

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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A FEW years ago the late Mr. Woolsey Teller, whose sudden death recently inflicted a heavy loss on American Freethought, published a valuable book under the intriguing title of *The Atheism of Astronomy*, under which title the eminent American Freethinker collected much valuable data of an astronomical character for the purpose, which he accomplished most effectively, of demonstrating the absurdity of the "Design" Argument, that former pillar of "Christian Evidance." One can summarise Mr. Teller's weighty and effective arguments by indicating that in the vast Universe around us, matter of any kind—is the rarest of exceptions; the totality of the heavenly bodies constituting an infinitesimal fraction of the field of illimitable space; and that, further, even amongst the worlds sparsely scattered throughout space, the overwhelming majority are totally unsuitable for the support of any kind of life, intelligent or otherwise. From which one can only conclude that the attempt to find a creative mind behind the visible phenomena of the Universe must be abandoned as, at least, an unverifiable hypothesis. Despite all the endless rhetoric of preachers and theologians the Heavens do not "declare the glory of God," nor does "the firmament show forth his handiwork." The science of astronomy, contends our American author, is *par excellence*, the atheistic science.

## —VIEWS and OPINIONS—

### "The Atheism of Astronomy"

—By F. A. RIDLEY—

and we can only conjecture what is to be seen on the surface of the beautiful planet named so appropriately by the ancient pagans after the Goddess of Love. Contrarily, Mars indicates certain seasonal characteristics, notably a green belt which *may* and in our author's opinion, probably *does* indicate the presence of vegetable life on the surface of the planet Mars. Dr. Strughold, who is a professional physicist and a specialist in the recent science of "air-medicine," devotes the greater part of his book to a closely-reasoned, though, in parts, rather technical analysis of the Martian-physical phenomena, and to the consideration of what, if any, forms of life might conceivably

exist in the actually existing conditions of life under Martian conditions.

### Flying Saucers, Farewell!

The learned author's main conclusions may be briefly summarised. If valid, and Dr. Strughold does not appear to leave many loopholes, they knock on the head any idea of Martian "men"—or even monsters! No "War of the Worlds," as envisaged by H. G. Wells, is, henceforth, possible; "flying saucers" vanish into the vacuum—*mental* vacuum from which they briefly and sensationally emerged. No man-made "canals" constructed by giant ants, as the present writer once rashly conjectured, wind through "The sands of Mars"; whilst the current "best-sellers" of "science-fiction" are scientifically demonstrated to be pure—or impure—fiction! Even the more serious theories about "canals" in Mars, which have been put forward seriously by astronomers (e.g., the late Prof. Lowell), get short shrift from our scientific author's austere conclusions. Those who, including the present writer, have written books about *quasi* human life on Mars are, herewith, demonstrated to be, shall we say, rather wide of the mark!

### What Does Live on Mars?

Our iconoclastic author, however, does not deny any possibility of life on Mars. Actually, he considers it as probable that the green belt which appears every summer on the surface of Mars, *does* actually indicate the presence of organic life in the shape of primitive vegetation broadly similar to our lichens and mosses found on high mountain passes on the snow-line altitudes. For Mars possesses an atmosphere of a rarified kind, much less dense than that of our earth or, presumably, than that of our nearest neighbour, in space Venus. By a rigorous examination of the atmospheric content of Mars our author arrives at the conclusion that the density of the Martian atmosphere is equivalent to that at rather more than 50,000 feet above the earth's surface. At such an altitude on earth neither human beings, warm-blooded animals, nor even the higher kinds of cold-blooded animals or organised plant-life could possibly exist. Even if oxygen were to exist in sufficient quantities on Mars, which probably it does not, no such organisms could absorb it at such an altitude. *Ergo*, Dr.

### Life on Mars?

A recent book has approached this question from a less controversial and a more rigorously scientific attitude than was that of our American Rationalist author. For Mr. Teller, as the title of his book indicates, was writing in order to prove a thesis, viz., *The Atheism of Astronomy*, whereas our more recent author, also an American, Dr. Hubertus Strughold, does not, apparently, write with any set controversial purpose, nor does he display any overt sympathy with the atheistic or rationalist point of view. He writes, like his English predecessor, Sir Harold Spencer Jones (in his book, *Life in Other Worlds*), purely as an astronomer and physicist. Nor does Dr. Strughold consider, except incidentally, the general question of life in other worlds; his book is concerned primarily with a single aspect of the problem: the question of whether life exists on a single planet, Mars.

### "The Red and Green Planet"

The title of Dr. Strughold's new book, *The Red and Green Planet*, derives from the appearance of the planet Mars under observation both by the naked eye and through the more detailed view revealed by the telescope. When burning in the night sky, Mars indicates the ruddy colour, which caused the ancient astronomers to call it after the God of War. Mars, however, unlike Venus, the only other planet nearer to us in space, can be seen in some detail—Venus is shrouded impenetrably in a dense enveloping atmosphere so that direct observation is impossible,

Strughold logically concludes that life, *as we know it*—and, obviously, one cannot profitably discuss any other hypothetical kind of life—is absolutely impossible on Mars, for any of the “higher” species of organic life, including Man, who, here on earth, cannot live permanently at more than about 16,000 feet, and who could only reach 29,000 feet—the summit of Mount Everest—with extreme difficulty and only for a few hours. However, our author learnedly demonstrates, it *might* be possible for *very* primitive forms of plant-life, such as can live on earth at high altitudes, to withstand the rigours of the thin Martian atmosphere. More doubtfully, this may also apply to the more primitive forms of bacteria. So the “Green Belt” *may* exist, even though the “canals” and “flying saucers” do not!

