

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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IT has often been noted that, whilst a monotheistic religion in form, Christianity, particularly in its Catholic expression is largely polytheistic in fact. Between the far-away and intangible god of the theological formulas, "without body, parts, or passions," and his worshippers here below, there is interspersed the company of the saints, at the head of which stands the "Mother of God," the Virgin Mary. It is well known, also, that the cult of the human Mother of God has reached a status in the popular devotion of Catholic lands, in particular, of the more illiterate lands, hardly inferior to that accorded to Jesus Christ, and far in excess of the homage actually offered to the shadowy "God the Father" or to the nebulous "Holy Spirit." The statement that the Virgin Mary has come to represent "The Fourth Person of the Trinity" errs on the side of excessive moderation! In strict fact, she is the Second, if indeed, not the actual First person in the pantheon of Catholic Christianity.

## "The Cult of Mary"

We have referred before in this column to the published works of Professor Prosper Alfaric, one of the most eminent scholars in contemporary European Rationalism. Indeed, in the scope and erudition of his studies of religious history and dogma, Prof. Alfaric is the worthy heir of the great Joseph Turmel, perhaps the most learned of all critical historians of Catholic dogma. In this country, apart from the one and only Joseph MacCabe, whom we were all so delighted to welcome recently to the columns of *The Freethinker*, we do not know Monsieur Alfaric's equal in Anglo-Saxon Freethought circles. The learned author has now added to his already eminent contributions to the critical study of religion, a masterly little study of "*The Cult of Mary*," a study that might bear the sub-title, "The Natural History of the Evolution of a Goddess."

## "From Zero to Infinity"

Monsieur Alfaric summarises the growth of "The Cult of Mary" as an evolution "From Zero to Infinity." Prof. Alfaric is a thorough-going "mythicist," like our own great scholar, John M. Roberston. There never was *any* Jesus at all. "There ain't no sich person," obviously, if there never was a Jesus, there could never have been a mother of Jesus either. Mary is just as ghostly a figure as her alleged "husband"—if that is the correct theological description of the relationship—the "Holy Ghost." However, the "cult," if it started from, in the author's expression, "Zero," looks like ending in "Infinity." The Virgin Mary has already reached virtual godhead in popular devotion. Our author's concluding paragraphs appear to envisage an actual proximate declaration of her divinity by Catholic theology in the near future, of which the recently proclaimed Assumption (1950) is, presumably, the preliminary stage. One could wish that this concluding suggestion had been stated in more detail.

## "Without Father or Mother"

In the earliest form of Christianity the belief in the Virgin Birth was absent, as, also, was any current reference to Mary herself as an historical character, or so, at least, our French critic argues. In the oldest books of our New Testament, there is no mention of Jesus being born at all. In what our author regards as the oldest extant Christian Scripture, the (so-called) "*Epistle to the Hebrews*," written before the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, by the Romans (A.D. 70), it is explicitly stated that Christ was "without father or mother." In the contemporary "Apocalypse" Jesus "was slain since the foundation of

the world." There is nothing to link up the Divine Warrior who leads his celestial cavalry from Heaven to the relief of Jerusalem, with any *human* being whatsoever. In the "lost"—suppressed?—gospel of the heretic, Marcion (c. 140), it is boldly stated at the start that, "Jesus appeared at Capernaum." Even *our* oldest gospel, *Mark*, knows nothing of any human origins, nor—apart from some obvious interpolation in the text—did the author of the "Pauline" epistles. All these early documents know nothing of Mary.

## The Birth of the Virgin Birth

The story of the Virgin Birth first appeared in the popular Christianity of the second century when the Christian churches decided to give their god "a local habitation and a name," a *biography*! Even so, the earliest editions of our *Matthew* and *Luke* knew nothing about a *Virgin Birth*. Both gospels *begin* with genealogies which trace the descent of Jesus from David through *Joseph*—an obvious absurdity to believers in the *Virgin Birth*. Alfaric holds that the belief in the Virgin Birth was adopted by the Church, ultimately, under pressure from the heretic, Marcion, an important figure in the evolution of early Christianity, who forced the Church to accept his view that the state of virginity was, *ipso facto*, superior to that of marriage. Such ideas were "in the air" at the time, and the dogma of the Virgin Birth soon became the orthodox formula of the Churches, though the original Palestinian Christians, the "Ebionites" continued to reject it as a paganising myth, as, indeed, it was!

## Isis and Mary

The elevation of Mary in the celestial hierarchy of Christianity was largely due to *Egyptian* influences. The Madonna of mediæval Catholic art is a hardly altered representation of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, carrying in her arms the infant god, Horus. From times before recorded history began, the Egyptian prototype of the Christian Mary had been adored by the banks of the Nile. Only the names have changed! As our historian learnedly demonstrates, it was, primarily, the Egyptian theologians who were responsible for both the Trinitarian dogma and for the elevation of Mary, in the teeth of fierce opposition from the Nestorians to the officially recognised status and title of

## —VIEWS and OPINIONS—

# "The Cult of Mary"

—By F. A. RIDLEY—



"The Mother of God," the "Theotokas." It was at Ephesus, former sanctuary of the pagan goddess, Diana, that "The Mother of God" was finally proclaimed in 431.

### The Goddess of the Monks

By a curious coincidence, the "cult of Mary" owed most to women and to Monks, who were rigidly debarred from any association with women. The *silent* influence of women on religion is enormous, and Christianity has been no exception. Christianity, too, had to have its *goddess*! However, the *active* promoters of the cult of "The Mother of God," were the monks who, beginning in Egypt in the fourth century, have exercised a powerful influence on the evolution of Catholic Christianity. Mary has always been the goddess, *par excellence*, of the monastic orders. Prof. Alfaric explains this tenacious attachment on Freudian lines as a psychological "compensation" for social and sexual frustration.

