

# The Freethinker

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THE present era of transition amidst which we live witnesses not only vast changes in the spheres of knowledge and of the social order, but also in the distribution of racial and political power. For the nineteenth century the "Victorian" era in its widest sense, was, essentially, the age of the white races who, armed with the superior techniques afforded by the Industrial Revolution, extended their ascendancy in both arms and in ideas over the entire planet. In the present writer's opinion this ascendancy was *acquired* rather than *innate*. For "Racist" theories, whether those of the ancient Jews or of the modern Nazis, are fundamentally unscientific, whether in the biblical *Book*

of *Ezra* or in *Mein Kampf*. There have been periods—and long periods too—when political and cultural ascendancy have lain with the East no less decisively than "western civilisation" dominated the nineteenth century world. Nor is racial arrogance and its assumption of unjustified superiority the monopoly of the West. It was, we recall, an Arab "racist" of the, we seem to recall, ninth century, who went on record with this profound observation: "North of the Pyrenees the people are white in colour. They are of great stature, but are congenitally sluggish, and are incapable of arriving at intellectual maturity!"

From which fatuous statement one may judge that "Semitism" is as absurd, *per se*, as "anti-Semitism."

To-day, what Mr. W. H. Wood recently described as "The Crime of Colour" in an excellent article under that title, has provoked a swing of the pendulum, the re-emergence of races and cultures virtually obliterated by the European "drang nach osten" ("pressure on the East"). In a recent survey in this column of Christian missions in the Far East we indicated how severe has been the recent set-back suffered not only in the political but equally in the religious sphere by the Christian West in recent years.

## China and India

The two oldest, most extensive and, once more, powerful of non-European civilisations are those represented by India and China which, together, account for, perhaps, eight hundred millions of people, about a third of the entire human species. Both these sub-continental civilisations date back to about the same period, probably, the second millennium B.C., and cultural and even military contacts between them have not been entirely lacking. For examples: Buddhism was imported from India to China; whilst, as recently as 1792, the Chinese invaded India via the Himalayan passes. Despite which ancient and modern contacts, the fundamental outlook of these two great civilisations have varied and, in matters of religion and philosophy, in particular, have assumed characteristics of inversely contrasting character. This absolute contrast is strikingly indicated in and by a French historian who, in a recently published history of China, devotes a masterly chapter to the respective attitudes towards the supernatural

taken up by Chinese and Hindu culture. Monsieur Robert Louzon also advances a most interesting materialistic theory to account for this, at first sight, startling contrast taken up with regard to religion by the two greatest indigenous civilisations of Asia.

## "The Most Religious Land in the World"

The above description of India is fully confirmed by both history and by our author. India simply swarms with gods! Religion there has, from time immemorial, assumed a totalitarian form, and religious rites occupy, one can say truly, every nook and cranny of daily life in Hindu

society. Historically, ever since Buddhism was driven out of its land of origin a millenium ago, the Brahmins, the priestly caste, have exercised a virtual dictatorship over Hindu society, which is now only slowly giving way before the impact of imported Western science and industrialism. The famous passage of Karl Marx, no doubt known to our French author, how in India mankind "adored his own helplessness before Nature, bending in adoration before Hanuman, the sacred monkey, and before Durga, the sacred cow," still remains a substantially accurate account of the basic postures of Hindu religion. Our Rationalist friends in India, no doubt, know this only too well!

## Rain-gods!

Fundamentally, argues Monsieur Louzon, the cause of this overwhelming religiosity, so endemic in and to the Hindu "soul," is known and is to be ascribed to objective, and not to psychological, reasons. For India, incredibly poor and incredibly thirsty, depends for its very existence on the life-giving rains brought, or withheld, by the presence or absence of the Monsoon winds. The Monsoon, like other winds, "bloweth where it listeth," and is uncontrollable by the will of man. The awful droughts, the terrible famines, arising, fundamentally, from the lack of water, which have taken such a fearful toll of life and happiness in India down to quite recent times, may be accurately described as "acts of God" in the classic legal definition of this term, as something which cannot be explained or controlled by human agency, and only gods can control their own "acts"! Whence the spectacle of the Hindu sub-continent, helpless before Nature and, consequently, prostrate before its gods!

## The Most Irreligious People in the World

Contrarily, argues our author, the Chinese are the most *irreligious* of men. "Contrary to the Hindus," declares Robert Louzon, "the Chinese are the least religious of peoples. The Chinese are the only atheistic *nation* in the world. When I say 'atheist' the expression must be taken literally as without belief in god" (p. 9). The great philosophers of China, the activity of whom was approximately contemporary with the classic era of Greek philosophy (c.

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## Indian Religion, and Chinese Irreligion

By F. A. RIDLEY



600-300 B.C.), were rationalists, positivists, atheists or, at least, agnostics. Confucius, Mencius, Lao-tze, Mo-ti, these expressions apply to all of them. Even the Indian cult of Buddhism was profoundly modified by its contact with the natural positivism and scepticism of the Chinese mentality. The official cult of the old Chinese Empire was the worship of "Heaven," performed yearly by the Emperor, but it remained vague and abstract, without either dogmatic theology or popular appeal. To the Chinese, both philosophers and people, religion, in Herbert Spencer's phrase, was "the unknowable."