### The Solar “Temperate Zone”

So much for life on Mars. Apart from “The Red and Green Planet,” the problem narrows itself down to two worlds: our earth, where life demonstrably exists, and

Venus, where the unknown factor is the atmospheric content, but where, otherwise, life *might* exist. All three planets are in what our author terms “the temperate zone of the solar system,” where, alone, life is *possible*. In the solar “tropics,” in which Mercury is situated, the *heat* is too great, whilst in the solar “arctic” region, which includes all the planets beyond Mars, the *cold* is too extreme: the big outer planets are buried under ice. Fred Hoyle has described Saturn as a huge “snowball.”

### A Superfluous Hypothesis

Our American scientist nowhere denies, or verbally doubts, the existence of God. He simply ignores him! Like Laplace, he has “no need of the (theistic) hypothesis.” Everything is reduced to immediate verifiable causes. Astronomic science does not assert or argue atheism. It simply takes it for granted!

[*The Red and Green Planet* by Dr. H. Strughold. Sedgwick and Jackson; 7s. 6d.]

## Three Utopian Heretics

by G. I. BENNETT

IN the last year of her lamentably short life—she was only 31 when she died in 1949—Marie Louise Berneri wrote her *Journey Through Utopia* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950) 16s., a compendium of utopian writings in outline from Plato's *Republic* and Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* to those modern satirical works, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

What may be taken as Marie Louise Berneri's reason for writing her book is given in the opening lines. We live in a “realist” world, she says, in which “visionaries are derided or despised, and ‘practical men’ rule our lives. We no longer seek radical solutions to the evils of society, but reforms; we no longer try to abolish war, but to avoid it for a period of a few years; we do not try to abolish crime, but are contented with criminal reforms . . .” Wherefore she thinks it salutary to turn to those who have envisaged a human community founded upon the ideal.

This journey through the lands of utopia is fascinating enough and something of an education in itself. But if, as one may suspect, Marie Louise, Anarchist as she was, had a didactic purpose in producing her book, it is hard to discern. For the material it contains seems to be as much of a warning against the evils of authoritarianism attendant upon seeking the realisation of utopia, as a protest against the “realism” that is content with compromises and half-measures where, in fact, thorough-going change is demanded.

What emerges from Marie Berneri's brief but clear description of the ideas underlying each of the utopias included in her book is that the majority of them are authoritarian in the political, social, moral, and religious senses. The three exceptions she gives are Foigny's *Terra Incognita Australis*, Diderot's *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*, and Morris's *News from Nowhere*. In constructing their ideal world men have for the most part been unable to get away from rigid planning, uniformity, and regimentation. It has apparently occurred to few that men and women, given right conditions of life and right social and personal relationships, will work with and not against one another. Such is our young author's contention.

However, it is not with Anarchist questions that we are here concerned. Whatever opinions Freethinkers may hold about Anarchism, they will certainly be interested in at least three of Marie Louise's utopians on account of what she has to tell respecting their views on religion.

The first of these is Gerrard Winstanley, a small trader who first came into prominence in 1648 by the publication of four pamphlets expressing some audacious theological ideas, and whose blueprint of an ideal commonwealth, *The Law of Freedom*, opening with a message addressed to Oliver Cromwell, was published four years later.

Of him Marie Louise Berneri writes: “He did not believe in a personal God, and went so far as to identify God with Reason, and once took the resolution (which he did not keep) to use the word Reason instead of the word God in his writings.” She goes on to relate that he disbelieved in miracles, in heaven and hell, threw doubt on the after-life, and rejected the doctrine of original sin.

Secondly, we have Gabriel de Foigny, born of a Catholic family in the Ardennes towards 1630. He entered a monastery, but because of “scandalous behaviour” was soon compelled to leave it. He published his *New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis* in 1676. Concerning this work Marie Berneri says: “His views on religion were ‘blasphemous’ indeed, for he in fact attacks all the foundations of religion.”

Like Winstanley, Foigny jettisons the idea of original sin, believing man to possess innate goodness.

Noting that sexual intercourse is abolished completely in Foigny's utopia, Marie Berneri puts forward the view that he probably wished to satirise the Christian attitude to sex. If sexual relations must only serve the purpose of procreation, why not do away with them entirely!

Finally, in comment upon William Morris's *News from Nowhere* she remarks: “A truly happy people do not need to believe in a happier life after death or to find solace in the love of God. The Christian religion has been replaced by the religion of humanity, and men love their fellows not out of duty, but because they are worthy of their love.”

Altogether this is a most interesting, thoughtful, and even scholarly book. What a pity that the independent, courageous, and intelligent young mind that produced it is now no more, silenced for ever before the fulfilment of its greater promise.

