

The Freethinker

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MOST of the religions of to-day profess a belief in monotheism, either in its pure monotheistic form, as in Unitarianism or in its modified Trinitarian definitions, as in orthodox Christianity, where the most Holy Trinity could be accurately defined as a "one-man committee"! However, there is a "struggle for existence" in religion, as in other, more secular matters. In order that monotheism should finally triumph other religious concepts had to fall by the wayside. Amongst these was Polytheism, the belief in the multiplicity of gods, a belief at one time practically universal. Another victim, less known, but also a once widely held view, was Dualism, the belief in two simultaneously rival gods, usually identified, respectively, with good and evil, who contend for mastery over the Universe and over the soul of mankind.

Dualist Philosophy

It must, we think, be conceded that the philosophy of Dualism is, at first sight at least, more plausible than the now universal belief in a single creator of the Universe. In both the physical and in the moral worlds, good and evil, or what appear to us to be such, alternate sharply and categorically. Light and darkness, day and night, represent obvious and striking examples of this duality in the physical sphere. In the moral sphere, good and evil may appear to philosophically constituted minds to be largely socially conditioned and relative in character. But to the simple untutored minds of primitive races, they, too, possess a character of open and absolute duality. Consequently, when mankind arrived at that phase in his intellectual evolution which expresses itself in theological myth-making, it was not at all surprising to find that a school of thought arose which emphasised the dualistic aspects of existence, and which interpreted the social struggle of good and evil here below as a metaphysical derivation from the eternal war between the two fundamental attributes of existence, theologically personified as supernatural Beings of a distinctive character.

Persian Dualism

As was indicated recently in a scholarly article reprinted in *The Freethinker* from our American contemporary, *The Liberal*, ancient Iran (Persia) was, it would appear, the cradle of Dualism, and the Iranian prophet, Zoroaster, appears to have been amongst its first exponents. It would, perhaps, actually be more accurate to state that the creed of Zoroaster, still current in small present-day communities in Persia and India, is the last remaining example of the religious sub-species otherwise extinct. It would appear that in the ancient pagan world, Dualism was the rule rather than the exception. For example, the ancient Egyptians featured a celestial war between the good gods, Osiris and Horus, on the one hand, and the evil god, Set the Destroyer at a much earlier date than that commonly ascribed to Zoroaster (c. 800 B.C.).

The Dualistic Origins of Satan

The Jews, as our learned American contemporary pointed out, owed a great deal to the Persian creed of Zoroaster. Perhaps their most striking loan was to be found in the idea of a personal Devil. For our old friend and patron(!) Satan, represents, historically, a bowdlerised version of the Persian god of evil, Ahriman, who, in the original version of Zoroastrian theology, appears to have been also a rebellious angel rather than a fully developed god. The famous Armageddon, pictured in our Book of "Revelations" between Satan and the Archangel Michael, is an almost exact reproduction of the Zoroastrian theology, which centred around a "war in heaven" between the powers of light and darkness.

Christian Dualism

To-day, as we noted above, Christian theology is rigidly monotheistic. But this has not always been so. In both early and mediæval Christianity, there were many professedly Christian sects who professed a Dualistic form of Christianity. These included the famous Marcion, the editor of the first, specifically Christian New Testament, and the Albigenses, who were so horribly exterminated by the Catholic Inquisition in the 13th century. Even the great St. Augustine was a Dualist for a time before becoming the pillar of Christian orthodoxy. Dualism was an endemic constantly recurring heresy in the religious underworld of the Christian Middle Ages. A high proportion of the heretics who died at the stake throughout this period did so on account of Dualistic heresies, which asserted that evil was not created by God, but was the work of an independent evil principle, usually personified as a rival god.

[cf. *The Mediæval Manichee*, by Stephen Runciman, and *St. Augustine and His Age*, by Joseph McCabe.]

Manicheanism—International Dualism

The original creed of Zoroaster, eventually, became embodied in a Persian national church and as such, like all "established" churches, became rich and self-satisfied. This social attitude became evident in its theology. Zoroastrian Dualism assumed an *optimistic* character. Eventually, declared the Persian theologians, the Light will triumph over the Darkness, the good will triumph over the evil, just as, in the terrestrial sphere here below, the armies of Iran (Persia) will conquer the barbarians beyond her borders! Thus, the creed of Zoroaster ended by assuming a *monotheistic* character, in which, Ormuzd, the good god will eventually get the better of Ahriman, the Persian "Satan." In this form, the creed of Zoroaster may be called monotheistic rather than dualistic in character. However, the original Dualism survived and, in the Third century of our Era, assumed an international, a cosmopolitan form in the world-religion founded by Mani, or Manichæus, a native of Babylon, who was traditionally murdered by the Zoroastrian Church (c. A.D. 270), but who

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Satan versus God

By F. A. RIDLEY

for centuries, had as many followers as Christ or Muhammed. For several centuries, the religion founded by Mani enjoyed a world-wide vogue. Remains of its influence have been found in China, whilst St. Augustine joined it in Africa. The Manicheans were ascetics, vegetarians, and pacifists. It is perhaps on this last account, even more than on account of their heretical theology, that everyone, pagan, Christian, and Muhammedan governments alike, persecuted them impartially. They were even accused of Communism!