### A Secular Society of Self-Help

What was the reason for this sceptical attitude, in such striking contrast with that of India? Our materialist historian produces a most plausible materialistic theory to account for it. China, he argues, like India, depends on water, since irrigation, regular and uninterrupted, is absolutely essential to both agricultural civilisations. But, whereas in *India* the life-giving waters descend from the sky, which the *gods* alone rule, in China it comes from the rivers—in particular, the two great rivers around which all Chinese civilisation centres, the "Yellow River"

(Hoang-Ho) and the "Blue River" (Yangtze Kiang) with their numerous tributaries. The material life of China depends on this river system, which frequently overflows its banks, causing the terrible inundations that have recurred throughout Chinese history. However, whilst one can only *pray* for rain, one can *work* to *prevent* floods! Hence the practical attitude of self-help, and the consequent construction of a secular outlook and society, of our nation of atheists. Briefly put, in India man *adores* Nature in her capricious moods, whereas in China one works co-operatively to *control* her irregularities. The *real* religion of China, if it can be called such, ancestor-worship, merely represents the continuation of this co-operative effort in a society where the primary unit has always been the family rather than, as in the West, the State.

### A Contribution to Historical Materialism

A notable contribution, we think, to the philosophy of Historical Materialism. It is much to be hoped that Monsieur Louzon's important book will soon appear in English.

[*La Chine*, by R. Louzon, 14, rue de Tracy, Paris, 2e. France.]

## God and a Post

By ADRIAN TA'BOIS

IF we try to compare God with an ordinary common or garden post that is sticking out of the earth, we are likely to run rapidly into severe criticism. "Fancy comparing something which doesn't exist with something that does," moans the Atheist. "Fancy comparing something of a universally-known value with something that has only limited local value," groans the Christian.

A neutral inquirer, who has no preconceived ideas to start with, might well be excused for raising his eyebrows at the severely contrasted outlook of the Atheist and the Christian. Of course this neutral inquirer might disagree with the Christian that the post has only "local value," because its value is as well known to the African native as to the Hollywood film star. And again, God can't have "universally known value" when Atheists and Agnostics do not realise "his" value. But he may feel equally fed up with the Atheist who says that St. Mark said Christ said this, and that St. Luke said Christ said that; for, after all, faulty reporting doesn't prove that God (or Christ) is non-existent.

Eventually, having become immune to the bombardment of Atheistic "Bible atrocities" and the Christian "religious truths," he is likely to replace theory with practice. Supposing he introduces us to four farmers whom we will call Mr. "A," "B," "C" and "D." The practical experiment develops thus:—

Mr. "A" prays to God for rain and, soon after, the rain arrives.

Mr. "B" prays to a post for rain and, soon after, the rain arrives.

Mr. "C" prays to God for dry weather, but is disappointed.

Mr. "D" prays to a post for dry weather, but is disappointed.

Now if our neutral inquirer is really as inquiring as he neutral, he will realise that the above results are rather more complex than they appear at first. For if "A" believes God has great power because He made the rain come, then "B" is equally entitled to claim that the post has great power also. And if "D" claims that the post is proved useless, then "C" has proved nothing except that God is useless. But perhaps "A," who has his wish, laughs indulgently at "D" praying without success to a post. His sense of humour is exceeded only by that of "B," who

finds that—to his amazement—his post has apparently achieved more than God in whom "C" believes.

Now let us look a little deeper at one of our characters. "C" is a very deeply religious gentleman who is astounded at the Atheist's nonchalant attitude towards God. When the Atheist demurs at the word "God," "C" believes that high treason has practically been achieved. Supposing "D" said that my post *could* have answered my prayer but it has a reason for not doing so. Wouldn't "C" regard this as an extremely cheeky piece of guesswork? Yet "C" is nauseated when he is criticised for making an identical piece of guesswork in defence of his God. (Perhaps he thinks the Atheist has an infernal nerve in logically decrying the value of God.) Yet "C" is only using guesswork when he defends his God thus, for he cannot really know the exact reason why his God has failed to act. So whatever the assumed theories about God may be, the above experiment shows that, in actual fact, God shows as much—or as little—efficiency as the post.

Our neutral inquirer has learnt several things from this test, which are as follows:—

- (1) Either God has as much power as inanimate objects or
- (2) He has as little power as they have.
- (3) If God has power which He does not display, then there is no evidence of any power.
- (4) In the absence of this evidence we cannot attribute to God the things we see around us.
- (5) God only becomes "great" when a fair and logical argument against Him is prevented from operating by the Christians.

### Blasphemy

We are quite aware that Pilate would not consent to the death of Jesus until the priests accused him of sedition, blasphemy being a crime unknown to the wise Romans, any such charge being esteemed by them as only the bitter wrangle of sects. Yet the fact is plain, that the charge of sedition was preferred in the last extremity, so that the victim might not escape. Blasphemy was the original charge, and it led to the death of the Nazarene. Are we not justified, then, in speaking of Christ the blasphemer? Have we not the right to taunt the Christians with hurling at us an epithet that struck Christ on the brow, and drove the nails into his hands and feet? Let them dread the verdict of history, and tremble lest they share the execration meted out to those who murdered the founder of their faith.

G. W. FOOTE.



# What Are The Flying Saucers?

By GEORGE A. FINK

AT last, a good book on "Flying Saucers" has been published (*Flying Saucers*, by Donald H. Menzel, professor of astrophysics, Harvard University, published by Harvard University Press, 1953); one by an author acquainted with the physical phenomena concerned. Menzel attempts to answer the question I have used for a title and writes: "No single answer suffices, because the apparitions stem from not one but many dozens of causes. Most of the reports refer to reflections from material objects: distant planes, jet aircraft, vapor trails, miscellaneous balloons, newspapers, kites, birds, peculiar clouds, spider webs, insects, feathers, and so on. Searchlights playing on thin layers of cloud or mist account for many of the records. Venus, Jupiter, various stars, bright fireballs, and even the moon shining through broken clouds, have been frequently identified as flying saucers. According to the U.S. Air Force, about 80 per cent, of all sightings possess natural explanations, like those listed above.