—NEXT WEEK—

“OBSCENE” PUBLICATIONS,

by ALEC CRAIG

# On Education

By FRANK VINEY

FROM the unconscious assumption of my youth that educationalists are necessarily possessed of an infallible prescience as to what is right and what is best for us to be taught, I have long since awakened. The Very Rev. W. R. Inge, D.D., it was, who administered a cold douche of truth that made me jump, dreamy-eyed and startled, out of the Procrustean bed of Orthodoxy. "It is quite uncertain," proclaimed the venerable Dean in an essay (1940), "at what time of year Christ was really born. The Church probably acquiesced in the December date because the adherents of Mithra celebrated the feast of the 'Invisible Sun' at this time, and it was wished to Christianise this very popular festival with as little interference as possible." But how could this be? I was shocked—for had not every teacher and headmaster of my school-days implied, stated explicitly, in fact, that the actual date of Christ's birth was indisputably known; and then to learn, purely by chance that I had—to put it euphemistically—been grossly misinformed on such an important matter . . . it was unbelievable! Why was I, and why are children even to-day, not told that at the winter solstice the sun appeared to the heathens of long ago to be commencing its annual journey round the heavens, and that accordingly December 25 was celebrated as the sun's birthday? Is it that to admit that we have adopted the sun-worshippers' dates for the birth and death of their saviours would be to embarrass our Christian State with a multitude of juvenile sceptics? But, in any event, to continue the inculcation of false knowledge in our schools—even for the purpose of preserving traditional beliefs—is surely inexcusable. Yet this form of mis-education still obtains in our schools. My son and daughter, attending different schools, have both been informed, for instance, that God is "up above the sky." It is doubtful whether any educated contemporary—even a theologian—would dare manifest such palpable ignorance of astronomy; is it really necessary, therefore, to foster such extraordinary credulity in our children?

Now the danger of inculcating falsehood, myth, and dogma in our schools is twofold. In the first place, we automatically relinquish all logical and moral justification for condemning the similar indoctrination of schoolchildren in the totalitarian countries; it is no argument to say that our dogmas are "good" and those of the totalitarians "bad," because the classification is purely arbitrary and dependent upon an ideological pre-conception; either the presentation of a myth or dogma in the respectable guise of an indisputable scientific fact is wrong here, there, and everywhere, or the totalitarians must remain, in this respect, blameless. We should be meticulously careful always to differentiate between what is mere opinion and what is generally accepted fact. Secondly, as our schools interweave the teaching of morals with the inculcation of falsehood, myth and dogma, what is the inevitable consequence? When the credulity and ignorance of the child becomes lessened by experience he will tend to ignore or dispense with the indoctrinated falsehood, myth, and dogma; unfortunately, he may probably throw the baby out with the bath-water—his early acquired concept of morality, although lip-service may still be paid, may, not unnaturally, be thought to be as invalid and unnecessary as the rest. The social consequences are incalculable.

Be that as it may, it is undeniable that our industrial and business life is ridden with mendacity, deceit, bribery and corruption; even worse is the hypocrisy with which it is pretended, by means of conscience-salves like the cliché "it's just business," that all is morally well.

"Education," says Lord Brougham, "makes a people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave." Apply this to Hitler's Germany and it becomes self-evident nonsense. In other words, this ostensibly admirable aphorism is dependent upon the way in which we define "education" and "enslave": it can mean anything we want it to mean. I will end, therefore, in the vein in which I began: let us teach our children to test and question the validity of all their opinions; let us not thrust opinions upon them in the guise of facts; let us teach them to differentiate between writing and oratory that is purely emotive and writing and oratory that is strictly informative; let them learn to draw valid conclusions from valid premises; in short, let us teach them to think. Why? Because, if human society is to realise its greatest potentialities, it must, like the highest skyscraper, be built on the soundest foundations; and, in my view, one of the most essential aims of education—both juvenile and adult—should be to eradicate the dry-rot of muddled and wishful thinking, thus achieving the elimination of falsehood, greed, and hypocrisy, which infest our present social, economic, and moral structure.

## G. W. Foote on "Rain Doctors"

WHEN a parish clerk was told by the parson one morning that the prayers for rain would be read he replied, "Why, sir, what's the use of praying for rain with the wind in that quarter?" We fancy that the parish clerk must have a good many sympathisers in the pulpit.

Still, the clergy should do what they are paid for, or resign the business. They are our rain doctors, and they should procure for us the precious fluid. If they cannot, why should we pay them a heavenly water-rate? The rain doctors of savages are kept to their contract. They are expected to bring rain when it is required, and if they do not the consequences are unpleasant. They are sometimes disgraced, and occasionally killed. But the rain doctors in civilised countries retain all the advantages of their savage prototypes without any of their risks and dangers. Modern Christians allow the clergy to play on the principle of "heads I win, tails you lose." If the black regiments pray and there is no answer, Christians resign themselves to the will of God. If there is an answer they put it to the credit of the priests, or the priests put it to the credit of themselves.