Optimist or Pessimist

The philosophy, or theology of Dualism varied in character, as we have seen. Whilst the optimistic Zoroastrians believed that, in the cosmos—and, presumably, here below?—right would eventually triumph over wrong, the good god over his evil rival, most Dualistic creeds were

pessimistic. The struggle would go on for ever; right would *never* get the better of wrong. As we have seen, in this respect, Christianity took over the Zoroastrian, not the Manichean devil! Satan may have his fling for a time, but sooner or later, the Lord will send him where he belongs! Most Dualist creeds, for example, Manicheism, Marcionism, and others, took the pessimistic view; the evil one will *never* get his quietus! Logically, these pessimistic creeds were pessimistic in practice as well as in theory; they usually identified evil with matter and cultivated an extreme asceticism, which, no doubt, was one reason why they failed to survive in competition with more aggressive creeds. Fashions change in religious philosophy, but, for the moment, Dualism appears to be extinct, and its last remaining Christian legacy, the Devil, "Old Nick," is at a discount in present-day theology, and seems to be finally doomed, not to Hell, but to oblivion.

Self-Righteous Peers

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

WHEN the House of Lords was reduced to a subordinate position in the machinery of British government, a fashion started of atoning for curtailing its powers by paying compliments to the "Upper" House on the high intellectual level of its debates and on the judicial calmness distinguishing its atmosphere from the more hectic one of the House of Commons. A debate recently initiated by Earl Winterton on whether there should be a change in the law relating to homosexual offences did not uphold this reputation.

The noble Conservative Peer who raised the matter, supported by his Tory friend Lord Vansittart, made the occasion one for attacking the actor-manager who was fined not long ago for importuning males. They expressed, in doing so, their horror at the state of morals in the theatrical profession and amongst the public generally, shown by the fact that he had not been hounded off the stage, and had even received ovations when appearing. For the Labour side of the House, Earl Jowitt and Lord Ammon made it clear that there is no party line dividing ignorance from enlightenment in this matter. Ignorance and a narrow vindictiveness were, indeed, patent in the speeches of the four peers named.

For example, Lord Winterton described the actor-manager in question as one who showed "no public repentance" after being convicted of "a disgusting crime." The newspaper report that I read at the time informed me that the accused said in court that he had been overworked and worried, had taken too much to drink that evening and could not explain his action, which he deeply regretted. This was reported in the press all over the country and probably in many parts of the world. What further public repentance does the noble lord want? Ought the culprit to write articles for the press, enlarging on his feelings, for the morally superior to gloat over? He could sell them for big money these days. Ought he to have cancelled his theatrical engagements at once? This would have certainly been easier than carrying them out in the circumstances, but it would have involved his business associates in loss, and a number of actors in unemployment, while the public would have missed some stage productions of a high artistic order. Lord Winterton seems incapable of appreciating that the public could admire his professional distinction and applaud him for the course he followed in a difficult situation. Instead, the speaker had to join with Lord Vansittart in accusing the public of condoning lapses from normal decent behaviour.

A male who importunes other males does not thereby, to use Lord Winterton's words, "commit a disgusting

crime." Actually he makes himself a public nuisance, in exactly the same way as a man who accosts females, or a prostitute who solicits custom in the street does. Nobody who advocates changes in the law regarding homosexuality asks that importuning shall cease to be an offence. Yet Lord Jowitt represented the attitude of opponents of prison-sentences for homosexuals as being "He is that way inclined; he likes doing that and why shouldn't he?" The conduct he refers to as "that" is, he said, "essentially wicked and evil," a sentiment echoed by Lord Ammon, his fellow Labour-peer, who is reported to have drawn approving cheers when he announced: "In my youth they used to call these things sin. Now they call them complexes." Clearly these self-righteous peers, only one of whom, by the way, sits among the Lords by *hereditary* right, have no more understanding of the conduct associated with Sodom and Gomorrah than had the Biblical writers whose denunciations of it enliven the Old and New Testaments.

Lords Brabazon, Chorley and Ritchie of Dundee, however, contributed thoughtful speeches advocating clinical rather than penal measures for dealing with the problems involved, and Dr. Barry, the Bishop of Southwell, departed entirely from the Biblical attitude by saying that he believed that some homosexuals were "just born that way," that there was "nothing reprehensible" about it and that "their plight demanded every sympathy and consideration." Narrow-minded Christians will certainly purse their lips over this episcopal pronouncement, while our readers may incline to the view that he is over-sentimental where scientific detachment would have been more to the point. Still, he was much to be preferred to the precious quartet who were so full of the sinfulness of the perverted and of their own moral superiority. Their "normal" inhumanity should make N.S.S. members glad that the Society's Conference had no hesitation in calling for necessary changes in the law that at present sends homosexuals to prison time after time without any possibility of its doing any good.

ROME OR REASON? A Question for Today. By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 1s.; postage 2d.

MARRIAGE, SACERDOTAL OR SECULAR? by C. G. L. Du Cann. Price 1s.; postage 1½d.

THEISM OR ATHEISM. The Great Alternative. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.

WHAT IS RELIGION? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

Catholic Propaganda Films

THE Vatican, with its usual capacity to inject its religious sepias into all social crevices, is trying to take advantage of the general chaos in thought to-day. This cunning religious organisation, which is regarded as the most efficiently stage-managed in the world, "never misses a trick," when the general psychology is favourable, to consolidate and extend its forces. To-day it is doing this, in a most obtrusive and impertinent way, through all the media of contact with the public—the newspapers, the radio, the films, etc.

Perhaps the films provide its most impudent and insidious medium. There was a time when the secular principle in regard to motion pictures, and other sources of entertainment for the general public, was consistently adhered to, for box office reasons. It was realised that the introduction of clerical characters, either Catholic or Protestant, into pictures or other plays, had a tendency to create disaffection in mixed audiences, particularly if any specific religious propaganda were associated with these black-coated gentlemen. Catholics, for instance, had and still have no time for Protestant clerics or their religious activities, and many Protestants who resent the presumptuous claims of the Vatican to "infallibility" or who can never forgive these enemies of tolerance for their past Inquisitorial record, regard the typical picture of the lovable and self-sacrificing priest, especially with his Irish accent, as a personal affront to their own sect, while the Rationalist or freethinker regards all this religious "hoocy" as an insult to his intelligence.

