

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

WE remarked recently that the origins of the Christian religion were shrouded in almost complete obscurity. Despite the rather naive claim made by our Catholic critic, Fr. Paris (Malta) that we can rely upon the Gospels for such an explicit account, the fact remains that, until almost the end of the second century, secular literature in what Gibbon accurately termed, "an age of science and learning,"

was silent about what it, no doubt, regarded as merely yet another "Oriental superstition." A glance at the alleged Pagan and Jewish "evidences" may be useful in this connection.

The earliest non-Christian references to the alleged Founder of the new religion would, if their authenticity

were not now universally discredited, be the two references to be found in *our* text of the Jewish historian, Josephus, who wrote about the last decade of the first century of what is now known as the Christian Era. The author nowadays is usually known by the Latinised version of his name as "Josephus." If these references were authentic, the Christians would be entitled to make the most of them, since, as and when judged by the normal standards applied to historical evidence, they would, undoubtedly, possess considerable value. For Josephus, born about 38 of our era, was himself an ex-governor of Galilee, being a contemporary of the earliest Christian propaganda. He must have known of the existence, at least, of the new sect, since Galilee, after all, was only a small district, whilst Judaea itself, we understand, is about the size of Wales. Nor was Josephus the only Galilean historian of this era. He, also, had a rival, one Justin of Tiberius, whose work has been "lost," but who seems to have made a special point of denouncing what he considered as the mistakes of Josephus. However, the learned Photius, a Byzantine scholar of the ninth century, who had Justin's work before him, tells us that it said nothing about the new religion.

The "Evidence" of Josephus

The same also applies to the works of Josephus. Origen, the most learned of the early Christian Fathers, who had Josephus's original text before him, also says that he made no reference either to Christ or to early Christianity. As is generally known, there are two in *our* present text. One of these, a reference to the martyrdom of a certain Jacob, or James, "the brother of the so-called Christ," is too vague to be quoted as definite evidence. The name "Jacob" was a common one amongst the ancient Jews, and would-be "Christs" or "Messiahs" were two-a-penny at the time. As we pointed out recently in this column, there are half-a-dozen "Christs" to be found within the covers of the New Testament itself. It is only in the light of the orthodoxy of a later day that, say, the "Christ" of "Luke" and the "Christ" of "Revelations" can be regarded as one and the same person. As for the other longer passage about Christ in Josephus, it is sufficient to consider the text attentively to see that no orthodox Jew, such as we know Josephus to have been, could possibly have written it. The

actual phraseology is that of a *Christian* forger whose approximate date is known. For this reference to Christ was, as we have seen, unknown to Origen, who died about A.D. 258, and was known to Eusebius, who quotes it, and who died about A.D. 340. Somewhere between these dates accordingly, the actual reference may be dated.

In his famous book, *John the Baptist and the Messiah Jesus*, the late Dr. Robert Eisler made the interesting suggestion that, whilst the passage in *our* Josephus is an undoubted forgery, it may have been inserted by its Christian forger in place of a genuine passage in the original text. This passage, argues Eisler, was, as we should expect, from an

orthodox Jew like Josephus, a hostile one. However, apart even from the explicit denial of Origen writing over a century after publication, that any such passage existed, even if well founded, such an attack would merely indicate that the new religion *had* a founder. In their anxiety to deny the historical existence of "The Jesus of the Gospels" our "mythicist" friends, at times, give the impression that, unlike every other known religion, Christianity never had *any* founder! But this is merely to substitute a new miracle for those of the Gospels. Whatever Josephus may have known about the new sect—and it would seem that so well-informed a contemporary of its origins must have known *something*—there is no mention of it in his extant text.

The Roman Historians: Tacitus

Next to that now found in Josephus, the most quoted reference to early Christianity is the famous passage in Tacitus, which describes how "an enormous multitude" of Christians were put to death by Nero in Rome about the year 64 of our era. Tacitus, a Roman aristocrat who detested the Jews, was alive at the time and wrote about half a century later. He was, obviously, writing at second-hand, and the authenticity of the passage is not beyond dispute. It is, of course, possible that Christians were executed by Nero at a time when the Jews were continually rebelling against Rome and when Christianity was still regarded by the Roman government as just another Jewish sect. It seems, however, very unlikely that "an enormous multitude" perished, and if Tacitus is literally correct in this description it is quite irreconcilable with that given by the next Roman witness to Christian origins.

Pliny and Trajan

This was none other than the well-known Roman savant, Pliny, a friend and colleague of Tacitus, who was governor of Bythnia (Asia Minor) round about 112 of our era. In his official capacity, Pliny wrote to the then emperor, Trajan, asking for legal advice as to the status of the new religion in the eyes of the Roman laws. Both his letter and Trajan's reply are extant, and indicate that neither of these exceptionally able administrators knew anything about the new religion. This appears hardly credible if, as Tacitus alleges, "a huge multitude" of Christians had, half a cen-

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Pagan "Evidence" About Christian Origin

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

tury earlier, been put to death by Nero under the most sensational circumstances imaginable. *Both* documents can hardly be genuine; possibly *neither* is.