We should be sorry to charge such a holy body of men with duplicity. They are reluctant to pray for rain on the alleged ground that omnipotence should not be interfered with rashly. But the sincerity of this plea is questionable when we reflect that it obviously favours the clergy. Our climate is variable, long spells of the same weather are infrequent, and if when one occurs the clergy hold back till the very last, their supplication for a change cannot long remain unanswered. If the clergy are anxious to exhibit their powers they should pray for rain in the desert of Sahara. Missionaries might be sent out to establish praying stations, and in the course of time the desert might bloom as a garden, and the wilderness as a rose. Praying for rain in a watery climate is one thing, praying for rain where none ever falls is another.

If the clergy can bring down a fruitful shower on the African sands we shall cry Miracle! and send them a quarter's pew-rent.

FLOWERS OF FREETHOUGHT.

## This Believing World

On TV the other day we had Dr. West discussing his book *Psychical Research To-day* with a biologist—though all we really got was a talk on “Extra Sensory Perception,” known as E.S.P., another word for “telepathy.” Dr. West hastily dismissed “physical” phenomena as being far too difficult to investigate scientifically though he appeared to disbelieve it completely. We wonder what the eminent “scientists” who are always brought to our notice as determined and convinced believers have to say to that?

On the other hand—what exactly has telepathy, even if it is a fact, to do with the spooks, spirits, materialisations, apports and the rest, all of which characterise “Spiritualism?” Dr. West could point to only one man who was more “telepathetic” than the best of a small bunch whose prowess did not appear to depend on anything much more than mere chance. Telepathy has been investigated for 70 years at least by the Society for Psychical Research, and the results have been almost nil. The most that one can say is that telepathy is part of psychology and, so far, proves either nothing at all, or very little of anything worth bothering about.

What a wonderful money bringer has been the simple story of Jesus Christ, the great Apostle of Poverty! 20th Century Fox studios have just bought the film rights of “the greatest story ever told” written by Fulton Oursler for £714,000, a book which has already sold to the extent of 3,300,000 copies. No wonder the late Saviour has been called the greatest business organiser in the history of the world, having founded the Christian Church with its huge offices, executives, business managers, foremen—mostly receiving fat salaries, and doing very little for the money they get. And the cash will continue to pour in—no doubt for centuries to come. The “fable” of Jesus Christ (as one Pope called it) will never be given up by all who love—tons of money.

Do you want to know “the Truth about the Catholic Church”? Simply contact the “Catholic Inquiry Centre” and soon you will join the “writers, judges, V.C.’s, diplomats, sportsmen, Protestant Clergy, Communists, and especially plain, ordinary, honest-to-goodness working men and women who are becoming Catholics in their thousands every year.” This quotation is from an advertisement—and no doubt will bring in more boobs “in thousands.” It may well be that Christians are being “converted” to Romanism, but what about the thousands of “backsliders”? Why has the N.S.S. so many former Catholics?

In computing the number of Catholics in the country, the figures given are those of all Catholics and ex-Catholics. Once a Catholic always a Catholic is the general rule. The best example is that of the bestial Hitler. He was never ex-communicated, and so remained a Catholic to the end—no matter what he may have said about the Roman Church. He is, according to Catholic doctrine, still living—probably in “Purgatory,” and may be “punished.” But eventually, like all good Catholics, he will have the certainty of immortal life. What a comfortable creed is that of the Pope!

God Almighty, we understand, has just written another book. This particular God is not, however, our old friend Jehovah—a name sometimes shortened to Yahveh—but a coloured gentleman called Father Divine, the much revered Almighty of American negroes. Like the Precious Word of Jehovah, Divine’s is a code of living in holy grace, and

it seems to have upset some believers in the other God as being a tirade against “sexuality.” But this is not surprising as that eminent sexologist, Dr. William Reich, has pointed out that both totalitarianism and religion “are primarily erotic.” That is why we get in both deviations from a more or less puritanical code severely condemned. The Lord God Divine wants husbands and wives to separate, and if children have unfortunately arrived, they must be placed into homes. Needless to add that God Divine is now a millionaire!

## For Newcomers

“THANKFUL AND NO ONE TO THANK”  
HOW often do we see the time-worn advertisement stuck up outside churches and chapels: “An atheist is one who is thankful and has no-one to thank.”

In this way the Christians hope to negative the atheist argument that the vast amount of waste and cruelty in nature rules out an Almighty Good Being as its author. The present Dean of St. Paul’s, Dr. W. R. Matthews, uses this argument in his book *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, and it is quite a favourite among religious apologists. If, says Matthews, we Christians cannot explain the evil in nature, neither can the atheist account for the good.

The atheists’s answer, of course, is that since he does not believe in an Almighty Devil either, he has no “problem of good,” analogous to the Christian’s “problem of evil.”

Let us coin a word—Diabolism, the (hypothetical) belief that the universe is the work of an almighty evil being. No diabolist could then stand up two minutes against the Dean’s argument, any more than the Dean himself has any effective answer to the atheist.

The theist (god-believer) could then say to the diabolist (the devil champion), “Look at the good harvests. Look at the beautiful sunsets. Look at the glorious landscapes. If your Devil is almighty he could stop these. And if he’s malignant he would wish to stop them. But they exist. Therefore, your almighty Devil does not exist.” And if Diabolism existed for 2,000 years its apologists would be just as impotent to find a satisfactory answer, as the Christians have been when confronted with the problem of evil.