### The Evolution of "The Cult of Mary"

"The Cult of Mary" has passed through several successive phases. Her "perpetual Virginity," her "Immaculate Conception," most recently, her bodily "Assumption" into Heaven, have been successively proclaimed as "articles of Faith" by Rome. Will this strange theological evolution (in our author's apt phrase), "from Zero to Infinity," proceed any further: Will the *divinity* of Mary be proclaimed next? There is no further honour that can otherwise be conferred upon the "Christian Isis," "The Star of the Sea," "The Mother of God." Whatever may be the future of "The Cult of Mary," here, we have to thank Prof. Alfaric for a notably lucid and learned summary of the evolution of one of the strangest cults in religious history.

[Les Origines du Culte de Marie, par Prosper Alfaric—*cercle "Ernest Renan,"* 3, Rue Recamier, Paris 7e.]

## The Heavens His Handiwork!

By RUBY TA'BOIS

IT was Haeckel who suggested the word "dysteleology" (from the Greek "dus," lack of, and "telos," end or purpose), to denote the fact that there is much in Nature which definitely excludes the idea of purpose. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the science of astronomy. No astronomer dreams of postulating design in the evolved structure of the universe.

The teleologists who prate of purpose in the "wonders" and "harmony" and "glory" of the skies conveniently ignore the fact of the colossal waste of material and energy going on in the abysses of space. Untold billions of stars rotate aimlessly for unimaginable stretches of time. Not a single one can support life, has never done so, and never will, for the temperature at the centre of a star like our sun is 40,000,000°F., and the atoms are ionised, i.e., stripped of their electrons.

There is no purpose in the existence of the nebulae—those vast masses of gas and dust—of which there are many millions. Their diameters are so inconceivably vast that a unit known as a *parsec* is used to measure them, the order of the measurements giving a result (say) requiring a figure followed by eighteen or more zeros if expressed in miles. Sizes and distances and velocities of these objects stagger the imagination. Wherever we look in the starry sky we see aimless expenditure of stupendous energy squandered purposelessly.

In our own solar system exist the most striking departures from anything in the least resembling purpose. Planets smack-up against the sun so that they are scorched to death; others so distant that they are blocks of ice. There is no purpose in the asteroids, those thousands of small bodies revolving in an orbit between Mars and Jupiter, and which are probably the relics of a shattered planet. There is no purpose in the rings of Saturn, another example of a shattered body; or in comets careering round the sun once before disappearing into space, and with tails millions of miles long, all needing material for no purpose at all. There is no purpose in meteorites hurtling down from the skies, occasionally on to the surface of the earth, causing devastation and loss of life.

Genesis tells us the purpose of our moon is to "rule" the night. Yet it is as often in the daytime sky where it is useless as a light-giver. Further, our earth gives more light to the uninhabited moon than does the moon to the inhabited earth. There is no purpose in the eleven moons of uninhabited Jupiter, nor in any of the moons in our solar system.

Life as we know it is certainly not the purpose of the

universe. If MAN is God's crowning purpose, it is purposeless for Him to have created an almost lifeless universe. Jupiter would have been the most obvious planet to populate from the point of view of accommodation, its volume being some 1,312 times that of our earth. But the Omnipotent Designer has set the temperature at minus 130 degrees Centigrade, and well poisoned the atmosphere with ammonia and methane. Conditions on Saturn and Uranus are as appalling.

Though there is nothing in the evidence of astronomy to suggest the universe has either a beginning or an end, theologians have made much use of Jean's statement that the universe is running down, and must therefore have been wound up. In his book *EOS*, Jeans has a very dogmatic and misleading paragraph which runs: "Everything points with overwhelming force to a definite event, or series of events, of creation at some time or times not infinitely remote." We will not insult his intelligence by assuming he means creation out of nothing. In the same book he has a chapter headed "The Annihilation of Matter" which, with the paragraph just mentioned, can lead the unwary thinker into concluding Jeans believes matter to be both creatable and destructible. Of course, it is neither. The real meaning of "annihilation" is *utter destruction*, while what Jeans really means is not "annihilation of matter" but merely "transformation of matter into radiation." Matter has not been destroyed. It has become something else. Jeans has also been used by teleologists on account of his tidal theory to explain our earth's origin; this theory seemed to imply the earth was something unique, and of possible significance. But Jeans's theory is not now accepted on account of his failure to solve the angular momentum problem.

Dr. Davidson, an astronomer and also a Clergyman of the Church of England, told me that he did not believe the Second Law of Thermodynamics was valid on the macroscopic scale, and he did not therefore agree the universe was running down. He added, "My view, if sustained and finally accepted, would have profound effects on religious beliefs, as it would eliminate the necessity for creation of the universe." This is delicious! A Clergyman on the brink of demolishing his God the Creator!

The evidence of astronomy, then, is of a godless and purposeless universe. No one in his senses attempts to discern the slightest trace of design in stellar gyrations and careering comets and shattered planets and falling meteors and clouds of obscuring matter that abounds in space.