Suetonius and "Chrestos"

A few years later we have the reference of Suetonius, in his description of the reign of Nero's predecessor, Claudius, of how that emperor expelled the Jews from Rome on account of a riot in, presumably, the Jewish quarter, "at the instigation of a certain Chrestos." Apart from the fact that Suetonius was actually a gossip-writer rather than a scientific historian, the phrase is too vague to be quoted as evidence. If, as seems probable, "Chrestos" was the equivalent of "Christos," the latter designation was a title, not a name, and the sentence would appear to indicate that would-be Jewish Messiahs who made trouble for the Roman Empire were found in the capital itself, apart from the province of Judaea itself. There is no evidence that *our* Christ is referred to: "Chrestos" appears to have lived in *Rome*.

Lucian and Celsus

All the previous references, to which a perhaps genuine letter of the Emperor Hadrian, written about the Christians in Alexandria, may be added, even if genuine, merely tell us, on information obtained at second hand, that Christianity already existed. They tell us *nothing about it*. It is, in fact, very unlikely that any of the "authorities" cited above had ever *seen* a Christian, except, perhaps, Pliny, and then only when he was on the bench and the accused Christians in the dock on the criminal charge (in Roman law) of belonging to a "secret society." None of them give any *real* information about the new religion. It is only when we come to Lucian's account of the shady ex-Christian, Peregrinus, who committed suicide at the

Olympic Games in 169, that we have a reference to the Church which *may* be based on personal knowledge. A little later (c. 200?) the Pagan "apologist," Celsus, seems to have made a close first-hand study of the new religion, the growing power of which he obviously feared. But an account of a religion written two hundred years *after* its origins can hardly be cited as evidence *for its origins*.

A Modern Example

Christianity originated some two thousand years ago. But we have more *modern* examples of how religions originate. "Mormonism," for example, originated, not in the first, but in the 19th century; not in ancient Rome, but in modern America; not in obscurity, but in the full glare of publicity. It was based, in the case of Joseph Smith, no less than in that of Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels, on an original "revelation" from Heaven. But do our Maltese critic, Fr. Paris, and his co-religionists accept the miraculous origin of Mormonism? They do not. In their descriptions of the revelation vouchsafed by the Lord to his American prophet by the banks of the Susquehanna River, in the State of New York, U.S.A., the writers of Catholic theological encyclopædias almost qualify for membership of "The World Union of Freethinkers" by the scornful tone which they adopt! We respectfully suggest to our reverend critic that he applies to his own creed the *same* critical standard as he applies to *other* religions which, at least as far as the contemporary evidence for their origin is concerned, can certainly produce more contemporary evidence than can the Christian religion. Which, we must repeat, emerged from complete obscurity into the light of history only about two centuries after its reputed origin.

Reverent "Inquiry"

By G. H. TAYLOR

IN *The Unitarian* for March there is a plea for "free and reverent inquiry." A moment's thought should convince any reasonable person that inquiry cannot at the same time be both free and reverent. That is, free from a preconceived conclusion and yet loaded with one, free from dogma and yet filled with a dogma. For what is a reverent approach but a dogma in itself? Surely if there is anything worth revering it should emerge as a *result* of inquiry. We do not start with reverence as a means of finding whether there is anything worth revering. In that case the rabbit is in the hat to start with and it is no surprise when it is pulled out.

Unitarians and Free Christians would do well to consider what is meant by reverence. For the psychologist reverence is a state of mind involving four elements; wonder, subjection, fear and gratitude (taken from *Everyman's Psychology*, by Sir John Adams).

When plain Mr. Brown becomes the Rev. Brown what happens? So far as Brown himself is concerned, nothing happens. He is the same growing individual that he was before. No supernatural break is detectable in his make-up. No one has infused a "divine spark," or any such nonsense, into him. His bodily functions and mental limitations are unaltered. No God-inoculated bonus lifts him above the ordinary run of mankind. He knows no more of the next world than he did before. The appellation Dr. or Prof. may, or may not, be taken as a sign that the bearer knows more about *this* world. The difference is between given and ungiven data. The Rev. Brown is just as ignorant about his stock-in-trade (God, Soul, Heaven, etc.) as he was when plain Mr. Brown.

In a word, he is the same individual with an artificial handle to his name. But although nothing extraordinary has happened to Brown, something *has* happened to the more credulous of his flock. By them he is now regarded as the specially chosen repository of divine wisdom. And here we see how the four factors, wonder, subjection, fear and gratitude, come into play:—

- (1) The wonder is the index to the essential mystery of what the Reverend stands for.
- (2) Subjection places the congregation in a position of inferiority. They regard him with a degree of awe.
- (3) Fear marks the imminence, the danger, of their situation if they fail to give the Reverend due respect.
- (4) Finally, gratitude is necessary for the collection box.

Go into any Christian Church and, for once ignoring the time-honoured custom, take your brains with you. Note how the service is designed to get the congregation into a reverent, passive, receptive state of mind so that the preacher can get away with the twaddle that is to come. See how the congregation assemble in the traditional quiet, like conspirators on the eve of a dark plot. See how the individual is sunk in the mass responses so that anything he has left in the way of critical power is completely submerged in the regimented emotion. The music, the architectural surroundings and ornamentation, the unctuous tone of the preacher, all combine to put an effective blanket on individual thought.