While we rarely see a Protestant minister featured in the films, especially when associated with a Protestant service, quite half the pictures to-day show some phase of Catholic ritual or sentiment. In fact, so general is this tendency to use the films for Catholic proselytism, that half the time one goes to see the pictures nowadays it's like going to church. And unless a Rationalist knows beforehand the type of picture he is going to see he is as likely as not due to have his principles jarred by a Catholic sermon based on stupid mythology and ignorance.

The titles of the pictures in many cases do not forewarn him. They are (purposely, no doubt) designed to mislead him. Who would suspect, for instance, that a title like "Never Take No for an Answer" would tell the story of an ignorant Italian child who had such "faith" that the bones of St. Francis would cure his sick donkey, that he ultimately succeeded in getting the Pope to overrule the priests who would not allow him to break down a wall to let his donkey into the vault of the saint? There is a general "miracle" atmosphere enveloping the whole picture, of course. Other recent films which have been going round the Melbourne suburbs are "The Miracle of Fatima," "The Foreign Legion," in which a simple-minded but shady character becomes "converted" and enters a monastery of "dumb" monks; "Sombrero," which has much of a Catholic atmosphere about it; "Going My Way," in which the audience's sense of humour is catered for so as to make the Catholic atmospherics palatable; "Quo Vadis," that great spectacle but blatant exaggeration of Catholic Christian virtue and fortitude and Pagan cruelty (with an incidental conversion to Christianity, of course); "I Confess," an impudent piece of Catholic propaganda emphasising the inviolability of the Confessional, in which a priest keeps stupidly (and immorally) silent while the confessor frames him for the crime (murder); but it must misfire to the intelligent person who cannot see the sense in the priest's "heroic" silence while the confessor runs amok to commit more murders (this picture is also well punctuated with "signs of the cross"). Another picture

tells the story of a crippled girl whose Catholic "faith" lifted her out of her invalid chair and incidentally converted her agnostic doctor. "The Way of a Gaucho" has a priestly atmosphere about it, with signs of the Cross and sacred ikons obtruding on one's intelligence; while "The Iron Mistress" demonstrates how a statue of the Virgin miraculously saves the life of the "reverential" Alan Ladd after he has been nearly murdered by enemies, and ends up with a spectacular cathedral wedding scene with all the elaborate and garish Catholic altar candelabra and other religious gadgets calculated to hypnotise impressionable mentalities. Another misleading title, "Taxi," pictures an Irish Catholic girl full of faith and introduces a large ikon of St. Anthony for a "miracle" atmosphere, a Catholic Church altar and more signs of the Cross. Even in "Titanic" a self-sacrificing priest is introduced in such a way as to show the integrity of the Vatican, and more religion is injected into the tragedy than is artistically necessary. In "Mogamba" another interlude unnecessary to the picture depicts Ava Gardner in a Catholic confessional with a priest (more signs of the Cross, etc.). The priest also gives more than a hint of the Church's continued opposition to evolution.

Such films as "Salome" and "Samson and Delilah" are also calculated to assist the general Christian Catholic propaganda trend; also "The Robe," another triumph in its new "Cinemascope" effect for Catholic Christianity and in which another "conversion" takes place.

Added to these stories, we get featured on the Metro or Pathe' news section any Catholic demonstration that takes place, such as Eucharistic processions or rosary crusades.

The Catholic priest is always represented as a good fellow—never a picture with a bad priest, though one story recently featured one who had doubts, which were, of course, later dissipated in the light of some "miracle."

This Catholic film propaganda has become quite nauseating. Why the antagonistic rival sects tolerate it without protest is perhaps explainable by the fact that so much has to be tolerated in so many other directions to-day. —(From the *Australian Rationalist*.)

The B.B.C. and Islam

We are favoured with a copy of a letter sent to the Director-General of the B.B.C. by an English Muslim, dated June 30. It reads:—

I have noted on several occasions recently that there have been instances, both on sound radio and television, where the religion of Islam has been insulted. This has caused very great hurt to thousands of Muslims, both English and foreign, the majority of whom are either British subjects or members of the British Commonwealth.

In these days, when attempts are being made from every side for mutual understanding between nations and races, it seems rather strange that the B.B.C. should go out of its way, apparently, to stir up ill-feeling between members of different creeds. Islam is the greatest monotheistic religion in the world to-day, and attempts by a body such as yours to proselytise followers of this great religion to a more primitive religion, i.e., Christianity of one form or another, are not viewed with favour.

It would at least be equitable if the other great religions of the world could have the opportunity of presenting their point of view—and I am sure they would not have the bad taste to impute such vulgar attributes to other religions, as was the case during the religious service from All Souls' Church last Sunday evening, when the verse of a hymn was flashed on to the screen, reading: "... where Islam's sway, broods darkly o'er the earth."

The English people are traditionally honest and decent, and lovers of fair play, and we have previously been led to believe that the B.B.C. represents all that is good in England, but I am beginning to have my doubts.

Yours faithfully,

AL-HAJ ABDEL KARIM HERBERT.

This Believing World

The latest work on the Bible has just been sponsored by *The Times*, and most interesting it is. Written by Christian scholars, it is a far cry from the Fundamentalism of such pious ignoramuses as the Rev. B. Graham. For example, the article on Hebrew by Prof. Winton Thomas does not accept the general view among Christians that the language was the first ever revealed to man—the language God used when speaking to Adam, or that used by the Serpent when speaking to Eve. Hebrew has come down a long way from that exalted view—it is merely, with Aramaic, descended from a "proto-Semitic" language about which we know literally nothing.