(Continued on page 232)



## INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

## Colin McCall

IN the earlier days of his association with the movement the subject of our present interview was known as Colin McCall junior. To be born into a freethought family is doubtless an advantage. To have to stand in the shadow of one's illustrious sire is perhaps less so, his father being a most efficient worker in the cause and secretary of the Manchester Branch (N.S.S.). The "junior" did not last long, however, for his own contribution to our propaganda by voice and pen soon made him Colin McCall in his own right. Starting by carrying the platform and the case of literature he graduated naturally, through chairing and deputising for absent speakers, to becoming a regular propagandist, and, as one of our younger speakers, it may be hoped that he will continue as such for many years to come. His steadfast devotion to the cause was recently acknowledged in his election to the vice-presidency of the N.S.S. Listeners at his meetings and readers of *The Freethinker* know him as an earnest worker, a cultured exponent and a courteous controversialist. He is here interviewed by G. H. Taylor.

*Can you specify our most dangerous opponent at the present time?*

The Roman Catholic Church represents the most dangerous menace in the world. This is particularly so in the Manchester area, where Irish immigrants abound. The R.C. organisation is the most efficient in Christendom and, as a result, religious apathy hits them least.

*Is there any other urgent point of attack?*

I should say an attack, or rather counter-attack, on the many attempts, whether by literary intellectuals or from clerical sources, to induce the abandonment of reason as a guide to action.

*Over and above the basic questions asked of all our propagandists, different speakers naturally elicit different reactions and responses. What special brand of questions do you get yourself?*

I get many topical questions regarding modern morality and the Christian claim to have the only solution to our problems, personal, national and international.

*Does this mean you perhaps give relatively less attention to hitting the Bible than some of our speakers?*

Well, we cannot ignore it or allow Christians to forget that the Bible is the foundation of their religion, but I personally spend very little time dealing with contradictions and the like. Apart from occasional references to the creation stories, in contrast to evolution, and the inadequacy of the Commandments, I rarely touch on the Old Testament. I deal with the New Testament mainly from two standpoints—the absurdity and unscientific nature of the miracles, and the inefficiency of New Testament morality.

*Christian teaching, or Christianity in practice—which do you go for?*

Chiefly, I think, the latter, but never exclusively so: I always show the correlation with doctrine.

*Can we look for much help from the more rational Christian sects?*

Not much, though the Unitarians have combined with us in protesting against the B.B.C.'s religious policy.

*Do you always have a set lecture in mind when you get up?*

Yes; always. But in outdoor speaking the policy must be elastic, and according to what questions are forthcoming it is often advisable to forsake the lecture and deal with them.

*Have you any favourite speaking pitch?*

I've enjoyed my few visits to Marble Arch and Hampstead, but for me Platt Fields has a special appeal.

*Do you get any specially intelligent opposition?*

In Platt Fields there is plenty of opposition from Manchester University students, but it's mostly a mixture of intelligence and foolishness.

*I expect you've had to deal with some queer types.*

I once had a drunken American soldier who couldn't distinguish between "secular" and "sexual" and wanted my advice on his private life.

*How do you deal with the persons who say they've seen a ghost?*

I ask them to show me why it has any more objective existence than the pink elephants of a D.T. patient.

*And the one who asks for something in place of religion?*

In place of its dogmas—nothing. A modern outlook in place of its morality.

*What help do you like from your supporters in the audience?*

They can really help by curbing any tendency to argue with Christians in a distracting way, or to answer questions addressed to the speaker.

*You agree with what has been said in these interviews about ridicule?*

Yes; I favour it being used sparingly, otherwise this weapon may become blunted. Keep it in reserve for the arrogant and insincere.

*What is your experience of the relative difficulty of converting the old and the young?*

I find the young—of both sexes—more amenable to being converted to our views.

*As you are also a contributor to "The Freethinker" I must ask your opinion on the comparative value of the written and the spoken word.*

My general policy on the platform is to emphasise the need for a common sense approach to all matters. I honestly believe I have influenced some listeners and I think outdoor propaganda is valuable in making new contacts. But the work of following up depends a great deal on the written word and I regard the two media as reciprocal. I think *The Freethinker* should be both cultural and militant, and these two qualities can be combined effectively.

*Are you in general agreement with "The Freethinker's" statement of policy published on May 7?*

Yes! I was pleased to read the statement at the time and I think it is being implemented. It is encouraging to a speaker to know that *The Freethinker* is solidly behind the society; he is able to recommend the paper to those who show interest at our meetings.

*Will the recent N.S.S. conference at Manchester result in any extension of local activity?*

We shall certainly try to get the Deansgate blitzed site going as a regular concern. We are now having successful meetings there on Sunday evenings.

Adam was the first man. God created him a big booby, who, to please his wife, was stupid enough to devour an apple which his descendants have never been able to digest.—VOLTAIRE.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE COMING WORLD CONGRESS  
OF FREETHOUGHT



## This Believing World

**Poor old England!** We get attacked for many things but, according to Alderman R. Hughes, about our worst crime is the way we do *not* keep the Sabbath Day. And this in spite of the pious Lord's Day Observance Society. It appears that Mr. Hughes, who hails from Wales, defended the right, in the Denbigh Borough Council, to lock up on Sunday all apparatus in the children's playing ground. The picture of Denbigh's children on swings or see-saws enjoying themselves on a Sunday was too horrifying for him. "We in Wales," he stormed, "have a duty to the Sabbath. If we lose it, we will soon be in England." Which anyway, God forbid!

**But Ald. Hughes had one good word** to say, if not for England, for an English hotel. On a visit to our benighted country, he actually found a Bible on his dressing-table, and naturally, "That hotel has gone up in my estimation." And therefore, "We in Denbigh should show England and elsewhere that we keep our Sabbath in a different way to that on the six working days." Sabbath-ridden Hughes had plenty of supporters but, alas, he (and God Almighty) were defeated in the Council chamber, and Wales no longer stands where it did.

