Post* wanted to know why so many songs with religious themes were so popular? Swiftly came the answer—deep, deep down in every Briton's heart true religion holds undisputed sway. What he does not like is "the stuffy, strictly according-to-the-Bible type of religion"—which reads rather strange in view of the way the Bible is boosted up all over the Christian and Jewish world, and as much as possible on the radio.

Is not the real truth that people will always sing a catchy tune, irrespective of the words or the sentiment of the song? Look at the way the Salvation Army is ready to put religious drivel to popular music-hall tunes—on the

grounds that the Devil always had the best tunes. The real test is a rousing tune which can be picked up quickly and remembered. And its popularity rarely depends on its theme, religious or secular. We doubt whether any hymn rivalled Charles Coborn's "Two Lovely Black Eyes" in popularity—and Coborn was a very religious man. But almost any excuse will do for the apathy towards religion shown by most people these days—in spite of the Rev. B. Graham.

But the B.B.C. did its best to shake that apathy. In its Holy Week programme religion almost knocks out Music-hall and kindred shows. We had "Behold and See," all about "the Lament of Mary," then Christina Rossetti's "Moods of Holy Week," Canon Hutchinson on "The Mystery of the Passion" (the real mystery is that people believe it), a "Passion Play" talk by Marjorie Gallop, "The Dying of the Lord Jesus," nearly an hour of a Good Friday Service, "With Heart and Voice," packed with religion, and numerous other items too long to quote further. And all about a mythical Jesus and a mythical crucifixion! We wonder whether the "apathy" will be shaken?

Correspondence

DEBATE AT NOTTINGHAM

SIR,—I beg you to grant space for a report on activity in the provinces, if one more competent has not already supplied it.

On Sunday, the 28th, my wife and I visited Nottingham and attended the "Cosmo" Debating Society's meeting. It was a fine afternoon, and the sunlight, streaming through the large windows of the steeply-slanting lecture theatre, warmed and cheered an assembly of about 300 people, some of whom had made great efforts to be there after their Sunday dinner in Leicester, Derby, Mansfield, and Ilkeston.

The occasion was a debate between Mr. G. H. Hunnings, for the Christadelphians, and Mr. T. M. Mosley, for the N.S.S., and the subject "The Resurrection: History or Legend?"

Mr. Hunnings supplied us all with a three-page biblical reference album, and then in twenty-five minutes of eloquent and coherent speech built up an apparently good case for accepting the historicity of this miraculous event. He first of all stressed the supreme importance of establishing the case because, as he said, quoting from Paul, "If Christ be not risen, all faith is vain." He then referred to the evidence found in the New Testament, which he skillfully used to assist his argument.

When T. M. Mosley waded in, it seemed to us that he did not need many minutes to tear down the seemingly impregnable structure his opponent had erected. The apparently cast-iron evidence by which Mr. Hunnings set such store was shown by Tom Mosley to be quite unreliable.

The absence of all reference to these marvellous events by impartial historians of the time did not help Mr. Hunnings either; and Tom observed that at that time in history the air was full of virgin births, resurrections, and miraculous events of that type. It was an even more credulous age than this one. He pointed out that Mr. Hunnings' own faction insisted that all other Christian sects misunderstood what was written in the Testament, and that only they were right in their interpretation.

Our opinion, borne out by interjections from the deeply interested audience, was that Mr. Mosley had much the better of the argument.

After the debate, the delighted audience took part in a short ceremony in which a testimonial was presented to Mr. Mosley, in recognition of 25 years service as Secretary to the "Cosmo." Many of them had subscribed to it.—Yours, etc.,

J. G. CARTWRIGHT.

P.S.—This morning we received a letter from our son in Malaya in which he expresses sorrow on learning of the death of Mr. Chapman Cohen. He saw it in an obituary notice in the *Manchester Guardian*.—J.G.C.

[We regret that pressure on our space delayed the publication of this letter.—EDITOR.]

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 FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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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.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 3 and 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.

Bradford N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday at 7 p.m.: HAROLD DAY and others.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: Messrs. J. W. BARKER, E. MILLS and others.

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

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, noon: F. A. RIDLEY.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

West London Branch N.S.S.—H. ARTHUR, W. J. O'NEIL, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD, G. H. TAYLOR. Hyde Park, 5 p.m.