And what about the Bible in "the Light of Archæology"? Has anything whatever been proved to be true? As an example, we are told that, "It is no longer easy to doubt that the story of Abraham, the Hebrew, sums up the tribal history of a part of the Habiru"—which, if it means anything at all, means that we have here, not the history of Abraham the great progenitor of the Jews with whom God Almighty had a few serious conversations, but merely the kind of life nomads in his supposed country used to live.

That is bad enough, but what about the world-famed Exodus which all Jews and Christians believe to be literally and historically true? It is, says Prof. Hooke, whose speciality is the Old Testament, "a far more complicated piece of history than Hebrew tradition in its present form would suggest." And why? Simply because "it is well established that a large part of the tribes remained in Canaan and never experienced the Egyptian bondage and the deliverance under Moses." We are aware, of course, that such infidel heresy is rampant among the better instructed Christians and Jews, and has been for many years; and therefore, it is good to see it now openly declared.

But it must be a sad blow for people like Prof. Hooke to make such and many other damaging admissions. With a kind of painful after-thought, he finishes his article with "Archæology can neither affirm nor disprove the 'truth' of the Bible. Its ultimate truth is spiritual and lies beyond the region of archæology." So now we know. The story, for instance, of Jacob and his Twelve Sons who later gave us the Twelve Tribes of Israel to be ruled over in Heaven by the Twelve Apostles of Jesus can never be proved by archæology. They are all and their story simply "spiritual."

As for the Pentateuch which once was considered to have been written by Moses in its entirety, we know now, says Mr. C. R. North, who is a Lecturer in Hebrew of University College in North Wales, that it "contains within itself differences of style and representation which point to it being largely a compilation from varied sources." God help us—the Pentateuch a compilation! Really, where are we going to? To the Psalms? We were all in the past solemnly assured that the Psalms were almost entirely the work of David—and now? Prof. Johnson assures that they are "a collection of religious lyrics which probably range in date from as early as the tenth century to as late as the fourth century." David as their author is quite ignored!

And is Solomon the author of Proverbs? He is not even mentioned, for they are "a post-exilic compilation"; while the Songs of Songs "is really a post-exilic collection of erotic songs." A pity we were not told that the "eroticism" with which they abound has been beautifully toned down to make it acceptable in God's Precious Word. And so on.

These Professors have carried on the good work begun by Thomas Paine which now makes his *Age of Reason* almost infantile in comparison. They have justified every criticism of Bradlaugh, Ingersoll and Foote on the Bible. And they have vindicated the policy of *The Freethinker*.

G. W. Foote on Christian Charity

Jesus Christ told his disciples that in bestowing alms they were not even to let their left hand know what their right hand did. But this self-sacrificing method has not been generally approved, and comparatively few Christians "do good by stealth and blush to find it fame." They more often "do good for fame and publish it by stealth." Nay, more; their "charity" is actually their boast in their controversies with infidels. Look at our hospitals, they say; look at our orphanages, look at our almshouses, look at our soup-kitchens. It is a wonder they do not boast of their asylums, but perhaps it would invite the retort that they not only build them but fill them. Such boasting, however, is utterly absurd from every point of view. Since the world was in any degree civilised it has never lacked benevolent institutions. It is absolutely certain that hospitals are not of Christian origin. Every Mohammedan, for instance, is required by his religion to devote a tenth of his income to charity, whereas the Christian system of tithes is for the profit and aggrandisement of the clergy.

Still more ridiculous is the Christian cry, "Where are your Freethought hospitals, almshouses and orphanages?" Freethought is a poor, struggling cause; it has no endowments to lessen the current cost of its propaganda, and it is unable to exact subscriptions by boycotting or in return for a good advertisement. Still, the Freethought party does manage to relieve its necessitous members by a fund administered without a single farthing of expense. Besides this, freethinkers support ordinary charities, when deserving, just like other people, although frequently religion is forced on the recipients of such charity whether they wish it or not.

As a rule, however, freethinkers are not inclined to attach so much importance as Christians to organised almsgiving. At best it is a clumsy way of alleviating the worst effects of social disease. The freethinker attaches more importance to the study of causes. Many Christians, on the other hand, thoroughly believe that the poor will never cease out of the land; and they seem to regard these unfortunates as whetstones, provided by a beneficent Providence, on which the wealthy may sharpen their benevolence.

Let us go in for justice first, and when we have got that we shall see what remains for charity to do. Probably it will be found that unjust laws inflict a hundred times more misery than charity could ever alleviate. When Saladin died he ordered charities be distributed to the poor, without distinction of Jew, Christian or Mohammedan. Yet this brilliant ruler had to repel Christian attacks on his dominions, and to witness the most abominable cruelty wrought by the soldiers of the Cross. Where, in the annals of Christendom, shall we find such an example of charity which overflows the petty barriers of creeds and loses itself in the great ocean of humanity.

FLOWERS OF FREETHOUGHT.

So long as you suffer any man to call himself your shepherd sooner or later you will find a crook round your ankle.—H. G. WELLS.

—NEXT WEEK—
REVIEW OF JOSEPH McCABE'S
LATEST WORK

THE FREETHINKER

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To Correspondents

CLEMENT WALKER.—It was Mme. de Staël who said, "I no longer believe in ghosts, but I am still afraid of them."

A. DODSON.—Glad to hear you profited from Cohen's *Determinism or Free Will*. That is, we believe, the experience of most who read it.