But as the atheist does not hold that things are governed by an almighty Devil, he is not perturbed at all when he sees good things around him. He observes that nature, being impersonal, is, on human standards, a mixture of good and evil. Earthquakes and sunsets, bad harvests and good, co-exist; just as in the human realm we find murderers and musicians, priests and poets.

What would Christians say if we put up a notice, “The Christian has something to blame God for, but mustn’t.”

When an atheist is “thankful” it is usually to his fellow men, for what they have done. If, however, he has had a piece of good fortune, then he is simply pleased with the turn of events. Natural events. Nothing more.

I don’t often lapse into verse, but I imagine that nature, if she were personal, might speak to her creatures in this fashion:—

If Devil be my name then I will send  
A goodly harvest to confound thy sense,  
And music in a running brooklet. Hence  
If God’s my name then I will make thee bend  
Beneath my torrent, hurricane and storm,  
And crush to dust thy frail and feeble form.

G.H.T.  
(A reticence which proves a case in point for atheists to be thankful.)

# THE FREETHINKER

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# Newspaper Religion

By GEORGE MILLER

THE Rev. Leslie Newman is an entirely selfless humanitarian, ruthlessly dedicated to the task of helping others, and whose floodtides of altruism find an outlet in weekly articles contributed to the *Newcastle Journal* under the heading "Can I help You?" Bring your problems to him. The problems are invariably of the type that, with a little commonsense, seekers after succour could solve for themselves, and with the habitual practice of a little reason would not be troubled with at all.

It may be doubted whether any priest, of any religion, ever helped anybody. If we are right in our contention that religion—or the religious state of mind—contributes nothing to human progress, then there remains no room for doubt. But what shall we think of one, while having every right to hold what beliefs he freely wills, who when he undertakes a public service insidiously introduces propaganda for his chosen church and by palpable verbal trickery throws in a cheap sneer at atheists?

This was one of the achievements of the genial Rev. Newman on one memorable occasion. It seems that an all-believing reader was much harrassed by a wretched individual who could forego no opportunity to boast of his want of belief in the Most High. The Rev. Newman took the supplicant's burden on his own broad shoulders and, among other things, used up his allotted space in saying, in words to the effect, that: "No doubt this blatant atheist thought he was very convincing, but any psychologist could have told him that he was suffering from a severe inferiority complex." With careful deliberation he omitted to mention that the inferiority complex consisted (probably) in the loud-mouthed intolerant bragging, and not solely in the profession of unbelief.

The modern shocks which flesh is heir to should surely be treated in a down-to-earth manner and with regard to their immediate causes, yet the Rev. Newman too often (stopping just short of boredom) recommends recourse to the ancient-born religion of Jesus. Anything can be proved from the Bible, and the Rev. Newman is consistently true to priestly character in his conviction that the Christian religion is a panacea. Probably Newcastle United's failure to reach Wembley three times in succession could be attributed to a deficiency of faith.

The Rev. Newman's paper crusade is supported and furthered by the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. On its payroll are three journalistic reverends, who minister to the spiritual needs of us Geordies, and are neither depressed nor deterred from Christian endeavour by the fact that most Tynesiders do not read their articles. While this attests their rock-like faith, Tynesiders are unfortunately too busy being Geordies to care about their efforts.

The Rev. Charles Haig is one of those intellectual eccentrics who "accept" Evolution, but, unable to resist the charms of fundamentalism, attempt to reconcile the two, which they do to their own satisfaction but not necessarily that of others. His weekly feature "Talking With You" is almost the twin of "Can I Help You"—just another medium for the sly interpolation of religious thoughts into matters of purely secular interest. In his review of the recent book *This I Believe*, A. J. Ayer receives a not very flattering mention and his considered opinion of religion is quoted only to be slighted. The Rev. Haig must entertain a narrow conception of C. A. Watts & Co., for he tells us that "They are already [!] well known as the publishers of scurrilous attacks on the Christian Church." Well, such works as Joseph McCabe's *Testament of Christian Civilisation* do not make pleasant bed-time reading, but that can

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. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

## To Correspondents

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.

- E.S. writes "I seem to get to like *The Freethinker* better every week, and that after reading it for over 65 years."
- T. R. CAREN.—Letter passed to Mr. Ridley. Geo. Whitehead is still very active as a lecturer, but in the political field.
- F. BULLOCK.—Chapman Cohen's *God and the Universe* deals with the points you raise.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

- J. CLAYTON'S Lectures.—Friday, August 13, 7-30 p.m., Rishton. Sunday, August 15, 3-15 p.m., Padiham; 7 p.m., Blackburn Market. Tuesday, August 17, 7-30 p.m., Clairbridge.

### OUTDOOR

- 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., G. H. TAYLOR.
- 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, August 15, noon: a Lecture.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, August 15, 7-30 p.m., Old Market Square: T. M. MOSLEY and A. ELSMERE.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—F. A. RIDLEY, H. ARTHUR, L. EBURY, C. E. WOOD and W. J. O'NEILL. Hyde Park, every Sunday, 5 p.m.

## Notes and News

The Annual Report of the N.S.S. for 1953/4, as adopted by the Conference at Whitsun, has now been printed in booklet form, and copies have been sent to all Branch Secretaries for distribution to members of the Society. This 16-page review of a normal year's work of the organised militant freethought movement contains much to interest and hearten all friends of progress, and readers of *The Freethinker* who do not belong to the N.S.S. can secure a free copy by writing to the Secretary for one.