INDOOR

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Friday, April 30, 7-15 p.m.: Discussion on Conway Memorial Lecture, "The Fulfillment of Man."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 2: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "The White Man's Burden."

Notes and News

In a letter published in last week's issue of this journal the Reverend Fr. Paris, Editor of our Catholic contemporary, the Maltese paper, *The Faith*, took exception to a remark made in one of our recent editorials in which attention was drawn to the virtually complete obscurity in which Christianity was shrouded during the first two centuries of its existence. In disproof of which assertion, Fr. Paris cites the existence of the Gospels themselves, and declares that they as and when considered simply as historical documents, give a full account of how Christianity actually started. But, surely, this is to argue in a circle? The Gospels guarantee Christianity, and Christianity guarantees the Gospels! As Fr. Paris goes on to recommend us to read a book entitled *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, we repay the suggestion by recommending him, in turn, to read Walter Cassell's famous book, *Supernatural Religion*, where he will find what, in our opinion, are unanswerable proofs that our Gospels—that is, the Gospels in which we have them to-day—were unknown in, and to, the Church before about A.D. 150. As for their value as "evidence," it was obvious even to the early pagan writer, Celsus (c. 200?), that the Christian Scriptures had been rewritten "once, twice, many times." We would like to ask Fr. Paris how Jesus could, simultaneously, have talked in the same way as he is quoted

by "John" and by the Synoptic writers?

However, when we complained of the "obscurity" of early Christianity we were not, actually, referring to the Christians' own account of the origin of their faith: all religions give detailed accounts of their origins, and, incidentally, none of them believe *each other*! For example, Catholic writers criticise the Koran or the Mormon Holy Books with a scepticism worthy of *The Freethinker*! What we were actually indicating was the almost complete lack of any reference to early Christianity, or to Christ himself, in the surviving pagan and Jewish literature of the period. No such references exist, apart from an obvious forgery in the extant text of Josephus, and a doubtful reference in Tacitus, contradicted, if genuine, by another doubtful reference in Pliny (e.g., Tacitus refers to a "huge multitude" of Christians in Rome about A.D. 64, whilst, half a century later, his friend and colleague, Pliny, had, to judge from his correspondence, never heard of Christianity until he reached Asia Minor about A.D. 112, when he wrote to the Emperor Trajan for information about the sect). Probably our oldest extant reference to Christianity—and that at second hand—is Lucian's reference to Peregrinus's connection with the sect, about A.D. 170, quoted in our last week's editorial. If the Gospels are, as he alleges, completely historical, will Fr. Paris, please, either quote us some *non-Christian* evidence, or else explain their silence? After all, gods are not born of virgins, or rise from the dead, every day.

Amongst the founders of the advanced movements of to-day, some of the most eminent have been unaccountably neglected. Amongst such was William Thompson, of Cork, Socialist, Co-operator, Freethinker and Feminist, who, between his birth in 1775 and his death in 1833, played a notable pioneering rôle in all the above movements. We must congratulate Dr. Richard K. P. Pankhurst, himself the bearer of a famous name in Feminist circles, on writing the first biography—and a rattling good one—of this versatile pioneer of so many of the advanced movements which have "made good" between our age and Thompson's own.

William Thompson was the friend and, sometimes, the critic of his eminent contemporaries, Jeremy Bentham, the celebrated Utilitarian, and Robert Owen, the famous pioneer of Atheism and Socialism, besides being the critic of James Mill and the opponent in debate of his still more famous son, John Stuart Mill. William Thompson was both a leader of the then young Co-operative Movement, then outspokenly Communistic in theory, and was himself an important thinker who wrote outstanding books in support of the then novel and unpopular creeds of Socialism and Co-operation. He was, also, we believe, the first male pioneer of "Rights—and Votes—for Women" at a time when the Law still regarded them as, at best, perpetual minors, at worst, chattels without adequate legal protection. Modern social historians have ranked Thompson as, perhaps, the most important English-speaking predecessor of Karl Marx and of his world-famous theories. Dr. Pankhurst analyses his social and intellectual rôle in the evolution of Socialist theory. An original and scholarly biography, upon which we congratulate both the author, Dr. Pankhurst, and the publishers, Messrs. Watts. We are all expecting great things from Dr. Pankhurst.