**Incidentally**—we hope this will catch Ald. Hughes's pious eye—Sunday is not the "Sabbath" day of the Bible as he must know quite well. The Sabbath of the Bible is Saturday and it is kept by Jews. Our Sunday is *not* the seventh day of the week, but the *first*, and was the day kept, long before Jesus was thought of, by all Sun-worshippers. That is why it is called Sun-day. And naturally, as Jesus is mostly the Sun—he rightly calls himself the "Light of the World"—Christians *must* have their Sun-day.

**The B.B.C. are going to broadcast** some of the proceedings of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held this summer on "Church Union." There is one simple way of obtaining absolute Unity, and that is *complete* submission to the Church of Rome. There is no other way. The Church of Rome is in an impregnable position, and can defy all other Churches. It is not split up in hundreds of silly sects all claiming to be right. Its members are all convinced that the Pope and his henchmen have the truth, and they are not allowed to think otherwise even if a suspicion that Rome was not right occurred to them.

**Take such a dogma** as the Assumption of the Virgin—every Roman Catholic must believe it. There is religious unity for you. No matter how silly a dogma can be, it is at once believed in by over 300 millions of Catholics; and therefore what earthly good are other "Assemblies" for "Unity"? There will be hours of unctuous blather by various clergymen pleading for "Union," determined never to give up their own "rights" for Popery, and yet tearfully pleading for Rome to share their own silly beliefs. When Calvinists and Roman Catholics agree to sink all their differences to get "oneness in Christ" will be time to talk about Unity.

**And talking about the B.B.C.**, here we have that very pious journal, the *Daily Mail*, poking fun at its "foolish halo." Its leader-writer "protests against the exaltation of the B.B.C. into a kind of superhuman, divinely-inspired institution." Well, well. We in this journal of ours have been thus protesting for years and years even before World War II. We have even sent deputations to the people on its staff who, the *Daily Mail* declares, "tend to create an

intolerable snobbery in our affairs." Like the *Daily Mail* now, we have protested against the way "the B.B.C. is supposed to exist in a stratosphere of moral righteousness and can do no wrong."

**The B.B.C., as the "Daily Mail"** knows quite well, is in the hands of a religious Christian clique who are determined that nothing, if possible, shall reach radio listeners which savours of heresy. Sometimes—as in the case of Mr. Fred Hoyle—anti-Christian sentiments get by, but if possible, the heretic is not allowed to speak again. And not only heresy in religion. Other heresies like anti-vivisection, the problem of the plays of Shakespeare, vegetarianism, and so on, are forbidden by the B.B.C. pundits. No wonder that the *Daily Mail*, exasperated into attack, insists that we should tear away the B.B.C.'s "false halo."

## Pigs' Paradise

(With apologies to Rupert Brooke)

Gluttoned pigs within their sties  
 Reflect behind their closing eyes,  
 Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,  
 Each secret swinish hope or fear.  
 Pigs say they have their mud and sty,  
 But is there something past the sky?  
 This life cannot be all, they swear,  
 For how depressing if it were.  
 Surely the reverent eye must see  
 A purposeness in Piggery.  
 We darkly feel, on Faith we lean,  
 The next Life is not wholly clean.  
 Muck unto muck, Death hovers near,  
 Not here the Appointed Goal, not here,  
 But, far transcending Space and Time  
 Is muckier muck and slimier slime,  
 A Summerland where grunteth One  
 Who grunted ere grunts were begun,  
 Immense, of piglike form and mind,  
 Swinish, omnipotent and kind,  
 And safe 'neath that Almighty Snout  
 The littlest pig may play about.  
 O never butcher draws a knife,  
 Pigs say, in the Eternal Life.  
 Much more than bran and spuds are there:  
 From troughs celestially fair  
 Super potatoes drift around  
 And paradisal swedes are found  
 To satisfy their gluttony,  
 Unceasingly, immortally,  
 And in that Heaven wherein they dine  
 There'll be no bloody death, say swine.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## Lies

Great is Bankruptcy; the great bottomless gulf into which all falsehoods, public and private, do sink, disappearing; whither from the first origin of them they were doomed. For nature is true and not a lie. No lie you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a Bill drawn on Nature's Reality, and be presented there for payment—with the answer, *No effects*. Pity only that it often had so long a circulation, that the original were so seldom he who bore the final smart of it. Lies, and the burden of evil they bring are passed on; shifted from back to back, and from rank to rank; and so land ultimately on the dumb lowest rank.—Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*.



# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

ARTHUR WARE.—Dean Inge was not an idealist. In philosophy he inclined to teleology (the belief in an evolving purpose using deterministic procedure as its mode of operation).

K. O'DARE.—Psychologists can do nothing with an unrelated "ego." It is at best only an unscientific shorthand term for a built-up personality, and cannot be used as a subject in its own right.

VERNON WRIGHT.—Foote desired *The Freethinker* to be militant and scholarly. Some of the "Bible Sketches" may appear crude to-day, but there was then a greater degree of illiteracy. Doubtless some of Bradlaugh's followers could only read with difficulty, but they could certainly think.

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

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

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON's Lectures: Sunday, July 18, 7 p.m., Blackburn Market. Tuesday, July 20, 7-30 p.m., Huncoot.

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 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. At Deansgate Blitzed Site, 7-30 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, a Lecture.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, noon: H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Bingham (Toc H), Monday, July 19, 7-30 p.m., T. M. MOSLEY: "Why Do Right? The Answer of Secularism."

West London Branch N.S.S.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, W. J. O'NEILL, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

### INDOOR

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Stork Hotel, Liverpool).—Friday July 16, 7-30 p.m., F. A. RIDLEY: "A Secularist Looks at the World."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—Sunday, July 18, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A.: "Belfort Bax Centenary."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—July 16, 7-15 p.m., Dr. W. BIER: "Cruelty."