"EYE-WITNESS."—Thanks for reminiscences of Percy Ward. He went to America in 1911 and lived there for 42 years.

A. W. DAVIS.—Mr. Taylor appreciates your kind remarks, and also your information through the late A. B. Moss.

MRS. S. L. SYMM.—We welcome all militant women secularists, but can see no advantage in splitting our forces by the formation of a separate organisation of women.

PAT SULLIVAN (Toronto).—Thanks for letters. Will use extracts.

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.

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed, or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda. On the basis of an eight-page paper, space is the enemy, which means we cannot print as much as deserves to be printed.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S Lectures: Friday, July 23, 7-30 p.m., Worsthorne. Sunday, July 25, 3-15 p.m., Padiham; 7-30 p.m., Preston (Town Hall Square).

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.).—Sunday at 8 p.m.: W. J. O'NEILL. A Lecture.

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: F. A. RIDLEY and 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.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD and G. H. TAYLOR. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon St., off New St.).—Sunday, July 25, 7 p.m., G. BRIDGEN: "Christianity and Woman."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq., W.C.1).—July 23, 7-15 p.m., CEDRIC DOVER: "Perspectives on Racism."

West Ham Branch (Community Centre, Wanstead).—Thursday, July 22, Open Meeting.

Notes and News

Outstanding among the six applications for membership of the N.S.S. placed before the Executive Committee this month was one from Mr. Joseph McCabe. Merely to announce that he was accepted with the others would be altogether an understatement, for the news was received with enthusiasm. The motion for his admittance was put by the President, and, after it had been carried with acclamation, it was agreed that a special message should be sent welcoming him into the Society's ranks. At no time during Mr. McCabe's long fight for truth, freedom and justice has anyone been able to label him as a "reverent rationalist," and it is eminently fitting that he should now have an honoured place in the organisation of militant freethought.

World Freethought Congress

THE 28th International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers, of which the National Secular Society is a member, will be held this year in Luxemburg, in the Hall of the Casino, from September 1-7. Its President of Honour is Bertrand Russell, O.M., F.R.S., who, however, owing to his advanced years, will be unable to attend. The Committee of Honour is drawn from eminent freethinkers and rationalists, men of science and letters, from many parts of the world, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, Holland, India, Luxemburg, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.

On the first day the International Executive meets under the presidency of C. Bradlaugh Bonner (President of the World Union), followed by the formal opening of the Congress with a reception by the hosts, the Luxemburg Freethought Society.

The papers to be delivered are as follows:—

"The Hypocrisy of the Religions."

"The Churches and Science."

"The Churches and the Arts."

"The Churches and Social Problems, including Education."

"The Religious Philosophic Counter-Reformation."

"The Catholic Counter-Revolution of our Time" (by F. A. Ridley, President of the N.S.S.).

"Youth and Freethought."

"The Churches and Means of Propaganda."

The paper prepared by Mr. Ridley is of particular interest to us, and we shall hope to reproduce it in these columns in September, as well as selections or summaries of other papers.

At the public meeting on September 4 the speaker will be M. Lorulot, Vice-President of the Union.

National reports will as usual be submitted to Congress by the various representatives.

There will be a reception by the Mayor and Council of Luxemburg and another municipal reception at Dudelange.

On the social side there will be a Congress Dinner, a tour of Luxemburg City to include the underground passages, and of the Grand Duchy, and a Voltaire pilgrimage by kind invitation of the Director of the Voltaire Institute, Mr. Theodore Besterman. Voltaire's Swiss home at Ferney near Geneva will be visited, and there will be a short visit to Mme. de Staël's chateau, a tour of Lac Lemans and a ceremony of homage to the memory of Servetus.

The Freethinker hails the World Freethought Congress as an oasis of sanity in a troubled Europe, and wishes all success to its endeavours. When an international gathering of men of rational outlook can meet together in the knowledge that they are backed by countless thousands of others in all quarters of the earth, and can demonstrate on a world scale the demand for the liberation of mankind from his vast heritage of ignorance, the Churches, with all their wealth, can only look on at a spectacle which, in the heyday of their power, would have been impossible.

To come from the general to the particular, when our President, Mr. F. A. Ridley, leaves for Luxemburg at the end of August, he will carry with him the best wishes of us all for a happy and profitable participation in the deliberations of the World Congress. G. H. T.

Injustice

I punched my Time-card wrongly, I've been reprimanded strongly,

So I feel that I've been shaken off my perch;

I was claiming Sunday time, but surely it's no crime,

I only sneaked an hour, to go to church.

A. E. C.

The Age of the Gospels—1

By H. CUTNER

THERE are few things that the Christian apologist loves more, in a discussion with an infidel, than arguing about the dates of the Gospels. How many apologetic works have been written dealing with this subject I do not know, but they certainly run into thousands. Now, why does the Christian apologist like such a discussion? Simply because it is about the most futile one known, and by arguing at length in this way, one does not have to discuss what is far more important—that is, whether there is any historical foundation whatever for the events described in the Gospels and in Acts; in other words, whether Jesus was a real or a mythical character.

As is perhaps known, I have, ever since I began to write for this journal about 35 years ago, consistently supported the Myth Theory, and this Theory is anathema to all good Christians. They refuse wherever possible to enter into any argument about it, and infinitely prefer to drag in Papias, Irenæus, and Eusebius, as well as Ignatius, and Justin Martyr, as infallible Witnesses to the truth of the Gospels.