[*William Thompson*, by Dr. Richard K. P. Pankhurst, published by C. A. Watts & Co. Ltd. price 12s. 6d.]

Here's news! At the municipal elections in Israel, the borough of Nazareth elected six Communist councillors. We doubt if Jesus of Nazareth ever foresaw such a fate for his home town!

Christian Origins Again—2

By H. CUTNER

JUST as Mr. A. Robinson in his *Origins of Christianity* goes to such thoroughly exploded "authorities" as Papias, Irenæus, and Eusebius, for some proof of Jesus and his Gospels, so he goes to what he calls the "Jewish" evidence, and actually makes the astonishing assertion—without a particle of proof—that Jesus Christ of Nazareth and his followers (Apostles?) are mentioned in the Talmud. His exact words are "in the Talmud he and his followers are regularly called *Notzrim*." It will, I hope, be of interest to hear what a very learned Christian theologian says on this point. In his *Lost and Hostile Gospels*, the Rev. S. Baring-Gould, trying to explain why Jesus of Nazareth is not mentioned in the Talmud, says (page 66): "If it be a true solution, it proves that the Jews in A.D. 500, when the Babylonian Gemara was completed, had no traditions whatsoever concerning Jesus of Nazareth."

Baring-Gould goes deeply into details about the Talmud, and adds: "It will be seen at once that the date of the Talmudic Jeschu is something like a century earlier than that of the Jesus of the Gospels. Moreover, it cannot be said that Jewish tradition asserts their identity. On the contrary, learned Jewish writers have emphatically denied that the Jeschu of the Talmud is the Jesus of the Gospels."

Baring-Gould gives the names and statements of some of these Jewish writers—and here is a typical extract: "The Rabbi Salman Zevi entered into the question with great care in a pamphlet, and produced ten reasons for concluding that the Jeschu of the Talmud was not the Jesus, son of Mary, of the Evangelists." But will these and similar arguments have the slightest effect on Mr. Robertson? Not on your life. He will still continue to inform his reverent Rationalist readers (who are the only ones most likely to read him) that "Jesus and his followers are (therein) regularly called *Notzrim*"—and they will, of course, believe him. Let me assure the reader that, whatever else may be in the Talmud, it provides no evidence whatever for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth or of his followers. (That is, if by "his followers" he means the Apostles.)

As some readers know, I have often quoted the shattering evidence of Trypho in the famous *Dialogue* he had with Justin Martyr about A.D. 150 to prove that there were some Jews then who emphatically denied the historical existence of Jesus, and who claimed, as Trypho did, that the whole story was "invented"—the word used by Trypho and no doubt correctly reported by his Christian opponent. This passage has not been made enough of by Freethinkers—perhaps because too few of them could wade through the "prophetic" twaddle enunciated by Justin to convince Trypho. I call it shattering because I know of few arguments which make the reverent upholders of Jesus so angry. Mr. Robertson can hardly conceal his rage when he refers to it.

But he has made a new and remarkable discovery. He has found out that it is a "booby-trap." To use his own words—the "mythicists" fall "one after another into the simplest booby-trap ever set for the unwary." Now a booby-trap has to be set, so here we have in the year A.D. 150, according to Mr. Robertson, either Justin himself or Trypho or both setting a trap for the unwary and stupid "mythicist" in the year A.D. 1954, and into it we fall—meaning me and those who think like me. In my forty years of controversy, I have not come across anything sillier than this hopeless bilge.

Let me give the exact words used by Trypho:—

"But Christ, if he has indeed been born, and exists anywhere, is unknown and does not even know himself, and has no power until Elias comes to anoint him and make him

manifest to all. And you, having accepted a groundless report, invent a Christ for yourselves and for his sake are considerably perishing."