## Notes and News

Among recent new readers we have gained (or perhaps we ought to describe him as an old reader regained, since he knew G. W. Foote in the paper's early days) we are pleased to note the name of that distinguished veteran journalist, Mr. J. W. Robertson Scott, C. H. He writes that he thinks it "better to order through my newsagent, for it is bound to be seen by some locals before it gets to me and so do good work. The N.S.S. was founded in the year I was born. Weren't people scared!"

High praise of the matter and manner of recent open-air meetings conducted by Mr. Jack Clayton in Preston has been received, and it is forecast that his efforts may lead to the re-formation of the Preston Branch of the N.S.S. We hope to publish definite news very shortly. Meanwhile Mr. Clayton has moved on to Blackpool where, with the co-operation of Blackpool Branch members, he is enlightening the holiday crowds in his forthright and effective style.

# The "Sincerity" of Billy Graham

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

A PRINTED News Letter, dated May, 1954, bearing the signature "Billy Graham," throws rather more light on this gentleman than have the eulogies of his "Christian sincerity" published in the British Press, broadcast by the B.B.C. and endorsed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The "letter" was distributed from Minneapolis, U.S.A., by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, and its message was addressed to American listeners to the radio programme "The Hour of Decision." It reported what Billy Graham said was happening in London, but, above all, it was an urgent appeal for money.

"The over-all expenditure of the British campaign has been much greater than we anticipated," readers were informed, but "the British people have been able to bear a much larger share of the financial load than we had thought possible. It now looks as if we may be able to leave England without any deficit whatsoever." Seeing that at the outset of the campaign the British people were told that generous Americans were bearing the expense, this sounds very satisfactory from the standpoint of the Billy Graham outfit. At the American end, however, the picture painted is far from rosy.

"The Hour of Decision has had to curtail part of its operation in recent weeks. We have had to go off many television stations due to lack of funds, and in some cases we were the only evangelistic programme on television in that city. At this, the most critical hour of history, we pray that we may not be forced to further curtail *The Hour of Decision*. The coming summer months are going to be extremely critical, for while overseas we have not been able to take offerings in our campaigns which usually help supplement our mail income."

That phrase "we have not been able to take offerings" is not very explicit. We know that there were collections taken at all meetings after the first one, but will American readers of Billy's words realise this? It may not have been reported in their Press that one of the voluntary helpers, after having had the benefit of listening to their spell-binder during most of the campaign, was caught helping himself to the notes he had received, was prosecuted for doing so and put on probation for three years. Of course, the phrase can mean, although it is not clearly stated, that the collections went to the British evangelical organisation that invited the Americans over, but what does that matter if the money helped them to pay their share?

The rest of the News Letter suggests that the London Campaign was planned with a view to creating a series of "sensations" to make simple-minded, fearful and self-concerned people in the U.S.A. respond with cash support. And what a hotch-potch it is! "A beautiful young woman from a sheltered, refined background, daughter of a peer, received Christ one night this week," and "on the same night a woman, only a week out of jail (unmarried mother of eight children) was brought to Christ and found in Him the forgiveness and cleansing for which she longed." "A successful doctor," converted at Harringay, "is a new man inside . . . and considers it a privilege to serve his patients, whereas before it was only a job." Then we are told of "a young count from a noble family" who received Christ and exclaimed: "This is what I have been searching for all my life!" The nationality of this young man with an un-British title was not mentioned. Nor are we given the name of the "movie actress" who said: "I don't have to force any smiles now. They come naturally. Down inside I smile all the time since finding Christ."



Then we are told of some very queer people going around behaving like lunatics. Such as the man who was still cynical and critical after hearing Billy Graham, but "while giving his pastor a report of the meetings at Harringay, broke down sobbing: 'I must find Christ'; and the other individual who had never been near Harringay, but walked into a grocery store sixty miles from London and asked the grocer if he had been there. "The grocer replied 'Yes.' The man said: 'Thank God, I must get right with God now. Can you help me?' He was converted right there on the spot." These stories, however, are only the framework for the real underlying appeals to fear and cupidity that this very "sincere" Christian uses to extract financial support from Americans. Let us look at such parts of his "message."

"It is now possible to make a cobalt bomb that could destroy all life on this planet. Suppose a fanatical, demon-possessed man or group of men somewhere in the world sent an ultimatum to the nations calling for their surrender or they would explode a cobalt bomb—what would the nations do? I believe that if the United States and Great Britain will repent of their sins and turn to God that our enemies can be swept away like toothpicks before Niagara Falls. . . . Spiritual awakenings in the past have saved Great Britain and America from dangers and troubles. Many historians recognise that the Wesleyan revivals of the early eighteenth century saved Great Britain from the bloodbath of the French Revolution. A spiritual awakening in our countries can save us. It is the only ray of hope in this dark and perilous hour!" Dr. Graham is obviously full of the importance of his own mission. So full of it, indeed, that he may be suspected of having imagined the "many historians" whom he uses to support his case.

He certainly lays on the colour thick for American readers. I wonder if those who praise his sincerity would subscribe to the following description of conditions in this country at the present time: "In Britain we hear the beating of the war-drums in the night. We can hear the 'thunder' of a half billion people allied against us. Their 'battering rams' are almost at our shores. They have 'swift chariots' and their 'swords' are made of the finest steel. Humanly speaking, there is no possibility of survival. We shall be trampled underfoot by the barbarian hordes as millions were trampled underfoot by Genghis Khan centuries ago." This is not the language of a responsible, thinking person, but the wild ranting of one who is either crazy himself or deliberately seeking to impose on the known craziness of a large section of the American populace. It helps us to understand his recent sermon in Berlin, when he spoke with approval of rearming Germany with the latest and finest weapons—an advocacy that might well produce not only large returns in the form of subscriptions from wealthy folk interested in the manufacture of military munitions of all kinds, but influential support from official quarters as well. Billy Graham makes no bones about regarding giving to the Lord as an investment, and is not at all averse to promising a *quid pro quo* to his supporters.