Once inveigled into an argument on these eminent Church Fathers, and the *real* problem can be most conveniently shelved. Let me say then, the question of the date of the Gospels, whether early or late, is a matter of very small importance. The Virgin Birth or Jesus's adventures with the Devil are not proved true, whether Matthew can be shown to have been written in the year A.D. 50 or in the year A.D. 150. A silly story is just as silly no matter when written.

In replying to some remarks recently made by Mr. F. A. Ridley on the Gospels, the Rev. Mr. Paris of *The Faith* (Malta) refers to W. R. Cassels' *Supernatural Religion*, and also to the above-named Church Fathers. And before I deal with his arguments I want to make one or two emphatic statements. And the first is that Mr. Paris has never read Cassels' famous work. Nor has he, in my opinion, read in the *originals* what Papias and the rest say about the Gospels. What he has done is to get from his shelves one or more of the "apologetic" works some Roman Catholic priests are required to read, and copy out what they say about the Gospels. For him, it does not matter two hoots whether what they say is true or not. He is not allowed to think for himself on these matters. So long as there is an orthodox *imprimatur* on a Catholic book, that is enough. It must be right. A Catholic priest, or even a layman, is always protected by this *imprimatur*, for the man who gives it must be a Man of God, inspired by God, and therefore anything he says must be true.

We Freethinkers, though we may go to any authority we like, are bound by no such rules. We can throw overboard any other Freethinker if his authority is impugned. And we can read anybody we like without having to get permission from a priest.

I am obliged to mention this, for Mr. Paris thinks that all he has to do is to quote his Catholic authority to a Freethinker—and heigh, presto, we are annihilated.

Let me begin by pointing out that at some time at the beginning of the present era, there must have been quite a number of "Gospels" or "Logia" or "Oracles" or "Acts" flying about, some better written than others, and most of them containing either explicit details of somebody called Jesus, or vague recitals of his career. Many of these, possibly re-written or re-edited, have come down to us; many have been lost; and the curious reader can find those that survived in what is known as the "Apocryphal" New Testament. From all these emerged our present four "canonical" Gospels and the Epistles and Acts which are

in the present New Testament. Our contention is that the four Gospels, as we have them at this day, were quite unknown—as Mr. Ridley well put it—before the year A.D. 150, and it may be that they were unknown before A.D. 180. This does not mean that certain "sayings" were not floating about in the then small Christian communities. Of course they were, and eventually they were embodied in the newer or later Gospels.

Now all this is very carefully hidden in most apologetic works—or, if it is mentioned, it is contemptuously dismissed as of small account. Anything will do for a layman, and almost anything for a priest. The Church, that is, some decisions made by priests at a Council, settles everything, and if it says one book is "apocryphal" and another is "canonical" there is nothing more to be said—except by Freethinkers. It should not astonish Mr. Paris that we see precious little difference between one kind of Gospel and another. Both are pure fictions.

Mr. Paris also claims that "the Gospels were written and known before A.D. 150," and adds that "numerous texts from the Evangelists are quoted in the letters of Pope Clement (A.D. 95), St. Ignatius (A.D. 107), St. Polycarp (A.D. 120) and also in the very important work entitled *The Teaching of the Twelve*, which was written, probably, as early as A.D. 95." This is the kind of thing which fills apologetic works, and is very rarely challenged by all-believing Christians like Mr. Paris. But when he writes to *The Freethinker*, the matter is quite different.

Now I could fill pages about Clement of Rome, but there is no need to go further than the world famous Catholic Encyclopedia which is the work of the best Catholic scholars and which, of course, bears the famous *imprimatur*. And it is obvious, when Mr. Paris referred to Clement, he just copied his "apologetic" work, and never looked at his Encyclopedia. As a matter of fact, this is not surprising, for it is packed with "heresy"—at least, heresy for such minds as Mr. Paris! Here is what it says about Clement—"The New Testament he *never* quotes verbally. Sayings of Christ are now and then given, but *not* in the words of the Gospels. *It cannot be proved, therefore that he used any one of the Synoptic Gospels.*" (My italics.) This very plain speaking is just a little different from the nonsense Mr. Paris copied from one of the books on his shelves written for the uninquiring mind—written, in fact, to be swallowed by believers like himself without question. Where then are the "numerous texts from the Evangelists" referred to by Mr. Paris from Clement? I can tell him. They are figments of his imagination and his books. They are not there, and that settles Clement. In passing, I should like to add that the Protestant scholar, Tischendorf, also admits "that Clement nowhere refers to the Gospels." If this does not satisfy Mr. Paris, then I challenge him to produce twelve quotations from the Gospels in Clement and thus prove his Catholic Encyclopedia was absolutely wrong.

It may prove interesting to look at his other "authorities" in future articles.

To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as indubitable, unassailable, sacred without rendering an account why. Hence self-delusion, if not wicked, insidious design, is at the root of all efforts to establish morality on theology. Where we are in earnest about the right, we need no incitement or support from above.—FEUERBACH.

Yes, religion bred the first fratricide, and since then it has borne on its forehead the sign of blood.—HEINE.

Recipes for Crime

By G. H. TAYLOR

WHAT is a children's "comic"? The word conjures up visions of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Andy Pandy, Tiger Tim and all the other harmless and delightful creatures of that world. It is a far cry, alas, from this colourful realm to the American "crime comics" now flooding that country to the tune of 90 million copies a month. Articles in the *Reader's Digest* for May and June show that many American authorities are appalled at the way the situation there has got more and more out of control. That this deluge of filth is correlated with the rise in juvenile crime is the confirmed opinion of a psychiatrist and clinic director, in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* (Fredric Wertham). Whereas in 1946 crime comics in the U.S.A. were only one-tenth of all comics, they are to-day forming a vast majority. The campaign being undertaken by educationalists in America to eliminate them is a campaign against vested interests. Vendors are compelled to accept these books for their stock, for fear of having their supplies of other books stopped.