All this means, says Mr. Robertson, is that as "Jesus was not proclaimed by Elijah; therefore he was not Messiah" just as simple as that! But will the reader notice that Trypho says "But Christ, if he has indeed been born," and ask himself why should he say that? If Trypho meant only that Jesus was not the Messiah, he could never have doubted his *birth*, surely? No, it is as plain as the noonday sun that Trypho refused to believe the whole Christian story. If there had been a Crucifixion, if the remarkable events were true which followed it as narrated in Acts, if there really had been a Peter and a Paul both preaching Christ Jesus to the Jews in the Jerusalem synagogue, if there had been hundreds or thousands of Jewish converts, it would have been impossible for Trypho to doubt the *birth* of Jesus (or Christ). I say, as I have always said, since I stumbled on it many years ago, that this one clear passage from Trypho completely disposes of the idiotic statement so often made by Jews, Christians, and reverent Rationalists, that the Jews never questioned the existence of Jesus. If the Jews do not *now* question it, it is because their vanity is highly tickled when they see five or six hundred millions of Christians worshipping a Jew as a God, and a Jewess as a Goddess; and they are now more than ever anxious for this to continue. With them, heart and soul, are Rationalists like Mr. Robertson. And it is very amusing to find him moaning that "incredible as it may seem"—"otherwise reputable scholars" agree with the Mythicists and not with him. I am glad he acknowledges that there are "reputable" scholars on our side.

Mr. Robertson talks learnedly about a "revolutionary" movement "proved to be such by internal evidence and by a comparative study of the Synoptics" headed first by John the Baptist and then by Jesus "the Nazoraean"—for which I contend there is no "internal" evidence whatever. There were, of course, many revolts against the Romans, culminating in the one by Bar. Cochba about A.D. 130. But, in spite of Mr. Robertson, as there was neither a John the Baptist nor a Jesus the "Nazoraean," they could never have headed any revolts. He claims that John the Baptist was "an historical individual." Let me assure the reader that there is no more evidence for the existence of this gentleman than for Jesus. Both are myths—and in my next article I will try to show why John the Baptist is *not* an "historical individual."

Correspondence

BLOOD SPORTS

SIR,—It is heartening to see the N.S.S. taking up the cause of the abolition of cruel sports, and clamouring for the *Grand National* to be thus classed, and therefore condemned.

Since it seems to me essential that we, as humanist, humanitarian Freethinkers, should be clear in our minds about means and ends, and should unequivocally oppose the former when these are evil and cruel, may I call your readers' attention to the fact that, in one year alone, over two million experiments were carried out on animals, most of them without any anaesthetic.

Further, for the supervision of the vivisectors, there are precisely five inspectors—an increase of two from the time when the annual number of animal experiments was a mere three hundred or so.

Leaving out the question of whether animal experiments are of any value in treating human disease (and this is more and more open to doubt, as even the most orthodox of doctors now admit the extremely close relation between *mind* and body, and hence the divergence between animal and human), surely all humane-minded persons should be in agreement to do their utmost to urge the Home Office to appoint far more inspectors and to impose far more stringent conditions on the vivisectors.

EVELYN BELCHAMBERS.

A Chronology of British Secularism

By G. H. TAYLOR

(Continued from page 123)

(Omission: 1906—Many secularists are supporting women's rights and the first "suffra-gent" is Bayard Simmons, who goes to Brixton gaol.

Correction: Foote-Warschauer debate 1911, not 1913).

1934. Secularists protest against the Incitement to Disaffection Bill and maintain the now yearly attack on the B.B.C. In the year the N.S.S. executive sponsor some 500 lectures, mostly open-air; the Dublin Branch N.S.S. is meeting with persistent priest-inspired Catholic hostility. Cohen writes *Letters to a Country Vicar*, Geo. Bedborough exposes the attitude of the clergy to war, and Whitehead's *Inquiry into Spiritualism* appears. Rationalist publications include McCabe's *Riddle of the Universe To-day*, maintaining his reputation as "Haeckel's bulldog," *A Picture Book of Evolution* and Haldane's *Fact and Faith*, while Vivian Phelips brings his former best-seller up to date with *Modern Knowledge and Old Beliefs*.

1935. Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner (b. 1858) dies. The N.S.S. Principles and Objects are revised; the E.C. is responsible for over 500 meetings in the year. A lengthy epistolary debate between Haldane and Lunn (a Catholic) is published as *Science and the Supernatural*. McCabe writes a *Social Record of Christianity* and also edits a Voltaire selection; other current works in the doctrinal attack include *Did Jesus Ever Live?* (Dr. L. G. Rylands), *Letters to the Lord and Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought* (Cohen), and Bertrand Russell's *Religion and Science*, which is in the tradition of Draper and White.