He emphasises this aspect with some pointed texts. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "The righteous giveth and spareth not." "There is he that scattereth and yet increaseth." "The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Then, perhaps because the Bible is not held in the esteem it enjoyed in the past, he clinches the texts with an up-to-the-minute testimonial: "A business man wrote a few days ago and said that the greatest investment he had ever made was when he gave to *The Hour of Decision*. He stated in detail how it had been returned to him many-

fold, both spiritually and materially." Dr. Graham does not say whether this businessman was in the armaments industry.

Returning to the church and chapel bigwigs, the popular organs of the Press, the politicians and the B.B.C. with their commendations of Billy Graham's sincerity, I cannot refrain from asking myself: "How sincere are they?"

## Science and Civilisation

By FRANK VINEY

A SIGNIFICANT example of the danger of unscientific thinking was the provocative epistle I recently received from a friend who is a Jehovah's Witness.

"I consider the atom bomb outweighs any good the scientist may have done," he writes. "What does the scientist think of mankind in showing the world how to destroy us all?"

Now although my friend's view *per se*, neither vitiates nor runs counter to my own, it is obviously motivated more by an emotional desire to belittle science than by a dispassionate regard for clear thinking. According to the United Nations Health Organisation, half the world remains a slum and about two-thirds of the world's population obtain less than £30 per annum to live on. Atomic energy, appropriately utilised, may yet prove a vital contributory factor in ameliorating the intolerable conditions in which so many humans still live and prematurely die, and which, so long as they continue to disfigure, like a vast festering sore, the surface of the earth, make glib talk of moral values appear as unconscionable cant and humbug. Little or no good purpose is served in castigating the scientist for the diabolical misuse of his discoveries in the sphere of world politics. It is the political set-up upon which we should focus our hypercritical attention.

However, what does my friend advocate? "One thing possessed by J.W.s," he says, "is peace of mind." He no longer worries why this or that is happening, because he *knows* why. I am exhorted to read the 24th chapter of St. Matthew to become equally enlightened, and by so doing I am reminded of Christ's solemn predictions of his speedy return in glory and of the end of the world, which events are to be preceded by wars, pestilences, famines, earthquakes, and so on. Doubtless my friend and I might profitably exchange views on almost any subject but religion. Why? Because our criterion of truth would be the same. But once enter the field of religion and the Christian (of whatever sect) is no longer concerned with truth in the common sense way in which he, and most of us, use it in the daily business of life. His reason is subordinated to emotion; the creed of his choice, so long as it ostensibly provides a hope for the realisation of his most cherished desires, must be defended at all costs; he must have faith, i.e., believe something without adequate evidence. Thus, by the prostitution of his intellect, he is enabled to enjoy the comforts of unreason. At what expense to the progress of humanity, heaven only knows.

In view of the nature of my friend's faith, it would be pointless to suggest that it is highly probable that the prophecy in St. Matthew is either (a) a false prophecy, or (b) a potentially true prophecy, but in which case also an example of deliberate prevarication and deceit in regard to those to whom the words were originally addressed (for the same chapter clearly proclaims that ". . . verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." James, Peter, and Paul also taught that the end of the world was imminent.

Unfortunately, the logical corollary of a belief in this prophecy (and J.W.s are singularly logical within the



framework of their creed) is to stand aloof from all human problems, social and political; if the Second Coming and the end of the world are near, what matters? The predominance of such a view would cripple human endeavour. Gone would be the magnanimous urge to eliminate the causes of war, famine, and pestilence. Indeed, it is folly to try and prevent what, in order to fulfil divine prophecy, must inevitably happen; folly even to condemn—as does my friend—the misuse of scientific knowledge. If many of our best citizens are to withdraw from human affairs with “peace of mind,” devoting their thoughts and energies to escapist creeds, then the hope of solving many problems—of facilitating or perpetuating the happiness of millions—becomes infinitely less. Let us endeavour, therefore, to concern ourselves with *this* life and not with hypothetical possibilities of another.

It is, I think, essential for the ordinary man to be aware that a university education is not necessarily a guarantee of a person's rationality on questions related to his prejudices. A tutor at an evening school, who graduated at Oxford, once endeavoured to convince me that scientific method, like religion, is itself founded on “pure faith.” The “faith” in scientific method, however, and that regularities will repeat themselves, is palpably different from the faith in the existence of things that are postulated without adequate evidence and with regard to which we are unable to apply the ordinary tests of objective verification; it is rational to have “faith” in a probability, but irrational to have faith in an improbability.

The Rev. Billy Graham was recently guilty of similar equivocation. He argued that because he had faith that the coffee made by his wife was not poisoned and because we have faith and do not question the quality of the white milk produced by a black cow which eats green grass, it is reasonable to have faith in Jesus Christ. It is surely an indictment of our educational standards that I have encountered several people of average intelligence who had heard and accepted this gem of logic.