"I shall use the phrase 'true flying saucer' to refer to the 20 per cent. that the Air Force lists as unexplained. . . .

"I present evidence to show that this mysterious residue consists of the rags and tags of meteorological optics: mirages, reflections in mist, refractions and reflections by icy crystals. Some phenomena are related to the aurora; others are unusual forms of shooting stars. A few, like the great saucer of 1882, probably represent natural phenomena we still do not fully understand.

"Experimental devices in development by various armed services account for not more than two or three out of a thousand sightings, and thus are unimportant for sustaining the saucer scare. Saucers are not weapons or devices sent by Russia or any other foreign power.

"Above all, there is not the slightest evidence to support the popular fantasy that saucers are interplanetary space ships, manned by beings from beyond the earth, however much some people want to believe in this unscientific, highly publicised interpretation of saucers."

Menzel's conclusion, with which I thoroughly agree, is that "*Flying saucers are real*, as real as a rainbow, and no more dangerous . . . the objects identified as 'saucers' comprise not one but at least five different types." He gives a plausible explanation of the first "saucer" sighting by Kenneth Arnold, and of other cases.

Menzel's book contains a few chapters on ancient reports of apparitions similar to modern flying saucers, and one on "Flying Saucers of the Bible," in which he discusses the vision of a wheel in the first chapter of Ezekiel. In this he says, "The agreement between Ezekiel's vision and a modern description of a de luxe model exhibition of mock suns with attendant glories is, to my mind, completely convincing."

There are many persons who think that observations by radar, like photography, are not subject to human error, and prove that saucers are not illusions. As Menzel admits, they are not illusions, any more than rainbows are illusions, but he explains how radar is subject to spurious echoes and the equivalent of optical mirages, so that indications on a radar screen are not always what they seem.

The other authors whose books I have read, Keyhoe (*The Flying Saucers are Real*), Scully (*Behind the Flying Saucers*) and Heard (*Is Another World Watching?*) look foolish in comparison with Menzel, especially Scully, who was the victim of a glib practical joker, his friend Silas M. Newton. Because Scully knew nothing about science, he was taken in by Newton's tall tales about having seen flying saucers on the ground, with little men found dead

in them. Newton's stories included a lot of technical words which impressed Scully while they went over his head, and some scientifically ridiculous statements like "The planet Venus, for example, and the planet Earth, is each held in position by reason of its magnetic repulsion," and "Mantell's plane and every portion of his plane from the motor to the tips of the wings hung together by reason of magnetic frequency. This was true of even Mantell himself. Therefore all that a flying saucer had to do to disintegrate Mantell's plane, the lecturer revealed, was to demagnetise it."

Major Keyhoe accepted estimates of size, distance and speed of objects by observers who were only guessing. For example, on page 79 of Keyhoe's book is a description of a sighting: "Suddenly a weird ball of light flashed into view, at a height of a thousand feet. As the men on the base watched it, astonished, the mysterious light abruptly shot skyward. In an incredibly short time it reached an altitude of twenty thousand feet and vanished." Anyone familiar with even high-school geometry should know that the distance to an object observed in the sky can be determined accurately only by simultaneous sighting by two observers with instruments capable of measuring angles. This was never done in any case I have heard of. In two cases mentioned by Heard, theodolite observations are mentioned, but only one theodolite was used in each case, so it was acting merely as a telescope, not as part of a triangular system, and there still was no reliable estimate of distance. And all the estimates of fantastic speed and size depend on the estimate of distance.

Gerald Heard is an "expert," according to the blurb on the cover of his book, but he shows extreme ignorance of the status of modern physics in writing "Physics' saying that anything may happen, and, maybe, Causality itself isn't true. . . ." He also shows ignorance of the facts of social and political life in saying, "There is in time of peace no censorship in the United States, nor any sign that it would ever be possible." It is not surprising to find that he is a prominent Catholic writer, and that part of a chapter of the book was published in the *Catholic Digest*. Also, Heard shows that he has badly misunderstood Menzel's attitude towards flying saucers when he says, "All sightings were to be accounted for by ground lights—automobile headlights, etc.—which were reflected back from the night sky by hot layers of air."

I sympathise with Scully and Keyhoe, who were frustrated and exasperated by military secrecy and "security" regulations surrounding "Project Saucer," and tended to believe that where there was so much confusion and smoke there must be some fire. However, the fact that official Air Force statements were conflicting, and "Project Saucer" often withheld information from the public and writers like Scully and Keyhoe, does not prove there are any real aircraft behind the reports of flying saucers. That sort of behavior is characteristic of the military mind. Besides, the Air Force probably had some experimental aircraft in the process of development that they thought might have been responsible for a few sightings, and it wanted to keep them secret. It is not surprising that many Air Force officers believed the saucers were actual aircraft, possibly from outer space: these men may be well trained for their specific duties, and have some technical knowledge of aircraft, but they are unscientific in their methods of analysis of reports of saucer sightings.

Although the purpose of science—from one point of

(Continued on page 157)



## This Believing World

**Our very pious TV** has put on a visual series, "Men Seeking God," by Mr. Christopher Mayhew, M.P., and his first discovery was a Muslim, Mr. Muhammad Ali, who, it must be confessed, allowed himself to be charmingly interviewed and readily answered many questions on the religion of Islam. Mr. Ali, like so many fervent Christians, admitted that he once had been a Sceptic, but a reading of the Qur'an (or Koran) had convinced him of the existence of God. Just as the Rev. B. Graham confidently tells his hearers that everybody can know God but only through Jesus Christ, so Mr. Ali said everybody could know God, but it had to be only through Muhammad, God's final Prophet.