Mark what follows—a sermon in which, as the preacher warms to his theme, the boundary lines between fact and

(Continued on page 148)

INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS—1

Len Ebury

A YORKSHIREMAN by birth, Mr. Ebury came to the London area at an early age. As a young man he fought in the 1914-18 war, but was later encouraging and defending conscientious objection. In 1926 he contacted the N.S.S. through outdoor meetings and it was not long before he began to speak himself for the Society. He has been doing so ever since, year after year, in a sequence broken only by illness. In 1941 he was fined for blasphemy, probably the latest, and possibly the last, case in this country. He carried on right through the last war, at a time when all propagandist movements found it difficult to maintain their outdoor contacts. Mr. Ebury must by now have spoken at some 800 outdoor N.S.S. meetings, and as he is still young enough to deliver many more lectures, he will perhaps create an N.S.S. record. He will get no medal for this, and expects none, valuing far more the high esteem in which he is held by his fellow members and friends in the Society of which he is to-day a Vice-President. He is here interviewed by G. H. Taylor in the first of a series.

Are you one of those who think "Bible-banging" is out of date?

Definitely not.

It isn't much read these days, is it?

And that's exactly why it's necessary to introduce Christians to their fetish book. It may not be accepted now as literally true, but it's still the Holy of Holies and regarded as the repository of prophetic wisdom, the acme of dietetic teaching and the source of moral uplift. The Christian commandments are accepted as the basis of English law, and the Sermon on the Mount as the greatest example of purest ethical beauty. Now it's necessary to refute all these claims because they constitute the basis of the average Christian's belief.

What about Christian doctrine? Is there still so much need for attacking it?

Certainly, because the last line of defence of Christianity—not mere God belief—is the moral one. The selfishness and utter immorality of the doctrine of Atonement, a vicarious sacrifice and salvation by belief, and the unpardonable sin of unbelief, are so repugnant to any sense of ethical justice that they really constitute a most effective weapon in a Freethought lecturer's armoury.

Do you find it easier to convert the young?

I think, perhaps, it's easier to convert the young, but active participation in support of freethought comes rather with maturity.

You seem to enjoy interruptions. Do you welcome them?

Yes, when they're not too persistent, because they hold the attention of the audience, who are always out partly to be amused.

Do parsons often interrupt?

No. I wish they would.

Have you noticed any marked swing of interest since you first started?

No. I get the same stupid questions now as I did then: for example, "Who made the trees?"—an evergreen chestnut.

Are there many questions of a political flavour?

Very few: only the occasional use of the time-honoured objection that Freethought propaganda is a waste of time.

Are the crowds smaller than when you started?

They are.

And the reason?

I should say it's due to apathy and escapism caused by the war and present fears. And it's very easy nowadays to succumb to entertainments within easy reach. But I have

noticed that where consistent propaganda has been carried on there have been signs of increasing interest.

Yes, the audiences want entertainment as well as argument. When do you use ridicule?

Whenever possible.

But you don't depend on it?

No. Ridicule is an effective weapon, but unless coupled with serious argument it defeats its own purpose.

What about a spot of advice for the beginner?

Let him make a few notes and have a set subject in mind so that when he's interrupted or distracted he can always start again with "As I was saying." For the rest, only practice makes perfect.

Wilfred Pickles coming up. Have you had any embarrassing moments?

I had nothing else when I first started. But that stage is long past.

How can the N.S.S. members in attendance best help the speaker?

By pretending to be Christians and asking questions to attract an audience, then judiciously fading out when the audience is interested or a genuine Christian filled with the Holy Ghost is emboldened to intervene. They can also help the cause by selling literature, carrying the platform and forming the nucleus of an audience. People are like sheep. They won't gather round a platform where there is only one man and a dog.

How do you deal with the protagonist of "There must be Something"?

This question is put in many forms and when answered in one way it's brought up in another. I try to deal with it in a scientific manner, explaining the self-sufficiency of matter and energy in the light of evolution. I have also a number of wisecracks to render even this topic amusing.

Do you welcome the liberal Christians of the Inge and Barnes type?

It's often useful to be able to quote, on the authority of Christian divines, historical and scientific truths which undermine the fundamentals of their religion. But the other side of the medal is that they give an air of intellectual respectability to an outworn creed, so that under the cloak provided by the scholar, the fundamentalist and the obscurantist find refuge. Even some rationalists are apt to pay lip-service to the Christianity of these enlightened men, and this is all the excuse needed to poison the minds of children with false morality and dogma.

Is there any strong anti-Catholic feeling among non-secularists?

Not usually, but there are exceptions, such as fanatical Protestant sectarians and also people of liberal outlook who have realised the insidious way in which the Vatican schemes for political totalitarianism and intolerance. There is a great need for enlightening the masses so that they should realise the menace of organised Christianity to-day.

Now finally, can you give us the general picture of future prospects?

Well, in spite of the easy optimism of rationalist intellectuals out of touch with reality, things remain very much as they were when I first began. What is vitally necessary—and, oh! if it were only possible—is an intensive and extensive Freethought campaign to rid the people of the grossest forms of superstitious belief.

* * *

We stay for just one bouquet. To Mrs. Eva Ebury, who attends her husband's lectures in the capacity of chief assistant.

This Believing World

What a glorious time our B.B.C., aided by our bishops and priests had at Easter with the wonderful message of "our Lord." No story in any language has been so riddled by criticism as the story of Jesus—as anybody who reads Strauss's famous *Life of Jesus* can see for himself. But there are too many vested interests in the Glorious Story for it ever to be given up—at least, not for a long time. Jews, Christians, and Reverent Rationalists, are almost all at one in proclaiming the Messiah, the Christ, Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ, and Jesus of Nazareth, as the greatest ever.