Pope Pius, addressing a meeting of Catholic journalists in Paris, said, "An immense wave of atheism is crashing against the world, and rarely has the action against the religion of Christ been more penetrating and systematic." It would appear that this onslaught is having some effect. In the past two years 109 American missionaries have been refused permission to enter India, for the reason that their services were no longer needed.

The American Bible Society has announced from New York that it has exceeded its goal in a five-year effort to double the annual distribution of the Holy Scriptures throughout the States. Excellent! All that is now required is to get the recipients to read it. And an intelligent reading usually makes the reader a sceptic.

hardly be Mr. McCabe's fault. And he is oblivious that the educational value of the Thinker's Library is admitted even by Church dignitaries.

If the Reverends Newman and Haig occasionally flatter us by making concessions to science, the balance is re-adjusted by the Rev. E. Harriott, who is a Roman Catholic. It is really unnecessary to say more, except to note that his articles alone sometimes rouse a few readers from their slumbers for the purpose of showering letters of a controversial kind upon the editor.

The week-end brings us "Saturday Postscript," by the Rev. Herbert Barnes, which is tucked into the bottom left-hand corner of the Leisure Page. In seven or eight years the Rev. Barnes has dared to dress up nearly four hundred unoffending topics in a Christian garb, and his reasonings about man and the universe qualify him for the front rank of imaginative writers. Those who happened to read both J. Humphrey's article on Robert Burns in a January *Freethinker* and that of Herbert Barnes on the same personality, must have been startled by the diverse phenomenon which Scotland's pride and joy presents to different observers.

The object of these pious scribes, and of their counterparts on duty at every newspaper office, is to inculcate that

## INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

### T. M. Mosley

(INTERVIEWED BY A. ELSMERE)

HAVING spent his whole working life as a miner Mr. Tom Mosley is now retired and able to give added attention to the freethought propaganda in which he has been active for so many years. But, as he says: "Though working in physical darkness I was not in mental darkness after I had contacted the writings of Joseph McCabe, Chapman Cohen and others." One of the most popular figures in our movement, he is an omnivorous reader, and retains a zest for learning that would do credit to a university student. Intensely eager and friendly in discussion, he brings an infectious enthusiasm to bear on the many subjects he touches. As we have not seen our friend since this series started, the interviewing was done by his right-hand man, Mr. A. Elsmere, himself one of our effective younger speakers, and one of a number whom it may be possible to interview during another season. Mr. Elsmere writes: "About thirty years ago the Exchange, Nottingham, was demolished and with it went England's second largest open market square and the forum for any man or woman with the courage and ability to stand up and give voice to his or her beliefs. In its place came the imposing Council House fronted by the Processional Way; this was immediately commandeered by the local orators, and, after an apprenticeship of debate and impromptu meetings, Tom Mosley is now the best known and respected speaker in the Square."

G. H. T.

*How did you start speaking for the N.S.S.?*

I had been a member since 1910 but did not become an "official" speaker till 1938.

*Which is the harder to fight—religion or apathy?*

I'd say apathy: as Thomas Carlyle said: "The Trinitarians and Unitarians are outnumbered by the Nothingarians."

*Is Bible-banging out of date?*

No, because most of the loud-voiced religious speakers that one has to compete with are Fundamentalists.

*Do you welcome interruptions?*

Good use can be made of an occasional one, but if I have a set subject I prefer the questions at the end.

*Do you think the N.S.S. should take on a more political colour?*

there is nothing like Christianity. Those who reject it are malignantly misrepresented as being socially, mentally or morally inferior. A favourite stratagem is to emphasise the religious persuasion of distinguished men, together with oblique hints that they achieved fame with God's help through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thus, Mozart and Beethoven were great composers because they were Catholic born, though, after all, there are millions of backward Catholics who cannot distinguish a piece of music from a railway time-table.

This "newspaper religion" is what Isaac D'Israeli would have called a "curiosity of literature." It is no doubt innocuous enough, but what irritates by repetition is that, when a clergyman writes upon a subject of topical or worldly importance, he must drag in God, Jesus, Christian love and all the rest of it.

On our side, we may claim that authors like Lewis Spence, Gerald Bullet, George Godwin, and others, are capable of writing in the popular Press without feeling it necessary to announce that they are rationalists. And when Prof. J. Bronowski appears on our television screens with his instructive talks and demonstrations, he does not strike one as being noticeably inferior.

No; I think we have an advantage in being non-political: we have special work to do that no other organisation can do.

*What would you say is the ideal length of a speech?*

About thirty minutes, then take questions.

*You sometimes use Christ to hit the Christians with.*

It is as well to point out, at times, how Christians fail to follow their "Master," who *blessed* poverty and instructed them not to lay up treasure on earth, and to "take no thought for the morrow."

*How do you deal with the ethical Christian who extols the Sermon on the Mount?*

I show him how much of it is impossible and based on the supposed end of the world.

*Briefly, what line do you take with the champion of free will?*

The word "free" is negative; it implies "freedom from or independent of," so what is the will free from?