Freethinkers are the *last* people to support the banning of any publication, but we are here concerned, not with adult reading, but primarily with protecting the child, and, because of the correlation with juvenile crime, ultimately of protecting society itself. The freethought, indeed the humanist, position has, I think, been admirably expressed by Mr. F. A. Hornibrook when he wrote:

"Why these crime sheets were ever labelled 'comics' is a mystery. Here, every form of brutality, murder, sadism, violence and crime are presented to young impressionable minds. The work that the educationalist is trying to do in schools, instilling principles of honour, fair play, kindness and good citizenship is counteracted by these moronic rags. One instinctively hesitates when strict censorship and banning are suggested because it is usually administered by the wrong people who, if successful, would use it as a medium to attack other things that are outside the subject. This is essentially a matter for the scholastic profession as their work is so intimately connected with children and they don't interfere with adults.

"Those panderers to crime who produce the comics and the pimps who own them and make fortunes by corrupting the young, should be told that Britain will have none of this filth."

There are some who will say that crime pictures in lurid details "help children to get rid of their inhibitions." The crime statistics are all against this view. If there is such a thing as an "inhibited murderer," is it not better that he should remain "inhibited" than that his allegedly suppressed desire to kill should be brought to fruition by the force of suggestion contained in these "comics"? Four different methods of intra-family murder are offered in one 10 cent book!

Ordinary murder by gun or knife is too mild for these authors. They mix it with sex (a top theme), mayhem, adultery, vampirism, necrophilia; their artists deal in cannibalistic orgies with half-eaten bodies lying about, eye-gouging, maggoty resurrections of bodies coarctate by joint burial, and other pictures rather less morally elevating than those mentioned.

Many of the illustrations are calculated to produce race hatred. The man whose skin is black is often depicted as sub-human. If the pressure against a certain series becomes "hot," it will formally stop and re-start under another title. Sometimes, in small letters, will appear some legend such as "Dedicated to the eradication of crime," or "Crime does not pay." The children are well aware that such

captions are eyewash for parents. One instance showed 97 pictures of crime, and then the 98th where it "doesn't pay."

Another gag is the "classic." For example "The Mad Doctor" (adapted from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) or "Murder in the Night" (from *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare). The idea that a child could be led to read Stevenson, Shakespeare or any other classic, by reading a debased version as an appetizer, is grotesque. Reports from children's libraries suggest that the crime comic is taking the place of other literature, to judge from circulation decreases in the latter.

The crime comics also contain advertisements selling switch-blade knives, guns, telescopes for prying, etc., interspersed at convenient points among the sequences, and termed by Wertham "veritable invitations to delinquency."

Science and Secularism—A Reply

By F. A. RIDLEY

SOME time back, I expressed certain views on the current relationship between science and society; my learned colleague, Mr. P. V. Morris, objected, as, of course, he was perfectly entitled to do, to certain of my contentions, or, as I should myself express it, to what he regarded as my contentions; an exchange of views followed; now, disregarding the sound view, which applies in controversy as elsewhere, that, "two is company and three is none," Mr. G. H. Taylor comes in with some critical comments directed at the present writer. Mr. Taylor's comments, ostensibly concerned with science, seem to be, mainly concerned with trying—in my opinion unsuccessfully—to find non-existent mares' nests in my articles.

I may add that I deplore these essays in logic chopping—at best—at a time when both the secular movement and *The Freethinker* have so many more urgent tasks on hand. As I have no desire to take up more space on these topics—perhaps quibbles would be the more correct term—I will limit myself to Mr. Taylor's specific points, and will be as brief as these will permit.

We start with what can only be described as a prize quibble. Mr. Taylor observes:—

"Hence, when Mr. Ridley says 'science to-day can make or mar, save or destroy human progress,' he is obviously making a false isolate of science and using it as an agent in its own right. He then proceeds to put it in the dock and try it for murder."

Precisely what *does* this actually mean? If I say "war destroys civilisation," this, presumably, is a "false isolate," since war is not a living reality, but only the people who wage it; my learned friend is wasting his talents advocating secularism: he would be in his element writing hair-splitting theses on how many angels could dance on the point of a pin. When I use the terms "science" or "history," I, and the readers of *The Freethinker*, don't need to be told that they haven't got a postal address.

Next, my learned friend objects to my statement that scientists and theologians are, alike, fallible. He thinks that "the scientist is more reliable than the theologian." Very often, yes, no one denies it, but not *always*. When Aristotle and Ptolemy—very great scientists in their day and terms of reference—said, respectively, that the sun went round the earth and that the earth was flat, they were no more infallible than were their contemporary theologians, who approached the same problems from a *theological* angle. When Sir James Jeans said that God

was a mathematician he was *fallible*, whether the definition be taken as science or theology. Anyway, there are no degrees in infallibility, either one is infallible or one is not. Even I am not always right. Whilst, if Mr. Taylor continues in this strain, I shall be tempted to say that he is *always* wrong!