Our very pious contemporary, the *Daily Express*, while correctly pointing out how "all the Apostles fled" when Jesus was arrested (just as in modern fiction the hero has to do it all himself) details the New Testament story as if every word and comma was "God's Truth" dictated by Divine Command. Criticism of the Gospels! Perish the thought! Everything in them happened exactly as related—Devils, Miracles, Angels, Resurrection, and Ascension. "So the Easter Message goes out to all"—that is, the Myth of the Supernatural at its silliest.

What are we—Freethinkers—doing about it? Have we advanced beyond the year 1900, or have we allowed the Churches to chortle with joy at the way so many of us are deserting Freethought for various Ideologies, or treating Christianity as if it no longer existed? On Good Friday, the Rev. B. Graham drew the biggest crowd any one speaker for religion ever drew in Hyde Park, and the "congregation" all joined in lustily singing his infantile hymns. Does that incident prove the Grand Old Story finished? Whatever the "people" may think on weekdays about Christianity, look how they rally round the Cross at Christmas and Easter—and with them all the vested interests, the Press, the Churches, and, of course, the B.B.C.

This journal of ours, "The Freethinker," is the one weekly in England which has never ceased to attack the silly mythology of all religions; and one can only hope that those of us who make Truth our ideal will never cease to protest in and out of its pages at the way in which such exploded nonsense as Christianity is being forced down our throats at every conceivable moment—no doubt, much to the amusement of the more intellectual Churchmen of all creeds.

Not only are the Churches perpetuating the Oriental myths which constitute Christianity, but some all-believing clergy are anxious to prove Spiritualism completely true. Of course, all Christians believe in "immortality," that is, you don't really die, and that you are "saved" through and by Christ Jesus so long as you believe what you are told and never ask inconvenient questions. We have now the newly-formed "The Churches' Fellowship for Psychological Study" with Mr. R. Lester as the chairman, and the Rev. G. M. Elliott as secretary. Anybody who believes that when he dies he will go straight to a Heaven with a diamond-studded pavement as taught by the Rev. B. Graham, and sit on a throne on the right-hand side of Jesus ought to have no difficulty in swallowing anything in the Spiritualist twaddle line.

We always thought that Jesus Christ was the world's Greatest Medium; but, according to Mr. H. Leaf, it looks as if this great honour should be given to Mahomet. "During trance," he tells us, "Mahomet obtained material for a remarkable book, the Koran . . ." and so "established through mediumship one of the most vigorous religions in the world." We expect this will be news to our orthodox Muslims who have always insisted that Allah, that is, God,

spoke direct to Mahomet, and that he wrote it all down in perfect Arabic. Still, Mr. Leaf knows, as a Spiritualist, much more than any Muslim.

In addition to knowing more than a Muslim, Mr. Leaf had little difficulty in proving that, as "Darwin's theory" had "never been adequate," he knew more than Darwin. Darwin, we are confidently told, "ignored atrophy," and that should silence the misguided old gentleman for ever. In any case, Science now admitted the existence of "super-normal phenomena"—a statement quite as true as that Science now admitted the existence of God Almighty, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. But, then, can anyone think of anything silly enough which Christians and Spiritualists could not swallow?

SCIENCE FRONT—1

THE ANSWER MAN

By GEORGE A. FINK, Ph. D.

Q. Would you say that man owes his dominance over other animals to his ability to make and use tools, and this is dependent on the structure of his hand, and the development of the hand to an almost perfect prehension required the development of sufficient strength and skill in the hind legs to be independent of the front legs in standing and walking?

This is partly responsible for the dominance of man, though his development of a brain and nervous system giving better correlation of hands and eyes is also important, and in recent times the development of communication by speech and writing.

Man's hand, with the thumb arranged to oppose the fingers, is better adapted to the grasping of tools and objects of various sorts than the claws or forelimbs of any other animal.

The freeing of the front legs from use in walking, making possible their adaptation as tool grasping hands and arms, is probably due to man's ancestral experience in going from a four-legged land animal to a tree-climbing animal, and then back to a land animal, through a transition stage in which he lived partly in the trees, requiring strong hands and arms for climbing and swinging from branch to branch, and also requiring hind legs capable of use without aid from the front legs.

The kangaroo, and some flightless birds like the ostrich, have also developed strong hind legs which are used for locomotion without assistance from their front legs, but they have not adapted their front legs to use for grasping, probably because they never passed through a tree-climbing stage in their evolutionary history.—Reprinted from *Liberal* (Philadelphia).

REVERENT INQUIRY

(Concluded from page 146)

fiction, the distinctions between what is history and what is legend, between occurrence and myth, waver and grow dim and finally disappear, leaving in their train a conglomerate jungle of clotted puerilities from which the preacher extracts a treacly sop for his intellectually bankrupt creed.

All that is required to complete the deception is a peroration of lordly phrases and question-begging epithets, constructing an ambush from which, as from an oratorical conjuror's hat, out pops the inevitable rabbit.

This goes on from thousands of pulpits by thousands of preachers in thousands of churches for thousands of days in a supposedly civilised country. And so far as valid argument goes, the labours of this mighty mountain have produced—one dead mouse.

THE FREETHINKER

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SPECIAL

Statement of Policy

To Correspondents

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

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 weekday, 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: L. EBURY.

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, May 7, 7-15 p.m.: D. J. BROUGHTON on "The Fulfillment of Man" by Dr. Bronowski.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 2: H. L. BEALES, M.A., "The Case for Secular Education."