1936. Secularists condemn the new Sunday Trading Act. E. Thurtle, M.P., attempts a blasphemy law repeal bill. Other bodies with which the N.S.S. is now co-operating are the Society for the Abolition of Blasphemy Laws, the Secular Education League, the Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, the League of Nations Union and the National Peace Council. The N.S.S. executive has sponsored 542 meetings in the year, the branches having, as usual, their own lists. Chapman Cohen has a serious and extended illness. H. Cutner's *Pagan Elements in Christianity* appears. J. W. Barker is now lecturing for the N.S.S.

1937. Two of *The Freethinker's* earliest contributors die, A. B. Moss (b. 1854) and W. Heaford (b. 1855), the former maintaining an active interest in the cause right to the end. A new official point of secularist attack is totalitarianism, whether religious or political. McCabe writes his *Papacy in Politics To-day*.

1938. F. J. Gould (b. 1855) dies. The N.S.S. Annual Conference is given a civic reception by the Lord Provost and Corporation of Glasgow. There is Catholic-inspired agitation to prevent the International Freethought Congress (now the World Union of Freethinkers) from meeting in London: the agitation is carried on by means of petitions to the Home Secretary and questions in the House; nevertheless the event takes place most successfully, the N.S.S. playing its part as usual. The executive of the N.S.S. has been responsible for 658 meetings in the year, and T. M. Mosley is now lecturing regularly in Nottinghamshire. There has been an Ecclesiastical Committee sitting on Church doctrine revision, and McCabe criticises their findings in *The Passing of Heaven and Hell*. Cohen exposes the similarities of Fascism and Christianity and is also producing a series of "Pamphlets for the People." F. A.

Ridley joins South London Branch and lectures, besides writing for *The Freethinker*.

1939. Llewellyn Powys (b. 1887) dies. Secularists meet at Bradlaugh's grave, on which an outrage has been committed. *The Freethinker* Jubilee Fund and the Rationalist Endowment Fund are launched. There is a revision of the Constitution of the N.S.S., whose Executive sponsor about 700 lectures during the year: winter programmes are seriously curtailed by the black-out. C. McCall begins lecturing for the N.S.S.

1940. Geo. Bedborough dies. The N.S.S. helps to resist the clerical agitation for religious tests for teachers, and attacks the arbitrary war regulations regarding religious oaths, church parades and the status of army chaplains. Birkenhead Branch N.S.S. is expelled, and Surgeon Rear-Admiral C. R. Beadnell becomes R.P.A. president. Cohen publishes *Almost an Autobiography*.

1941. *The Freethinker*, N.S.S. and Secular Society Ltd. offices in Farringdon Street are destroyed by fire in an air raid; the new offices are at 2, Furnival Street. A Freethinker War Damage Fund is started. Secularists protest against the government's suppression of publications (non-secularist). L. Ebury is fined £5 for blasphemy after a Hyde Park meeting. The Bradford Branch N.S.S. is revived and H. Day begins regular lecturing.

1944. There has been an R.P.A. manifesto to M.P.s on secular education, and the Butler Act is criticised by rationalists and secularists.

1945. During the war there has been an enormous decline in direct propaganda by open-air meetings, but L. Ebury has been able to maintain unbroken continuity: the annual conferences have been confined to London. The new offices of the secular movement are at 41, Gray's Inn Road.

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Ethical Rationalism

By D. G. HOLLIDAY

THE inquiring mind may be likened to a man who finds himself perched upon one of a number of rocks which rise up from the depths of extensive waters. Gazing around, he becomes aware of his situation and attempts to determine whether or not his rock is safe. But the crown sheers off steeply into the water, and he can see little of its lower regions. The submarine form of a nearby rock, on the other hand, is clearly discernible, and he sees that it has its base fixed firmly in the sand of the sea bed. He therefore springs across the small intervening gap, and now considers himself safe. But is his rock *really* safe? Obviously he can never know with absolute certainty. Yet, peering through the water at the rock from which he has just jumped, he sees that it sits at a dangerous angle in the sand; and further examination shows that the other rocks appear to be likewise insecure. So far as he can discern then, of the statements taking the form "This rock is safe," applied to each rock in turn, the one applied to his own rock, though perhaps not *wholly* true, is at least the truest.