Often we hear the lament—not only by people like the Jehovah's Witnesses—that science has become a danger to civilisation. There is a tendency, it seems, to hypostatise science into a sort of inorganic ogre whose culpability for the imbroglio in which human-kind now finds itself is irrefragably self-evident; from all sides we are adjured to return to, or embrace, this or that Faith (i.e., to adhere to a belief upon inadequate evidence) as the wisest course of action demanded by the world situation. Yet, before succumbing, ought we not to ponder the evidence, with which the history of human development abounds, that most, if not all, of the major problems that have confronted men have been solved neither by invoking the assistance of the supernatural nor by mere faith in a dubious creed but by the sedulous application of organised common sense to the understanding and mastery of nature, or, in other words, by means of scientific method.

For example, the Bible injunctions “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus), and “A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit or that is a wizard shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus), were for centuries quoted in support of the incredibly barbarous treatment of those who were mentally ill and believed to be possessed of devils; and, of course, Christ himself, if we are to believe holy scriptures, subscribed to this erroneous idea by purporting to cast out a legion of devils from a man into two thousand pigs, causing the latter to dash down a steep slope into the sea to drown—which from an unprejudiced standpoint seems rather unfair on the pigs.

Rational treatment of illness, both mental and physical, met with fierce opposition in the Middle Ages. However, whilst tremendous progress has now been made in those

many spheres where science has defeated obscurantism, the quality of thinking and behaviour in other spheres—particularly in regard to human relationships and world politics—remains at much the same level of sheer prejudice and emotion; little attempt is made by governmental or other authorities to encourage objective and critical thinking, and countless well-intentioned people, befuddled and bewildered by world events, emulate the emus by sticking their heads, not in the sands, but way up in the nebulous clouds of escapist creeds and ideologies.

Yet, if history has a lesson for us, it is that there is nothing in the present situation to warrant either apathy or defeatism. As late as 1797 the *Encyclopædia Britannica* stated that “the reality of demoniacal possession stands upon the same evidence as the Gospel system in general,” but to-day it would be difficult to find even one educated person of sound mind who adheres to a belief in evil spirits. When, in the nineteenth century Sir James Young Simpson advocated the use of anæsthetics in surgical operations and obstetrics he met with a storm of clerical opposition; but to-day this has been almost, if not completely, overcome. Science, in whatever field, has invariably had to fight for its life against superstition; victory has been slow but sure.

Let us, therefore, not be too pessimistic about the possibility of there being a rational *modus vivendi* between the World Powers; let each and every one of us play his small part by objectively questioning his own motives and assumptions; let us not rail against science but realise that, as in the past, our primary hope of improving and perpetuating our civilisation lies in the humane application of scientific principles.

## Correspondence

### RELIGION AND PROGRESS

Do not some of your articles pay too many compliments to religion as the binding force in primitive society, and to priests as the creators of the earliest civilisation? I find these articles a departure in this respect from the Secularism I have known most of my life.

Surely, the real cement of society is man's gregarious instinct, which always and everywhere renders companionship and co-operation necessary to human existence. Religion acts in opposition to the universal influence of gregariousness by excluding unbelievers, and that is the reverse of progressive. No harm is suffered by a tribe, nation or state when religion decays, because a healthy and progressive society can then find opportunity to flower.

To state that it is “incontestable” that the earliest civilisations in recorded history were created under the auspices of religion is, to say the least, rash. Compare Joseph McCabe's *A Rationalist Encyclopedia* (article *Civilisation and Religion*) from which I quote the following:—

“It will be found that in the discussion by historical experts of the agencies which periodically raised Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, China, or any other civilisation to its higher level, religion is never mentioned. . . . No statement is more common in our literature than that religion is of peculiar value in connection with civilisation, and none is more massively discredited by the facts of history.”

Again, take the statement that one could in a sense call the priests of Egypt the first scientists, and Theology as in a way the earliest form of science, and compare it with V. Gordon Childe's *Man Makes Himself* (Note to Chapter VIII):—

“It is quite obvious that science did not, and could not, spring directly from either magic or religion. We have shown in detail that it originated in, and was at first identical with, the practical crafts. In so far as a craft like that of healing or astronomy was annexed to religion it was sterilised of scientific value.”

The quotation of Aristotle's observation that the Egyptian priests were “the first leisured class in history” in support of the contention that they were also able to create the earliest of civilisations should be set against a fact revealed in Sir J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Abridged Version, Chapter XXXIX), namely that the far-from-leisured farmer was a better scientist than his priestly contemporary so far as the natural cycle of the seasons was concerned. Frazer wrote:—

“If the Egyptian farmer of the older time could get no



help, except at the rarest intervals, from the official or sacerdotal calendar, he must have been compelled to observe for himself those natural signals which marked the times for the various operations of husbandry. . . . The rites of the husbandman were stable because they rested on direct observation of nature: the rites of the priest were unstable because they were based on a false calculation."

Am I wrong in preferring the authorities I have quoted to assertions to the contrary? The good old onslaught on priestcraft strikes me as better Secularism than the new revelation of debts we are supposed to owe to early religion and its professional exponents. If, in the teeth of contrary statements from other reliable sources, we assent to claims that once upon a time myths and priests were socially useful and progressive, it is but a step further to agreeing with other claims that to-day we refute, such as the dependence of education, anti-slavery, hospitals and social reform on religious efforts. Of course, I admit that a very small proportion of priests have shone as scholars, poets, artists, musicians, scientists and humanitarians; but to do so they had to turn away to that extent from the priestly functions of conducting primitive ritual and preaching pernicious doctrine. My reading of history and my observation of current ecclesiastical practice convince me that at all times and in all countries priests have been pests and parasites, and myths and religion barriers to progress.—Yours, etc., "OLD-SCHOOL INFIDEL."