NOTES AND NEWS

During the summer we shall be conducting a series of interviews with long-service N.S.S. open-air speakers. Having been engaged for many years in outdoor propaganda and coming into contact with various types of believer, their opinions should have some weight. We begin with a Vice-President of the Society, Mr. L. Ebury, whose speaking pitches this summer will be mainly White Stone Pond and Marble Arch.

The Annual Dinner and Dance of the Rationalist Press Association will be held at the Trocadero Restaurant, London, on the evening of Thursday, May 27, and it is hoped that readers of *The Freethinker* will support this occasion, thereby returning the compliment to the R.P.A. which regularly sends representatives to the N.S.S. Dinner. The speakers announced are Mr. Ritchie Calder, Professor P. Sargant Florence and Mr. H. L. Beales. Tickets, price 25s. each, can be ordered through the Secretary, N.S.S., who will arrange for such a party to be seated together. He asks us to mention that it will be helpful if reservations are sent to him during the coming week.

Mr. Rupert Humphris, whose suggestion of a "Freethinker Correspondence Circle" we published early this year, sends us, not for publication, a list of fourteen ladies and gentlemen who are now exchanging views by letter, and thus making good local deficiencies in

THE FREETHINKER to-day announces its complete identification with the Secularist outlook as stated in the "Principles and Objects" of the National Secular Society, and will serve as the mouthpiece of that movement.

It will also provide a field for general Freethought essays. Its aims are propagandist, informative and creative. As stated in its first issue in 1881 it will, in its propagandist rôle, employ the resources of science and philosophy. It will attack religion and other forms of superstition and, while it will not hesitate to explore the field of politics on a broad basis, its official policy will not be narrowed into any particular line of thought, or canalised into any political "ism." Whereas there are many journals each claiming to indicate the proper direction of political thought and activity, with any of which Freethinkers as individuals will usefully associate themselves, there is nevertheless only one *Freethinker*, and it is essential that it should retain its identity.

The *Freethinker* will welcome all possible co-operation with other Freethought movements and journals both at home and abroad, and for specific purposes will advance with them on common ground. We extend the most cordial greetings to our nearest British neighbours, The Ethical Union and the Rationalist Press Association.

A limited portion of the paper will be at the disposal of any representative religious leader for the defence of his position, and in general *The Freethinker* will not be officially responsible for all the views expressed in its articles.

intellectual companionship. We note that the list contains names that will have become well known to readers owing to their appearance in our columns. Others similarly placed and desiring freethinking pen-friends can still join the Circle by writing to Mr. Humphris at 75, Graystone Road, Tankerton-on-Sea, Kent.

A correspondent, R.G.V.G., recently wrote to the *Glasgow Evening News* about his difficulty in trying to read the Bible without an explanatory book on the subject. A good Samaritan promptly wrote to this newspaper recommending *The Bible Handbook* and giving the name and address of the publishers. We might not have known why we suddenly received a number of orders for this work from Glasgow and surroundings, if one of them had not contained a cutting of the second letter, which bore the initials R.M.H. All Scottish Secularists and many of their Sassenach counterparts will know one. R.M.H., as the most likely source of this truly canny example of service to his fellows and to "The Cause."

The Free Christian radical news-sheet published weekly in Paris, *Esprit et Vie*, quotes a French Catholic comment on the Pope's decoration of General Franco with the "Supreme Order of Christ." The comment says: "We are hurt because for millions of people in the world this decoration is no surprise, but the consecration of an already obvious alliance between the Church and the Franco regime. . . . Monsignor Antoniutti announced the decoration as 'a splendid consolidation of the Church in its intense Catholicism.' Can the Church be consolidated over the corpses of a million Spaniards?" Obviously it can.

—NEXT WEEK—

WHAT ARE FLYING SAUCERS?

By Dr. G. A. FINK

An Open Letter

To MR. ROY COHN, Chief Counsel,
Senate Investigation Sub-Committee,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir,

On March 14 last, on the N.B.C. radio-television program "Meet the Press," you said that the purpose of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the other members of the Senate Investigations Sub-Committee is to rid this country of "atheistic Communism." In using that phrase you followed the reprehensible lead of Senator McCarthy and this nation's Big Business and Big Church interests.

American prelates and priests and preachers are much perturbed over the steady increase throughout this country of disbelief in basic religious doctrines and concepts, including the God-belief itself. The large financial, commercial and industrial interests in America are greatly alarmed over the spreading throughout the world of various systems and ideologies for economic and social justice. As a consequence the two groups, aiding and abetting each other, have coined the phrase "atheistic Communism" and employ it without scruple. This procedure is a contemptible and cowardly, but effective, device to extend to atheism and atheists the fear and hatred that Americans in general have been taught to feel toward Communism and Communists.

Atheism and Communism have no necessary connection, and they have nothing in common. Many atheists are not Communists. I am an atheist and I am also a Jeffersonian American, a kind of American which Senator McCarthy detests. According to *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapters 2 and 5, the first Christian community was completely Communistic and functioned under the absolute dictatorship of "Peter," the reputed first Pope. A million or more Communists in Italy are Roman Catholics.

Atheism, as defined by Webster's New International Dictionary, is simply "disbelief in, or denial of, the existence of a God, or supreme intelligent being." And the existence of a God—any kind of God—is neither a self-evident truth nor a demonstrated truth, nor a truth which has been supernaturally revealed. Millions of people believe that there is a God, but nobody knows that such a being or power exists.