**Examples of the way Muhammadans pray** were pictured for viewers—and apart from some ritual movements including plenty of grovelling, there seemed little difference between Islamic and Christian prayers. Moreover, just as a Christian insists that God's Precious Word, the Bible, contains everything for man's salvation here and hereafter, so, Mr. Ali claimed, did the Qur'an. And he added that in the ultimate the whole of the Western World would have to take over the wonderful injunctions God gave in his Final Revelation to Muhammad for their own good. It was quite a treat to hear claims made for Islam which had been made for Christianity for centuries—and, of course, which had exactly the same validity. Won't Christians be pleased!

**The Resurrection, we are always told by believers,** is the world's greatest Historical Event proved to be true by undisputed evidence. But the Rev. F. S. W. Simpson, the vicar of Shoreham, has roped in more evidence from "spirits and psychical phenomena." The followers of Jesus, he said, were "honest to God" people, never "deluded," or suffering from hallucinations. If they said they saw the "risen Saviour," that settled it—they did. Besides, did not Frederic Myers, one of the Founders of the Society for Psychical Research, say that "in consequence of the new evidence" (from psychic sources, of course) "all reasonable men will believe in the Resurrection of Christ." Breathless, we can only gasp—good God!

**No story of any other God**—Jupiter, Allah, Mithra, take any in fiction—has been so thoroughly discredited as the Resurrection. Even the great Canon Lightfoot, who thought he could reply to Cassel's famous *Supernatural Religion*, very carefully and discreetly refused to discuss the Resurrection. He knew he could not defend it. Yet every Easter this infantile piece of fantastic superstition is trotted out as if it really happened.

**The shortage of parsons** has been a heartbreaking problem for the Churches, and it cannot be long before our bishops, in spite of their beloved Paul, will have to try out women in the pulpit. Why not? Women are far more faithful believers than men—it is they who get children to pray and go to Sunday school and have them confirmed. In addition, it would be a great job for women from the talking point of view—for in this they have most men dead beat on the line. That they rarely, if ever, understand Pauline theology, is no handicap, for even bishops prefer to talk about Christ Jesus without any allusion whatever to theology.

**In any case, Baptists have welcomed women** in their pulpits, and even the B.B.C. has the Rev. Elsie Chamberlain on its religious staff. Moreover, women priests would

shun Freethought far more than men for they would be literally scared of any unbelief, and would look upon such a work as Foote's *Bible Handbook* as coming straight from the Bottomless Pit. And finally, if the Rev. B. Graham can draw 50,000 people in Hyde Park, surely any lady priest, equally glib and more glamorous, could beat that record!

**And talking of the 50,000 in Hyde Park,** a Mr. Hale wrote to the *Daily Mail* to point out that "it has easily been surpassed" by Roman Catholics. There were at Wembley the Catholic Hierarchy Centenary and the Catholic Family Rosary Crusade, "and others in the North of England"—all attended by from 80,000 to 100,000 people. So there we are; Billy Graham's fans can't touch Christ's own Church when it comes to numbers. But we cannot help wondering what would happen to both sects if they met in such numbers in Hyde Park? What about carrying Holy Relics in front of Graham's microphone?

## Science Front

### THE RECAPITULATION THEORY

WHEN Haeckel propounded his "fundamental law of biogenesis" he believed he had established an almost exact parallel between ontogeny (individual development) and phylogeny (the evolution of the species). "Ontogeny," he declared, "is an epitome of phylogeny." In considering this matter, he pointed out, we had to make allowance for the fact that the epitomised stages were "overlaid," so to speak, by cenogenetic structures (structures developed to serve the needs of the embryo's intra-uterine life); it was also true that many of the recapitulated stages were very much abbreviated—in some cases entirely omitted; but that was inevitable, since an evolutionary process of millions of years had to be repeated in a few months.

But when due allowance had been made for these factors, we had before us features which were explicable only if we assumed that the embryo, during its development in the maternal womb, recapitulated stages in the evolution of the species.

Since Haeckel's day embryology has become a highly-specialised science; and investigators in that field have come to realise that the problem is not so straightforward and simple as the great German biologist thought. It has been discovered that embryonic processes are subject to the control of "rate genes," which operate to accelerate as well as to retard development. In some cases these genes give rise to what is called "anti-recapitulation," in which evolutionary change is *anticipated*. An example is the hippocampus (a fissure of the brain) of birds and reptiles. This fissure is larger in the embryo than in the adult bird or reptile.

This process, called "foetalisation" (also called Clandestine Evolution or Pedomorphosis), is the very opposite of recapitulation.

It is now realised that embryonic, and more particularly larval, variation may give rise to far-reaching evolutionary change, a thing that Haeckel never visualised.

The recognition of these facts has led to the virtual repudiation of Haeckelism in the field of embryology.

Let it be stressed, however, that there is general agreement among biologists that certain features of embryonic development can be explained only on the theory of evolution.

—(Reprinted from *New Zealand Rationalist*.)

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# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

### "THE FREETHINKER" FUND

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £11 6s. 4d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; Mrs. A. Vallance (Glasgow), 8s.; A. R. Anderson, 7s. 4d.; A. E. Stringer (Dublin), £2 2s.; J. W., 10s. (in memory of John Seibert). Total: £14 15s. 8d.

THOS. SHORROCK.—Thanks for cutting, which has been passed to H. Cutner for attention. He will deal with the matter in a special article.