#### THE HOLY MORAL GUIDE

I must congratulate the N.S.S. speakers, who have been interviewed, on their tenacity in continuing to expose the Christian Holy Book. When one has overthrown all childish Bible-beliefs one is apt to suppose that everyone else has too. On the contrary, vast numbers of people still think—incoherently—that there is something vital in the Bible, and while this is so it will still be passed as a sort of text-book on morals for the young.

E. COOPER.

#### A DARWIN POLL

I suggest that at the next General Election every candidate should be asked the question, "Do you believe in evolution?" This would be an intelligence test. It could be applied generally. Darwinism is ignored by statesmen of all parties and all the Churches.

W. MARGIE.

#### RELIGION AND THE ELEMENTS

Two more reasons, matters which have been within my own experience, corroborate the interesting theory that the Indians are so religious because they are dependent for their very existence on the elements, and the Chinese so atheistic because their salvation largely depends on their own efforts.

First, sailors are notoriously pious compared with landmen. They are mostly at the mercy of the elements when the latter are at their worst, and little or nothing they can do about it except pray!

Secondly, there is the S. African National Party who, almost to a man, belong to one of the three Calvinist Reformed (Dutch) Churches, all of them Fundamentalists. One of these, the Hervormde Kerk, is so fundamentalist that it won't even have the hymns of the other two, and sings nothing but the psalms. In other parties you find men of all creeds or none. Not so in the National Party. Their ancestors, and in many cases their present members, like the people of India, had to contend with dreadful droughts in the interior of the Union, followed usually by almost equally destructive floods, and in general may be termed a rural people, although many nowadays are drifting to the larger towns, and from my own observation many of these are no longer regularly attending the Kerk.

LEONARD MARTIN.

#### THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Merely to record the fact that man was born of a virgin does not prove this, though there be a thousand contemporary writers. Nor do we question the honesty of the writers, nor their desire to tell the truth, but whether they were in a position to know the truth. It is not a matter of whether there is enough evidence to establish the reality of a particular recorded event, but whether in the light of present-day knowledge we can rule it out as incredible.

Some years ago people believed in witchcraft, and there was no lack of evidence brought forward to support this belief. The evidence was honest and historical and well attested.

Birth is a biological fact, and requires biological evidence to prove it, also the changing of water into wine requires a knowledge of the chemical constituents of both liquids. Thus much of the evidence given is not merely inadequate, it is irrelevant.

It is in the light of the knowledge we now have that we judge the evidence of Christianity, and in the light of that knowledge it must stand condemned.

G. DICKINSON.

#### HOMOSEXUALS AND THE LAW

May I comment on the letter from the Rev. J. R. Broom in your issue of May 14.

This letter, in its essentials, must surely express the views of most Freethinkers on the subject of homosexuality. Your footnote at the bottom of the letter to the effect that the views expressed are not necessarily endorsed by the N.S.S. gives me, therefore, a certain feeling of uneasiness.

It is difficult to believe that the N.S.S. could possibly approve the present legal persecution of the homosexual. Such an attitude would not only be at variance with the whole humanitarian tradition of Freethought, but would also run counter to the 16th article of the N.S.S. "Immediate Practical Objects": "the humanisation of the treatment of the insane, the abnormal and the mentally defective," etc.

The position is simple enough. The genuine homosexual is an afflicted person, who can only find sexual expression with his own sex. The present law which punishes this affliction as a crime is an example of religious superstition and ignorance at its worst (though it is only fair to say that some clergy to-day are adopting a more enlightened attitude). It is as natural for the homosexual to have relations with his own sex as it is for the normal man to have them with women. The present law tries to condemn him to a sexless life.

Because something is a sin in the eyes of the Church that is no argument for it being an offence in law. Why do we not make all "sins" illegal? Hardly any other form of immorality is a criminal offence.

In any case, private morals are surely a purely personal matter. The present law on homosexuality is not only cruel and barbaric, it is also frankly ridiculous.

I think the Rev. Broom goes too far in talking about the "wiser" civilisations of Greece and Rome, and implying that homosexual practices may be positively desirable. But the experience of other European countries shows that the law could be changed in Britain without harmful results. Be that as it may, a more sympathetic and understanding approach is needed. Let there be no more pandering to bigotry and stupidity.

J. COITIER.

[The Freethinker and N.S.S. endorse your attitude and, in general, that of the Rev. J. R. Broom.—Ed.]

#### CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

The whole history of the Christian Church shows that it has never felt itself called upon to fight any social institution, no matter what its character, so long as it favoured the Church. Slavery and serfdom, war, piracy and child labour have all been in turn sanctioned. The Bishop of the Church claimed his feudal rights and privileges as strenuously as the medieval lord, and retained them longest. Its relation to slavery is, in fact, an epitome of its attitude towards social problems in general. It has taken existing institutions and, so long as they did not conflict with the Church, given them its blessing. And it gave to a re-created slave trade in modern times the same support it gave to the ancient traffic. It is small wonder that when, as Hobhouse says, the Christian world came into contact with the black races, there was "no moral force at hand to resist the natural results." How could there be in a society which had for so long been subject to the powerful influence of the Christian Church?—Chapman Cohen (*Christianity and Slavery*).

#### THE HEAVENS HIS HANDIWORK!

(Concluded from page 226)

What we do discern in the stellar universe is a vast machine working according to purely mechanical and mathematical "laws." There is no chance; there is no design; there is NECESSITY. The message of astronomy and astrophysics is of a self-determined, self-moving universe of matter in an endless state of physical and chemical change.

I will conclude with a quotation from Bertrand Russell who said, "I see no comfort to be derived from the supposition that this very unpleasing universe was manufactured of set purpose."

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