*Do you get much intelligent opposition?*

The modernists ask some very good questions.

*Is there much interest shown in the "Bible Handbook"?*

It holds its place as a veritable eye-opener. I lent it to a Christian speaker on the Square and he assured me it was the work of the Devil.

*Have you any hints for new speakers?*

Know your subject; start with short periods of speaking and soon that dryness of mouth and nervousness will go. Someone once said: "Man acquires the power of speech at an early age and never loses it until he stands up to speak in public." But the beginner can also be too loquacious. Let him beware of what Chapman Cohen described as a constipation of ideas and diarrhoea of words.

*Have you anything to say as regards the prospects of the freethought movement?*

We have the same trouble as the trades unions—apathy. But whereas their apathetic supporters are paying members ours are just supporters. I think the cause of freethought will best be served by showing how all Theology begins in Mythology. The only real ethics are those based on man's happiness and welfare here and now, the so-called "will of God" being a vague emotional abstraction.

# A Proposal for Uniform Definition of Atheism

By GREGORY S. SMELTERS

IN view of the confusion and disagreement still to be noticed in many Freethought publications in different continents as to the meaning of atheism, which state of affairs is greatly hindering an efficient and co-ordinated worldwide attack on religions, there is an urgent need for adopting a *uniform* definition of atheism.

The confusion and disagreement is caused by the failure to differentiate between the factual and the logical components of denial in the definition of atheism. There is, of course, *no* disagreement as to the factual non-existence of the many individual (personal, tribal) gods, such as Yahweh, Zeus, Mars, etc. The disagreement arises only about the logical denial of a God, when the name is used without reference to any and all the named gods of various mythologies. Note, however, that "a God" is by no means a proper name, but a disguised *generic* (class) name with a capital letter, a typographically misleading usage which is not found in the Greek text of the New Testament, but has been illegitimately introduced into all the Western translations of the Bible.

As a glaring instance of the above mentioned confusion may be cited the late John M. Robertson's view, expressed in his *Charles Bradlaugh* (London: Watts, p. 29): "It is an ignorant blunder to describe the educated atheist as saying: 'There is no God' . . . As he (Bradlaugh) said a hundred times, to 'deny the existence of God' is to be meaningless."

Less glaring, but none the less misleading is Bertrand Russell's opinion (*The Literary Guide*, July 1949, p. 116): "I am an atheist, because, when I say that I cannot prove (logically) that there is not a God, I ought to add equally that I cannot prove (logically) that there are not the Homeric gods."

Now to eliminate this paralysing confusion by introducing a factually and logically adequate and exhaustive definition which cannot be misunderstood or denied, I propose the following restatement of atheism:—

"**ATHEISM:** *The knowledge (1) that there exist no individual (personal, tribal) gods, such as the Hebrew-Christian chief god Yahweh, and like; and (2) that there exists no one distinct entity called 'a God' (correctly written: 'a god') over and above all the members of the class 'gods.'*"

The (1) *factually true* statement of the definition is proved (if it needs a proof at all) by all the vast anthropological, historical, philological and psychological evidence on the evolution of religious notions and attitudes, whereas

the (2) *logically true* statement is proved by a simple but decisive and final reference to the *principle of excluded contradiction* (in its logical calculus form) to the effect that

"There exists no entity *x* such that *x* both is and is not a member of a class *A*." That means in this particular case that "There exists no entity called 'a god' such that a god both is and is not a god." And this remains true in all circumstances, quite regardless of any definition of 'a god' that might be produced by theologians.

This logical disproof of "a God apart from all the gods" is adequate and conclusive, but it was a blunder on Bertrand Russell's part to imply that a *logical* disproof was either required or relevant for a denial of the Homeric gods which is a *factual* issue, and a further blunder on his and J. M. Robertson's part to say that there cannot be a (meaningful) disproof of "a God apart from all the gods," which is a *logical* issue.

Incidentally, Bertrand Russell's double blunder is the more surprising as he is well aware of the logical fallacy

underlying the so-called *category-mistake* of "an entity called *God* over and above all the various gods" since he himself referred to the principle (in his *History of West Philos.*, p. 224), when he wrote: ". . . there is not a *thing* called 'France' over and above its various parts."

So far as I know, no rationalist has put forward a definition of atheism on the lines of a clear differentiation between the factual and the logical denials, but a strange compromise between the confused view of J. M. Robertson and the correct, category-mistake argument is attempted by Chapman Cohen in his *Theism or Atheism* (London, 1921, p. 146): "Historically, 'God' means a deity believed by some people, somewhere, at some time. And if we put on one side these particular gods we have nothing left that can be either affirmed or denied. God-in-the-abstract is not a real existence any more than tree-in-the-abstract is a real existence. There is a pine tree, a pear tree, an apple tree, etc., but there is and can be no 'tree' apart from some particular tree. So with 'god.' There are particular gods, but if we do away with these, we have no god left as a separate existence. 'God' then becomes a mere word conveying no meaning whatever. Atheism does not deny the existence of a god for the same reason that it does not deny the existence of Abracadabra—both terms mean as much, or as little."—C. Cohen confuses here a meaningless series of letters with a *self-contradictory* expression whose referent *can* be meaningfully denied of existence on purely logical grounds.