W. HARDY.—We appreciate the difficulties of propaganda in a rural district. Why not take a supply of *Pamphlets for the People*?

H. McA.—Thanks for compilation of Bishops' wills. We may use it, ignoring sums less than £20,000.

B. HODGSON writes: "Billy Graham does not create stupidity. He taps what is already there."

C.M.—There are three ways of joining the N.S.S.: (1) by a subscription to this address, which would make you a Parent branch member; (2) by joining your local branch, if any; or (3) by starting a new branch, minimum seven members.

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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 Branch 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 Blitzed 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, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

### INDOOR

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Friday, May 14, 7-15 p.m.: D. W. MORRIS MUIRHEAD, "Nature Cure."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. 1).—Sunday, May 16: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Do Ethics Progress?"

## Notes and News

Reservations for hotel accommodation for the N.S.S. Conference at Manchester are coming in quite satisfactorily. Member-readers are reminded that this takes place at the New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate, Manchester 3, on Whit-Sunday, June 6. The Secretary asks Branch Secretaries to let him know the accommodation required for delegates, and other visiting members to send in their requirements without delay.

From time to time we are asked to publish lists of shops where *The Freethinker* can be obtained. May we explain first that there is no reason why any shop should not be able to supply the paper if a regular order is given? The retailer has merely to place instructions with his whole-

saler. Seeing that most of our trade sales are made to wholesalers, we do not know more than a small fraction of the retailers handling the paper, and it would be obviously unfair to the majority of our retailer friends to publish names and addresses of the minority we know, involving a possible loss of custom to the former. The best rule is to place a regular order with your own news-agent, and in the event of difficulty have your weekly copy sent to you direct by post on the day of publication. Quarterly, half-yearly and annual subscription rates will be found above "Lecture Notices" on this page.

The Secretary of the N.S.S. asks us to print the following extract from a letter sent to him by a member:—

"You will no doubt be pleased to learn that I regularly wear my Badge, and that it has already provoked discussion with some people who, I rather imagine, will *think more freely for themselves* in future, instead of pandering to and stagnating in outworn superstitions and beliefs fostered by subtle Priest-craft. T. C. Rowland-Hill, Lt.-Col., V.D., J.P."

Here is confirmation, indeed, of the effectiveness of the new badge, and readers without one should be encouraged to make good the deficiency forthwith. Lapel-stud or brooch-pin badges cost 1s. 9d. each, including postage.

The footnote to the review a fortnight ago of Mr. Du Cann's book *Getting the Most out of Life* gave the price wrongly. It should have been 6s., and copies may be obtained from The Pioneer Press at this figure.

A rabbit, rushing frantically through the woods was stopped by a squirrel who said, "What's the rush, rabbit?" "Don't stop me now," panted the rabbit, "I'm in a hurry. I hear McCarthy is after all the antelopes."

"But," said the squirrel, "You's not an antelope."

"Sure," answered the rabbit, "but, can I prove it?"

—*The Indian Rationalist*.

Just over a year ago the N.S.S. took part in a commemoration ceremony at Northampton, presided over by the Mayor, in honour of Charles Bradlaugh. Discussions are now in progress for a comparable ceremony in honour of Thomas Paine, to be held at his native town of Thetford. The local Borough dignitaries are interested, and it is hoped that details can be announced shortly. The keeping alive of the memory of such benefactors of mankind is a work that we must not allow to be neglected.

### WHAT ARE THE FLYING SAUCERS?

(Concluded from page 155)

view—is to provide explanations of all phenomena, and science does offer explanations of much more than the average layman knows about. Menzel is wise in saying, "As a scientist, I am not bothered if I cannot give a complete, ironclad explanation of every phenomenon I meet. . . . How simple science and life would be if, every time we encountered some seemingly inexplicable fact, we could blame it on an outside force over which we have no control. Indeed, such a mode of thought is as old as man himself. Our prehistoric ancestors personalized all the forces of nature. Gods blew the winds, threw lightning bolts, and stoked the fires that belch volcanic craters. . . . Centuries of civilisation have taught us the futility of inventing mysterious forces and superhuman beings. You could explain *anything* that way."

(Reprinted from *Liberal*)

—NEXT WEEK—

### THE MAN FROM ECTOPLASM

By Dr. CARL H. LOEB



## More Origins of Christianity—3

By H. CUTNER

SCATTERED throughout *The Origins of Christianity*, by Archibald Robertson, will be found a number of statements delivered on his own authority as if they had never been questioned. One of these is: "Now John the Baptist is an historical individual." This must be the case, for John is credited with leading a revolt against the Romans just like Jesus, a revolt for which there is no historical evidence whatever. And naturally, if Jesus is "an historical individual," as Mr. Robertson believes, why should not he have had a "forerunner"? How could John possibly have been referred to in the truthful Gospels if he were not an "historical individual"?

To make John "historical," Mr. Robertson has, of course, to shed his supernatural birth which is so beautifully told in Luke complete with angels and hosannas. But why not? Do not all reverent Rationalists, so anxious to preserve Jesus of Nazareth at all costs, hasten at full speed to disassociate themselves from the supernatural? By throwing over the miracles, the Devils, and Angels, and Resurrections, the story of Jesus is beautifully simplified, and we can now believe that he went about "doing good." Why should we not be equally fair to John?

John is introduced to us in Mark by "In those days came John the Baptist"—and as Robert Taylor pointed out, "In those days" is a phrase exactly like "Once upon a time." It is exactly like the beginning of "the most avowed and declared stories of witches, ghosts, or hobgoblins." He also shows that such a being could never have arose among "the Jews" or any nation "who had been educated under such institutions as those ascribed to Moses." In fact, "A John Baptist could not possibly have been a Jew, had there ever been such a nation as that of the Jews." (Incidentally, Robert Taylor was one of the first writers to make such an assertion about the Jews—which he later did his best to prove.)