Atheists are everywhere a majority among men and women in the higher intellectual and cultural levels, particularly among the greater scientists.* Julian S. Huxley, first Director-General of U.N.E.S.C.O., is an atheist. So is the Hon. Culbert L. Olson, who served with distinction as a Governor of California. Bertrand Russell and J. B. S. Haldane are atheists. So are Dr. Will Durant, Dr. Anton J. Carlson and Sir Arthur Keith. John Burroughs was an atheist. The great and good Robert G. Ingersoll, who was an illustrious member of your profession, said in his last public address: "I deny the existence of the supernatural,"† a denial that only an atheist could make.

Moreover, the American people have nothing to fear from atheism; quite the contrary. The clergy, because they are unable to confute the atheist, have smeared him with obliquy and odium; but atheists in general, as the records show, are not inferior—indeed, they would seem to be superior—to religionists in general as regards morals and ethics and humanitarian behavior. Atheists, though they are numerous and influential enough in this country to cause the clergy deep concern, are conspicuous for their

virtual absence from penal and correctional institutions. Of the many men who in recent years were put to death or sent to prison by the United States and Great Britain and France for "war crimes and/or crimes against humanity," only one was an atheist. That man was Alfred Rosenberg, official philosopher of the Nazi Party.

In truth, atheists, as also agnostics, are, on the whole, assets, not liabilities, to the communities and countries of which they form a part. Atheism, inasmuch as it necessarily goes with a higher-than-average adult intelligence, is far more likely than is theism to cause a person to see that good social conduct is its own ample reward.

Nor is atheism inferior to theism in the giving of comfort and consolation. Atheism does not, to be sure, hold out the prospect of a post-mortem existence for human beings, either with or without a physical body; but it does hold out the wholly satisfying certainty that an endless personal extinction is equivalent to a dreamless sleep with no awakening.

Thomas Jefferson, who was the chief architect of the noble edifice of American democracy, said in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*: "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god." On August 10, 1787, in a letter to his young nephew, Jefferson advised him to "question with boldness even the existence of a God." And Jefferson, whose pronouncedly anti-Christian views and whose near-atheism, as expressed by him in letters to friends, contrast most favorably with the naïve prayerful piety of President Eisenhower and with the naïve Bible-kissing piety of former President Harry S. Truman, was one of the soundest and clearest thinkers and one of the most honest and honorable men this country has produced.

The word *atheist* is really a badge of distinction. Atheism has the irresistible support of Science and Reason and human experience. Where atheism is associated with Communism or Capitalism or some other politico-economic system, to that extent at least that system is progressive. Where religionism is associated with Communism or Capitalism or some other politico-economic system, to that extent at least that system is backward-looking. This is one of the lessons of human history.

You, Mr. Cohn, are only 27 years old. I shall therefore give you the benefit of the doubt and assume that when you employed the phrase "atheistic Communism" (a phrase which the church-going Senator McCarthy echoed in his radio network broadcast) you did so from ignorance, not from malice or from selfish self-interest.

I am 64 years old. I have done a great deal of reading and much thinking on the atheism-theism controversy. On November 17, 1946, I made a 30-minute atheistic broadcast. That broadcast was the first of its kind in the history of radio in the English-speaking world, and possibly in the history of radio. An impartial account of that broadcast may be read in the magazine *Newsweek* for December 2, 1946. As was stated by newspapers at the time, at least 25 per cent. of the public responses to the broadcast were in favor of a continuation of atheistic programs. That per cent. is highly significant in view of the reluctance of Americans in general to put themselves publicly on record as approving something that is not to the liking of the Big Business, Big Church interests that rule this Republic.

As I need not tell you, that Big Church-Big Business combine controls virtually all American radio and television stations, practically all, if not all, the leading American newspapers, and all but a negligibly small part of the American motion picture industry; and it uses those

* See the late Prof. James H. Leuba's revealing statistics on American scientists in *Harpers Magazine*, August, 1934.

† *What is Religion?*, in 1899.

media of mass-communication to nurture and give respectability to public ignorance, to give a semblance of reality to the Communist bogey it has deliberately created, to gain and to keep public acceptance or tolerance of its systematic Red-baiting, witch-hunting, "cold war" tactics, and to equate with "subversion" and "Un-Americanism" all anti-capitalistic views and also atheism.

And that Big Business-Big Church coalition, immediately following my atheistic broadcast of 1946, intimidated and coerced American radio station owners and managers into refusing additional time for atheism on religion-broadcasting stations. Worse still, the Federal Communications Commission, which, on July 19, 1946, three months before my broadcast, handed down a 5-page Decision (obtained by me) in which broadcasting station owners and managers were given clearly to understand that they cannot in the public interest exclude atheism and kindred views from their microphones if they accept religious programs, has been similarly intimidated and coerced into doing nothing to implement the regulatory dicta in that "Scott Decision" even in cases of outright attack over radio or television upon atheism as a point of view or against atheists as a class.

Moreover, most of that anti-democratic pressure was brought to bear and is being maintained by the American branch of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, a body of men which is unequivocally on record in several publications bearing the imprimatur of Cardinals as intending to destroy if possible by way of the ballot all our constitutional basic civil rights and liberties in matters of religious belief.