We continue, rather surprisingly, since neither I nor, as far as I recall, Mr. Morris, ever mentioned his name, with an invocation to Mr. Cohen, or, rather, to his published works. When Mr. Taylor states categorically that Cohen—whose remarks are *summarised* but *not* quoted, is right about science, and I, who never mentioned him, wrong about science, not having Mr. Cohen's actual text, I cannot reply categorically to this quite irrelevant invocation to Mr. Cohen. I would, however, remark, firstly, that, as far as I know, Mr. Cohen was an expert on philosophy rather than on science. Further, that Mr. Cohen did not believe in infallibility, including his own! Nor do I. Does Mr. Taylor believe in Mr. Cohen's infallibility? If so, why does he continue to call himself a Freethinker? Incidentally, if *anything* could make Chapman Cohen turn in his grave, it would be because a legend of his infallibility had arisen in the very year of his death. That is how *religions* begin! Mr. Taylor makes, incidentally, a cryptic observation on some unquoted remarks of mine about "light-years" as an example of my ignorance of science. Certainly I am not an authority on "light-years." But then, I never write articles on subjects with which I am unfamiliar.

Mr. Taylor's concluding remarks do not, fortunately, require extended notice, and I merely note them briefly. I gave my reasons for stating that our present civilisation is the first to be based on science. My reply was relevant in its terms of reference, the "vacuity" of which my critic complains, occurs only in his own judgment.

Finally, it is indisputable that the earliest civilisations were created under the auspices of religion. The present excavations in Egypt, *inter alia*, prove this—whether this will ever happen again is so hypothetical a question, that it would be wasting space to try to answer it. Let us hope not.

I, again, remark, in conclusion, that I sincerely trust that in future, Mr. Taylor will employ his talents on causes useful to secularism instead of wasting my time and that of readers of *The Freethinker* in searching my articles for non-existent mares' nests.

Rejoinder by Mr. Taylor

[If F.A.R. thinks the difference between (a) science is responsible, and (b) the mis-use of science are responsible, is only a quibble, then I'm afraid we can't help him further. Meanwhile Morris's position ("Let us not even unintentionally suggest that science is responsible") is vindicated. It is, in fact, the secularist position. We must not encourage the popular idea that "science has let us down." If we do, we play right into the hands of religionists. One Bishop has already said that science should be given a ten years' holiday.

The scientist, repeat, is more reliable than the theologian. When the scientist makes a mistake, that mistake can only be put right by *other scientists*, not by theologians. Miscalculations by scientists are errors on the available evidence and on given data. The theologian is *always* dealing with *imaginary* data. Neither Mr. Ridley nor anyone else can show us one verifiable fact which can only be discovered by theologians. The contribution of theology to human progress is precisely nil. We think this topic has now been adequately discussed and the matter is closed.—Ed.]

Correspondence

BILLY AND THE COUNT

The Rev. Billy Graham sends me some of his dope every week. I don't know who gave him my name. In his last letter (enclosed) he tells me about converting the daughter of a British peer. Well, the majority of Britain's upper-class ladies never entered the homestead of common-sense.

He converted "a young count from a noble family." Most of these counts are of no account mentally.—Yours, etc.,
Toronto.

PAT SULLIVAN.

THE FIRST GODS

F. A. Ridley was surely right in backing Bakunin's opinion that the human God preceded the celestial God. The deification of the ruler was the answer to the problem set by the empire states of how authority should be maintained over vast distances and a multiplicity of peoples. The older type political unit based upon the tribe or a series of fraternal tribes was a face to face affair, the tribesmen knew their chief personally. A very different problem was presented when in the empire the peasant or labourer might hardly if ever see his ruler, and moreover in the new society he was, unlike in the earlier form, not a beneficiary. Under these conditions it was a distinct advantage for the ruling bureaucracy to carry the weight that deification would bestow upon the ruler. It was not merely peasants and labourers who needed impressing, either, local officials and notabilities needed to be impressed with the importance of centralised rule, why should they be mere provincials and not run their own show? We have seen a very near approach to deification in the example of Stalin when, in the last two or three years of his rule and life, every type of professional organisation held meetings to hail Stalin as their leader and inspirer in their particular specialism.

The celestial God was the answer of dissident peoples such as Israel to the empires with whom they were in revolt. It would have been absurd to have created a rival living God and to have claimed that he was more powerful than the God of the great empire, therefore the translation of the God to a realm inviolate from secular misfortune.

This sort of action was in a way comparable to the small boy who having been bowled out says that he will take the bat away, if he is out, then there will be no cricket. But it was not merely spoil-sport, the average person was convinced of the potency of the divine king's fiat. Unless a greater force could be postulated it was unlikely that a people would be ready to follow a political line at variance with that of the neighbouring imperial power.—
Yours, etc.,
M. L. BURNET.

BLACKPOOL CINEMAS—CORRECTION

Sunday evening cinemas have existed in Blackpool since World War I. Recently the cinemas applied for permission to open on Sunday afternoons during the summer months. This was approved by the Watch Committee and passed to the Town Council, who refused the application. The matter may be raised again by the Council.—Yours, etc.,
J. G. BURDON.

OUR "HISTORIC ENEMY"

Religion has caused more wars, more bloodshed, more slavery, more superstition, more persecution and more injustice than any influence that has affected human conduct. Christianity, headed by the Papacy, was responsible for the Dark Ages, and still enforces superstition on the human mind.—Yours, etc.,
Sweden.
K. LIDAKS (abbreviated).

WORLD DOMINION

"Of all the great evils to afflict mankind, the will for world dominion has brought in its train the most sanguinary calamities, indeed it has been the most formidable and the most disastrous. People were dispersed by it, nations were scattered by it, cultures were made to perish by it. It broke and destroyed civilisations. To-day, invigorated more than ever by the achievements of science, it is preparing to conquer the earth in an unprecedented attempt to force the human race into that subjection against which whole generations have soaked our planet in blood.

Justice is as strictly due between neighbour nations as between neighbour citizens. A highwayman is as much a robber when he plunders in a gang as when single, and a nation that makes an unjust war is only a great gang.—Benjamin Franklin.

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