John the Baptist is simply the personified Sign of the Zodiac named Aquarius. He is "John the Dipper." He is Oannes, half man and half fish, who came out of the Red Sea and every night dipped back again into his native element. In the story about him which Mr. Robertson takes for Gospel Truth, Jesus insisted that he was a reincarnation of Elias, that is, Elijah. Unfortunately, John himself said he wasn't—and if Mr. Robertson is right, poor John may be having a rough time somewhere hot for telling his Saviour that he was not telling the truth. When John was asked then, "Who art thou?" he said: "I am the Voice." John was the cousin of Jesus according to the "Sacred Records," and so Robert Taylor comments: "As Jesus is expressly called the Word and John the Voice, the devil's in it if the voice and the word are not first cousins, all the world over."

There is an account of John in Josephus, but if one takes the preceding paragraph and the one after, it will be seen that the two paragraphs naturally come together. In any case, the story of John in Josephus is quite different from the one in the Gospels, and even Mr. Robertson cannot reconcile them. Taylor sees in John the Baptist, the Sun in Aquarius "who pours his stream of water into the mouth of the great Southern Fish; and hence becomes Jonas, swallowed by the fish, and the Fish-God, Oannes of the Chaldeans" as well as Janus and "John"—or "Jan"uary, the month of Aquarius.

Just as Mr. Robertson will never admit that Trypho twitted Justin Martyr that Christians had "invented" the story of Jesus, so he will never, never give up Tacitus. It is, of course, quite useless to point out that even if the *Annals* are authentic, Tacitus, in mentioning the Christians

and "Christ," was only giving or trying to give the etymology of the word as given to him by Christians, and obviously did not care two hoots who Jesus was any more than if Egyptians had told him they worshipped Osiris killed by Set, for he must have come across many of these fancy religions. Tacitus mentions Jesus and that is good enough for Mr. Robertson.

It is not good enough for me for various reasons. The *Annals* were quite unknown before the 15th century, and appeared in an age when many "classics" were forged, so great was the demand for them. In *Poggio and Bracciolini*, by W. J. Ross, a masterly analysis of the case for a forgery will be found and, as far as I have investigated the matter, it stands unanswered. Mr. Robertson dismisses forgery with, "The theory was exploded by the subsequent discovery of coins and inscriptions confirming facts previously known only from the *Annals*." Mr. Robertson fills page after page with footnotes giving his "authority" for various statements—but for this one, he very conveniently is silent. There is a good reason. There is no authority whatever. It was asserted by an editor of Tacitus who was himself quite unable to answer Ross and the Frenchman Hochart who also wrote a number of works on the subject.

For myself, I have always felt that the theory of forgery of the whole of the *Annals* does not matter. I am quite convinced that the passages in the book about the persecution of Christian martyrs by Nero and the etymological explanation of the word Christ by Tacitus are just as impudent forgeries as the one in Josephus. This Jewish historian, though he gives a minute description of hundreds of things between the year 30 A.D. and 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, knows nothing whatever of Christians or what happened after the supposed death of Jesus in spite of the claim that hundreds of Jews were being "converted," and hundreds of Christian sermons were being delivered in Jewish synagogues.

It must not be thought, however, that Mr. Robertson is unaware of all this. Everything is true about Jesus except what he himself says is not true. What is not true is plainly mythical. His "reconstruction" of the "origins" of Christianity "in no way," he blandly tells us, "diminishes the mythicist contribution to the history of Christianity. Traditional Christianity, and any attempt to trace traditional Christianity to a unique personal founder, alike break down on the evidence." So long as it is Mr. Robertson who points out the "mythology" inherent in Christianity, all is well. When, however, it is a "mythicist" like myself that is a different matter. I go too far. I have the impudence to deny the "founder" altogether. I deny that he ever lived. And that would never do.

When Mr. Robertson tells us that there was an "historical individual" that we know he existed from the "evidence" of Tacitus and the Talmud, all should be well. He, Mr. Robertson, says so—though, alas, he is obliged to admit that "we know very little" of him. Still the "very little" is enough to annihilate the absurd claim that he never lived at all.

For my own part, after reading the *Origins of Christianity*, I can only marvel at the brilliant way its author manages to say "yes" and "no" when he wishes on the problem of the reputed "founder." When Mr. Robertson has done with Jesus he has left us an attenuated shadow, more like a spook than anything else—a vapour-like nonentity who never said a word or ever did a thing; as far removed from the Jesus of our Bishops as is Aladdin of the Wonderful Lamp. And he has my warmest congratulations.



# Secularism and Science

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

RELIGIONISTS love to be able to point out the shortcomings of science. Once they denounced it as impious meddling in what God Almighty intended to be hidden from mankind. Later it became the fashion to say that science was all very well in its own sphere, but that its sphere was a very limited one, not extending to the most fundamental concerns of human beings such as ethical principles, æsthetic values and spiritual experiences. At the same time the critics of science have always been able to accept with gratitude the testimonials of the scientists willing to add their quota of flattery to the existing witness of non-scientific believers. An example is seen in the readiness with which the B.B.C. allows such scientists to give talks with titles like "The Way to God through Science" (to cite a recent instance).