In your high and responsible and influential position as Chief Counsel of the Senate Investigations Sub-Committee you owe it to the American people to be neither a henchman nor a dupe of the powerful vested interests, lay and clerical, which, for their own material advantage and preservation, employ lying or misleading propaganda to deceive and exploit the masses of the American people. If, as I am willing to believe, your use of the phrase "atheistic Communism" is to be excused by reason of inadequate intellectual and cultural sophistication as to matters of religious belief, I suggest that you read the copy of my atheistic broadcast of 1946 which is on file in the offices of the F.C.C., or else that you listen to a playing of the phonographic reproduction of that broadcast which I furnished the F.C.C. in 1948. By so doing, Mr. Cohn, you might be led to acquire the "wiser head" which, in the aforesaid radio-television programme of March 14, you tactfully or craftily credited to the older members of the Senate Committee which you serve as Chief Counsel.

Sincerely,

ROBERT H. SCOTT.

DOGMA AND REALITY

By ARTHUR SEEHOF

(Translated by F. Ransome)

(Concluded from page 139)

THE Holy Father and his cardinals, of course, do not take the slightest notice of the "heresies" even of Protestant theologians such as Adolf Harnack or Rudolf Bultmann. They are nothing but "heresies." While, at the turn of the centuries, Harnack had at least admitted that no miracles occur or ever have occurred, that everything had happened quite naturally and, in doing so, had expressed his doubts regarding everything supposedly divine or miraculous about Mary, Jesus, etc., including the impossible "resurrection" and "ascension" which had been refuted over and over again—also by Ernest Renan—when a Catholic theologian (Pohle) had replied that "by denying the divinity of Christ liberal theology had denied true

Christianity," Bultmann says literally: "Jesus was no Christian." Neither had he considered himself a Messiah or to be the Lord, but, in fact, had "worked only as a Jewish rabbi." (If he has lived at all, since, in fact, the entire Jesus story, cf. Drews, Brandes, etc., is only a legend.) Since, however, even the "free" Lutheran churches of Germany accused the Marburg theologian Bultmann of heresy (1952!), what can you expect from the "infallible" Roman Catholic theologians? The so-called "heresies" of the so-called "liberal" theology and the scientifically unobjectionable researches and evidence of all the people, say, from Meslier to Brandes, as well as, by the way, old Roman and Jewish documents prove, of course, that an "immaculate conception" has occurred just as little as a "virginal maternity," a "resurrection," "ascension" or any other "miracle."

However, let us repeat it, what does all this or what does the truth mean to the Roman Catholic or, for that matter, to any other Church, if it is not prepared to agree to its own extinction? And because the Church is not prepared to do so and, above all, because political motives unconnected with religion also play their part, we now witness the centenary festivities of the—to put it politely—fairy-tale dogma of the "immaculate conception of the Holy Virgin," festivities which have been raised to an even higher, though characteristic, level by the fact that the successor of the inventor of the dogma has bestowed the Jesus Order, the highest order of the Church, upon, of all people, the Caudillo Don Francesco Franco. Which, once again, places the leaders of the Church in the position they have occupied throughout the ages and the position appropriate to them: by the side of reaction, of totalitarian intolerance, of arbitrarily and innocently spilt blood, of the terror, of decay and death.

Yet it is and remains true that only the interests of the Church, of its clergy and of the social institutions connected with them have led to the legends of the "immaculate conception," "virginal maternity," "corporal ascension" and the other perpetually repeated myths being newly hatched out on the foundation only of old superstitions. That was true at the time of Paul and remains true to the present day. We, however, are convinced with Emile Zola that "the only faith that can save us, is the faith in completed efforts," the faith in ourselves, the faith in natural laws, the work of human reason, purposeful, painstaking and responsible endeavours and that for an honest, thinking and rational human being it will be sufficient "to lay down his life after his task has been done." What religion has added consists irrefutably not only of nothing else but delusions, legends, fairy-tales, phantasmagoria and worse stupidities, but constitutes at least as bad a tyranny as any other. Franco, "immaculate conception" with everything following therefrom and papal Church, here, indeed, we find a Trinity which cannot be sundered.

—(From "Befreiung," Aarau, March 1, 1954.)

[We must point out to English readers of this otherwise admirable article that there appears to be a certain confusion in the author's mind between the dogma of the Virgin Birth of Christ, which existed long before 1853, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed by Pius the 9th in that year, which makes the additional affirmation that the Virgin herself at the moment of her conception, was miraculously exempted from the taint of original sin. This does not imply that Mary herself was born of a Virgin, as the German author appears to suppose. Otherwise, we have nothing but praise for Herr Seehof's article.—Editor, *The Freethinker*.]

"Purpose in Nature"

By ALVIN McELVAIN

Nothing that confronts the mind of man is so marvellous as the fact of his own development.—"Which Just Happened"!(?)

"I do not think life has any purpose. It just happened." This quotation is from Bertrand Russell's "What is an Agnostic?" (*Look Mag.*, November 3.) He continues: "Only individuals have purpose."

Having read several of his books, I think well indeed of the great philosopher, and I, who never saw the inside walls of a university, have little right to question. Another quotation is impressively true, but founded on a postulate: "If we reckon the world in which we live to have been produced in accordance with a plan, we have to reckon Nero a saint in comparison with the author of that plan." The postulate referred to is responsibility.

Without presuming to reject monism as the true philosophy of being, let us see the situation in a two-fold light—purely on behalf of clearer comprehension. (Dualism: matter one thing, life something else; their inter-relationship beyond our ken.) This division permits the examination of each part separately.