We have in the foregoing a man in search of truth. Is his search justifiable? Certainly it is; for his continued existence depends upon it. In this light the motto, "We search for truth," may also be justified: let us seek out truth and build upon its trusty rock. Yet this is but an incomplete representation. Not only do we pursue truth with rational purpose: we also feel an innate and unreasoned desire to embrace it. We have, in short, a truth instinct; and this can be understood only in terms of organic evolution. We need only refer again to the illustration of the man and the rocks, however, to supply an explanation. Indeed, it has already been implied, for the man's search is motivated by fear of destruction and is a feature of the struggle for existence. We may therefore join with Herbert Spencer and speak of "... *truth*, guiding us to successful action and consequent maintenance of life, . . . *error*, leading to failure and therefore towards death . . ." Thus concern for truth arises naturally out of the self-preservation instinct, and the greater powers of survival which it gives have ingrained it as an instinct in its own right.

It follows from this that the pursuit of truth for its own sake is instinctive, and not rational. It must therefore be classed with those personal faculties which, in varying degrees, make life worth living: faculties operative in such emotional realms as those of music, poetry, love and religion. The innate rationalism which derives from the truth instinct is thus scarcely more laudable than the religion which derives from the self-preservation instinct, and one who devotes his life to the study of the world without regard to the uses of his work (direct, indirect, or purely intellectual), and thus sacrifices humanism to reason, is comparable to the Christian who professes altruism in his second commandment and veils egoism in his first. Of course, in actual fact everyone has a certain amount of disinterested concern for humanity at large; but there is no doubt that the maxim, "Truth for its own sake," has quite a number of votaries, and their immature and half-fanatical activities provide a useful literary theme (eg., Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*).

Because it is instinctive, innate rationalism is a weapon of the individual and militates for personal superiority. The search for truth should therefore be carefully controlled, and used either for the benefit of mankind or for personal pleasure. In the latter case it must never be

allowed to encroach upon the beliefs and needs of others.

Genuine rationalism, on the other hand, is an ethical system and derives from the use of reason for impersonal ends. It may be justified by the most cursory examination of the social world. For it will be seen that the sole cause of strife is difference of opinion and direction of will. These obviously spring from the use of personal status and experience as a guide, and it is only by the consideration of all things objectively that a state of amity can be attained. Theistic systems are personal and have greater concern for the relationship between Self and God than for human relations. Their morality is consequently saturated with bigotry and dogma, and they lose sight of the real purpose of ethics, petrifying actions with the glosses "virtue" and "sin," and giving but nominal consideration to the complex ramifications which develop with every human event.

The task of the rationalist is, then, to increase happiness and decrease suffering; and there are no qualifying clauses in terms of circumstances, ways and means, etc. This he can best execute (apart from personal vocation), firstly, by encouraging the study of astronomy, evolution, and comparative philosophy and religion, thus diminishing the influence of the rapacious Self; and secondly, by preventing, so far as is within his power, the imposition of the beliefs and wishes of individuals and individual bodies upon unsympathetic sections of humanity. Needless to say, this second course of action will oppose all ruling of the Church over secularist communities, and similarly all attempts of the State to frustrate the needs of the religious.

It would probably be presumptuous of any man, as the product of millions of years of evolutionary law- and instinct-building, to maintain that a world-view free of unconscious urge is possible; and it might be said of ethical rationalism that it proceeds from the gregarious instinct. Nevertheless, the emancipation from evolutionary law which it represents, though not absolute, is probably the most exalted to which the mind of man can attain. For whereas evolution is concerned solely with survival, ethical rationalism seeks only for universal happiness. If the whole of humanity were to be erased without the incur-rence of suffering, either mental (in the form of fore-knowledge) or physical, then ethical rationalism could have no regrets. It might be added in parenthesis that I personally feel that the evolution of hydrogen atoms into human brains is somehow "good," and that therefore the continued existence of such brains, with the attendant production of works of art and science, has some kind of "value." But this is merely a facet, and I am quite unable to classify it.

Obituary

DR. MAX ISENBERG

It is with great regret that we have to announce the death of the well-known American Freethinker, Dr. Max Isenberg. Mr. Jack Benjamin writes us that Dr. Isenberg died suddenly on February 22. Dr. Isenberg was well-known for his questions and answers columns in the *American Freethought Press*. He was also a regular contributor to the *Indian Rationalist*.

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