This inconsistency is typical of pious opportunism, but what is one to think when something similar occurs in the secularist camp? Whatever its intention, a front page article entitled "Science and Religion" that appeared in this journal last January seemed to mean that we had developed, for the first time in the history of our movement, a distrust of science. This was followed up in April by another front page article, "Science—Progress or Prostitution?" in a similar strain, lending further colour to the suspicion that secularism and science had come to the parting of the ways; an idea to be countered with all the energy at our command, lest it be seized upon by our opponents and used to the detriment of our cause.

Indeed, the progress of science, meaning the growth of knowledge through observation, measurement, experiment, classification, hypothesis, testing for error and, finally, generalisation, is essential to the triumph of secularism, the view that the only life we know ought to be as full, free and satisfying as human genius can make it. Let us, then, look at statements taken from the two articles mentioned.

First: "It is no longer possible to equate science automatically with progress." Why? Apparently because the atom bomb was in the news at the time the article was written. True, this was a serious matter, but ought the whole of science to come in for condemnation, because one branch of science, nuclear physics, had made discoveries that had been exploited by the war machines of a few of the most powerful nations? Must we at once forget that at the very moment this condemnation appeared other physical investigations, together with the sciences of chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, medicine, surgery and their specialised branches were quietly proceeding with work for human benefit?

"The scientist, as such," we next learn, "is no more infallible than the theologian," and we should ask when it was that any scientist did claim infallibility? Does not the very name of the scientific experimental principle, "the method of trial and error," expose any suggestion that scientists have regarded themselves as infallible as being quite unjustified?

Highly questionable is the further assertion that "Mankind's critical reason is a greater thing than either science or religion, and alone can decide whether, and when, either science or religion, makes for progress or retrogression." Readers with a modicum of critical reason must have rubbed their eyes in astonishment to see it stated in *The Freethinker* of all publications that religion could make for progress in any circumstances whatever! Have we not been assailing it as "the historic enemy of progress" throughout the lifetime of our movement? How, moreover, is it possible to claim that "mankind's critical reason

is greater than science," as the writer does? We can say that science is greater than religion, because what it tells us can be verified and used to good effect. We can also say that critical reason is greater than religion, because it safeguards us against self-deception and exploitation. Science and critical reason, however, cannot be compared in this way, *since they are in no way opposed to each other*. They are complementary. Science needs reason in choosing its subjects of investigation, classifying its data and constructing its theories. Similarly, reason needs science to provide the reliable data upon which it can operate.

"The fundamental distinction between our present-day civilisation and that of *all* earlier ages is that it is a *scientific* civilisation: that it is founded on science." This pronouncement was made in *The Freethinker* on April 16, 1954. It is completely untrue.

For a civilisation to be scientific surely requires that a broad knowledge of science must exist in the minds of the majority, if not all, of the people whose lives it dominates. Does such a condition yet obtain in any country in the world? Of course it does not. Do even governments and parliaments consist to any marked extent of men and women of scientific understanding? It is rarely evident in debate or in legislative enactments. Can we really describe a civilisation as being scientific while riddled with irrational customs, superstitious beliefs, primitive fears, racial and national prejudices and ignorance of modern knowledge? Aeroplanes, radio sets, electric power and now the hydrogen bomb do not make a scientific civilisation, any more than the modern Press makes a literary one. To say that we live in a scientific civilisation is a wild over-statement. Would that we did!

The final proposition of a debatable series now presented for reconsideration states: "It is indisputable that, in view of recent experiments, mankind stands to-day in greater danger of destruction by a prostituted science than by even the most reactionary religion." This sounds impressive until one inquires whether mankind stands in any danger of destruction at all by religion. One then sees that the comparison made is altogether pointless. Our quarrel with religion is not that it threatens to destroy mankind, but that it preserves the superstitions that stand in the way of progress, the intolerance that finds expression in group domination, the fears and suspicions that breed wars, and the slave mentality that acquiesces in policies and actions revolting to the better instincts of mankind. Our aim is to destroy whatever keeps these instincts in chains, to destroy ideas, beliefs, prejudices, customs, institutions and systems detrimental to the advance of all humanity as one brotherhood; and in that aim science is our best ally. The world needs not less, but more, science to solve the problems of our age.

Meanwhile, if poor fools of men the world over use some of the discoveries of science to prosecute sectional advantage, let us place the blame where it belongs, on the unscientific heritage of stupidity, credulity and fear that has come down to us through the ages. Let us not even unintentionally suggest that science is responsible, for, if we do so, we give support to reactionary forces only too ready to take unfair advantage of any stick to belabour science with as occasion presents. Secularism and science stand or fall together. Our attitude towards *all* war has been stated too plainly for it to be necessary for us to join in a hysterical campaign against science at this late hour. We are for science and the peace that only the expansion of science can bring to the world.



## Correspondence

### HUMAN RIGHTS

SIR.—Has the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the General Assembly of U.N.O., been ratified by Parliament *in toto*? If not, why not? H. J. Blackham says that Articles 18 and 19 provide for freedom of opinion and expression. Surely a ratification *in toto* by Parliament of this declaration of U.N.O. would be tantamount to a repeal of existing Blasphemy Laws, and thereafter any Freethinker could point out that Parliament had thereby made it impossible for anyone to be prosecuted for the crime of blasphemy again.—Yours, etc.,

JOHN GRANTHAM,

### HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE LAW

SIR.—The charge of homosexuality against a member of the British aristocracy has in recent months brought this vexed question to the forefront of public attention. The case has, of course, given the more irresponsible sections of our Press ample opportunity to indulge in a particularly nauseating display of prurient self-righteousness. But it has also caused many thoughtful citizens to consider whether a more enlightened approach to the whole subject is not long overdue.