In the realm of matter—I mean cosmogony, we know that a few billion years ago there were no stars in the firmament in the place where we are; but instead, there was a great nebulous ring marking out the rim of our galaxy—which now carries a million stars; nor can we conceive of space as having a border.

The stars continue to exist by virtue of feeding upon themselves; specifically, their dissipation is counter-balanced by regeneration as they tunnel their way through space. Inter-stellar space is not an empty void, but carries many times the mass of star-stuff as do the stars. Thus the "plan" and "purpose" of the material cosmos unmistakably is expansion; just on and on forever.

In the realm of life: It's emergence on earth began—we hypothesise the only way it could begin—(as an organism, eternal, barring accident) by likewise, feeding upon itself.

We postulate no supervisor. (In head office with blue-print on desk.) The only God is the expression of life, something growing. Enmeshed in matter and enslaved to the prevailing conditions of place, it nevertheless, goes to any possible length by way of adjustment, for preservation and growth. Even the phenomenon of death was eventually instituted purely on this behalf—continuance through descent.

Growth (by which we do not mean expansion, but rather, what we are pleased to call moral development) is the key-word for the "purpose" of life. (Eternal growth with life, corresponds with eternal expansion, in the cosmos. Death versus rebirth is analogous to dissipation versus regeneration.) The "plan" for life reads: Upward and onward forever.

Thinking is only a little less consistent when thus put in reverse order. We invert the concept of God. Each new day shoots forth fresh, green ideas, maps out the direction and draws up the plan. God is, as yet, just a baby.

Admitting that the foregoing is an argument somewhat far-fetched, I submit that it is less ridiculous than Fundamentalism and more inspiring than Atheism. We who are freethinkers are prone to overlook the fact that Atheism is nihilistic; that it provides no consistent inspiration for better living. The logical course for Atheists is to squeeze from life the last drop of sense-pleasure; and to this end, action sees its cue in the political sagacity of Machiavelli.

Correspondence

SIR,—There has been a lot of talk recently about "broadening" *The Freethinker*. The term is, however, deceptive. Broadening does not always mean bettering.

The Freethinker would no doubt be broadened by musical reviews, cookery hints, fashion notes, and so on. But would it be a better *Freethinker*?—Yours, etc.,
H. BAGNALL.

SIR,—I liked very much your tribute to the late Chapman Cohen in the March 5 issue of *The Freethinker*. Mr. Cohen goes down in the history of Freethought as one of its giants and most useful exponents. He turned out a lot of scholarly and lucid writing in support of "the best of causes," and he spoke to good effect.

It is a shame that men like Chapman Cohen should have to depend almost entirely on Rationalists for recognition before and after their death for their truly valuable services towards human progress and enlightenment. But the power of the lay and clerical classes who oppose Rationalism is still most formidable in the Western World. This I can affirm from my own experience here in the U.S.A.!—Yours, etc.,
R. H. SCOTT.
San Francisco.

SIR,—I wish to express my regret at the passing of Mr. Chapman Cohen. Since the year 1947 I have read *The Freethinker*, and I must be the only reader of your journal in far-away Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federation of Malaya. I get it through the book sellers here.

I found his leading articles very reasoned, powerful and stimulating, and used to await the arrival of the journal with eagerness. It is evident that it will not be an easy task to find another of his calibre.

May I make an observation as a reader for seven years? Probably the consistent and sustained attack on Christianity is due to the paper being published in a Christian country. But I should think, as freethought is universal, an effort should be made to focus more attention on the aggressive Semitic faith, which is the most intolerant of the present religions. The lower forms of Hinduism and Buddhism should also receive their due attention.—Yours, etc.,
J. SEEVARATNAM JOHN.

[Does Mr. John mean Judaism, Islam, or both?—ED.]

MIND AND BRAIN

SIR,—In reply to Mr. Douglas V. Morgan on Immortality, I would say that there are many reasons for disbelieving this concept. As Mr. Morgan mentions survival of the individual after physical death, I would like to deal with this aspect.

In order to believe that individuals survive death it is necessary to believe in some form of Dualism, that is, that body and soul or body and personality are two different things, that in fact one is physical and the other non-physical. It is also part of the same belief that the soul or personality is therefore more important than the body, and it is argued that diversity of individuals cannot be explained from a purely physical viewpoint, that "something more than physical" is required to explain individuality.

Those who argue thus have very little knowledge of anatomy, physiology or psychology. It would be difficult to imagine a more complicated and well-balanced thing than a human body. When we consider how many different things the body is capable of, or how many different activities all go on at once without our even being conscious of them, it becomes just as pertinent to ask: why should such a wonderful thing be brought into existence merely to be destroyed?

The personality and the body are so intimately related that it is impossible to dissociate them. Personality is after all but the sum total of a number of things we can observe about someone, which make each of us "ourselves," and which go on as long as we live, and cease when we die. Why do they cease? Because the body is dead, and the brain no longer rules.

The personality is no more wonderful than the body, the two in fact are one, and when we talk of physical death we mean the end of life for the individual.—Yours, etc.,

G. DICKINSON.

FOR SALE.—*The Literary Guide*, 64 issues (September, 1948, to December, 1953), 30s.; *Dent's Cyclopaedia of Music*, 2,375 pp., new condition; £3 10s.—Box 38, Pioneer Press.

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