A homosexual is simply a man who, because of a physiological or psychological abnormality, prefers sexual relations with someone of his own, rather than the opposite, sex. (Lesbianism need not be discussed since, as the result of a puritanical delusion that women could never become sexually attracted to one another, it is not recognised as a criminal offence—perhaps the most absurd anomaly of our law.) For this deviation from the norm he is subjected to all the humiliation of a public trial and, if found guilty, receives a stiff prison sentence. What is this supposed to accomplish? The reformation of the offender? On the contrary, as W. D. Home shows in his play *Barabbas*, our prison system, by throwing together a motley collection of men in unnatural circumstances, actively encourages the practice. The deterrence of others? There is not a scrap of evidence that such an effect has ever been achieved in relation to this or any other offence. As Bernard Shaw pointed out in his famous pamphlet on imprisonment, no criminal believes he will be caught, and so none is deterred by the experiences of those who have been.

The cruelty and stupidity of the laws governing homosexuality almost pass belief. Oscar Wilde emerged at the end of his sentence a broken and ruined man and was dead in three years. The law, in fact, murdered one of our greatest dramatists and wits. One of our most promising novelists at this moment languishes in prison for the same offence. And how many lesser men have suffered and are suffering because of the medieval state of the criminal code governing the matter? Yet no-one has ever been able to produce a single convincing reason why a sexual relationship, conducted in private between two or more consenting adults of the same sex, should be morally wrong. Older and wiser ages have not considered it so. In ancient Greece and Rome homosexuality was regarded as not only permissible but desirable. The attachment of King James I with Lennox, Robert Carr and others, far from being condemned by his contemporaries, was passed off with the famous quip: "Elizabeth was king; now James is queen." The truth is that all of us are homosexual to a greater or less degree. The division between the sexes is by no means so clear cut as many moralists would have us believe. Every man has feminine characteristics to some extent and vice versa. Even complete change of sex occasionally occurs—indeed a case in point headlines the sensational Press as I write these words.

These psychological facts should be obvious to everyone and yet in spite of them we continue to treat homosexuals as criminals and condemn them to endure all the indignities and brutalities of the law. Can any humane person feel easy in his conscience over this state of affairs or deny that what is required is not punishment but compassion and understanding of those unfortunates who, through no fault of their own, have sexual drives different from the majority? Sir Robert Boothby is seeking to introduce a Bill in Parliament shortly to humanise the law relating to this vital problem. His commendable action deserves the support of every liberal-minded man and woman in the country.—Yours, etc.,

REV. JOHN R. BROWN, M.A.

[The above is published as a matter of interest, but *The Freethinker* and the N.S.S. do not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed. —Ed.]

### RECOMMENDED

SIR.—I would like to recommend to your readers, if at least they can get it from their libraries, a most interesting book by Sigmund Freud, called *The Future of an Illusion*. This book is

published by the Hogarth Press, 37, Mecklenburgh Square, London, and the Institute of Psycho-analysis.

In this masterly book the father of psycho-analysis shows how religious ideas were evolved and how little good they are. It is written in a very clear way with no recourse to technical terms and everybody can easily follow the arguments expounded.

Freud demonstrates how wrong or useless the arguments in favour of religion are. For him religion is a neurosis of humanity which will disappear when it grows up. It is only an illusion derived from men's wishes. Man has been for a very long time helpless in face of Nature, so in his imagination he has created a someone to whom he can turn for help and consolation. To escape from the mystery of death he has created the after-life worlds. So God is only a wish made into a reality and is really the continuation of the father, in a child's life, a more powerful one of course, who will protect man and take care of him. In return, as for a child's father, he will want respect.

Anyhow, for Freud, there is no doubt that one day, when humanity has grown a bit more mature, and owing to the influence of science, religion will be completely rejected from our culture, and that "by withdrawing his expectations from the other world and concentrating all his liberated energies on this earthly life, man will probably attain a state of things in which life will be tolerable for all and no one will be oppressed by culture any more."

Indeed, a very fine book to help in our common fight against the forces of darkness and superstition which really deserves to be strongly recommended by *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,

JEAN Toudic.

[This book has been published three times—1928, 1934, 1943.]

## I LOVE . . .

I love to wake, and greet the dawn.

I love my slumber deep.

I love to think how blest I've been,

With sound and healthy sleep.

I love to set the fire alight,

Its ruddy glow to see.

I love to hear the kettle sing.

I love a cup of tea.

I love to hear the postman's knock,

Whatever may be there.

I love my appetite, my thirst.

I love the homely fare.

I love to tend my garden patch;

To gaze on flowers fair.

I love to stroll through woodland glade,

Admiring beauty there.

I love a friend, a chat, a book.

I love my old armchair.

I love my home, my family,

The smiling faces there.

Though life has much we may not love—

Its pain and misery,

I love to think, whate'er befall,

The best is yet to be.

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

## Obituary

### GEORGE E. BRIDDON

Bradford Branch N.S.S. has suffered a great loss by the death at the age of seventy of the above-named member, whose association with freethought, socialist and trade union activities extended over the past fifty years.

An Aireborough Urban District Councillor, member of the Divisional Educational Executive, chairman of Rawdon Labour Party, actively interested in the local debating society, well read and up to date with every advanced movement, George Briddon found time after retiring to build handsome and ingenious master electric clocks as a hobby. His friend and fellow-member of the Branch, Councillor Norman Wilby, chairman of the Urban District Council, conducted secular services at his home and at Lawnswood Crematorium, Leeds, on Easter Monday, in the presence of his family, many friends and representatives of local public bodies.

Widespread and deep sympathy is felt for Mrs. Briddon and her two sons.

W.B.