Now, if my proposal for a uniform definition of atheism is widely accepted in the rationalist press of the world, there will follow some implications for a *uniform typographic usage* too, to foster clear thinking about the issue between Freethought (Science) and Religion. My recommendations would be as follows:—

(1) The form "God," whenever used to refer to the fictional (anthropomorphic) Christian gods: Yahweh and Jesus, and the pigeon-like Holy Ghost, will have to be always replaced by the full phrase "the god Yahweh" or "the good Jesus" or "the god Holy Ghost." Similarly with the particular (named) gods of other world religions. But note that Allah (= *al'lah*) already means "the god" (possibly the god Yahweh).

(2) The form "God," whenever used (without reference to a tribal god) to refer to the contradictory (logically impossible) "god-in-general" *apart* from all the gods, will have to be always replaced by the full phrase "the god-in-general" with the small initial letter, and the quotation marks being permanently used here in accordance with the modern logicians' wage when mentioning (and not using) a name that, moreover, has and can have no corresponding referent in the world.

We see now that Christianity thus hangs completely on an illusionary Capital Letter (G). *Withdraw the illogical capital G and Christianity at once disintegrates back into the original mythology.*

Our task is to make the whole world to see it clearly. And unless this *fundamental* task of establishing atheism is thoroughly accomplished, all other secular issues and reforms which rest on the acceptance of an *atheistic* explanation of nature and society, will necessarily remain, in theory, shaky and inconclusive. Atheism is therefore a top priority topic, and, following the contemporary semantic and linguistic trends of an increased language-consciousness, all rationalists should, in consequence, now give preference to the *logical denial* over all the other proofs of atheism. There is still too much arguing against

an *unqualified* (undifferentiated) "God" on the moronic level of a child, as when you first assume illogically the existence of this impossible "God-in-General" (distinct from the god Yahweh, etc.) and then argue whether it is worth—in view of the evil in the world—to worship him, as if this "God" (-in-general) were a tribual (personal) god of fairy tales, like Yahweh. Such a muddled argument at cross purposes won't carry much weight with the Christian dupes above the level of a fundamentalist moron. That is why, I repeat, *the logical disproof* of "a God apart from all the gods" that is, the reduction of the question of "God's" existence to the fallacy of a category mistake (hypostatisation), that means ultimately to the violation of the principle of excluded contradiction, a disproof that is incontrovertible.

In concluding, I can't help stressing the point that to go on using "God" for both meanings indiscriminately is henceforth a *reactionary* practice, perpetuating muddled thinking on the most fundamental Freethought issue.

NOTE.—In view of the International Freethought Congress in Luxembourg on September 2-6 this year, my urgent request to all the Freethought (atheist) organisations of the world is: Please reprint this article for discussion and take an official stand on my proposal.

### Footnote to the Above

Mr. Smelters asks for criticism. G. H. Taylor writes:—

This proposal will not do at all. It is open to the Christian to argue that all factual gods represent attempts to comprehend God. They are therefore either (1) perspectives; (2) partial aspects or (3) mistaken notions of God. The feature they have in common is that they *refer* to God. With God as referent, then, we see in "factual gods" (his term) an unreal splitting or distortion due to the limitations of human understanding. The story of God is therefore not, as suggested, the story of the emergence of an unreal universal from particulars; it is the story of man's unsuccessful attempts to pocket the Infinite. Monotheism is therefore a step forward. We are not dealing with two separate concepts erroneously associated for the benefit of priests; we are dealing with one possible concept misconceived in actuality. What, therefore, has happened is that man, in his attempts to get a purchase on God, has created gods, i.e., has broken up God into distorted appearances.

In order to get a ground for the above argument the theist would, of course, have to establish the existence of God, to be then used as a premise, and would have to name the usual attributes of God. This would bring into play the usual atheist argument from the problem of waste and evil—the argument scorned by Mr. Smelters—and so we are back with J. M. Robertson, Bertrand Russell and similar "morons and blunderers," whom Mr. Smelters holds in contempt. Mr. Smelters' article has been abbreviated with his consent, but his major argument has been preserved.

## Correspondence

### CORRECTION

In your issue of April 9 just to hand, the authorship of the hymn, "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," is incorrectly ascribed to Sir John Bowring, of opium fame.

The hymn in question was written by John Newton, friend of Cowper. Newton was able to reconcile slavery and Christianity, making profit from both.—Yours, etc.,  
New Zealand.

JAS. BAXTER.

### HEREDITARY PEERS

Re "Self-Righteous Peers"—knowing that P. V. Morris is neither a snob of any known variety, either to Thackeray or

myself, nor a believer in hereditary distinctions, I read and re-read his phrase, "Clearly these self-righteous peers, only one of whom by the way sits among the Lords by hereditary right," to discover the esoteric meaning implied in it. I can only assume that he means that stupidity would have been expected in an hereditary peer; am I correct in this?

Could P. V. Morris also tell me where the problem of homosexuality is dealt with in the New Testament, excepting the implication from the words of Jesus that Homosexuals would receive more favourable treatment in the hereafter than the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum?—Yours, etc.

EVA EBURY.

P.V.M. replies: Hereditary peers of good sense are not so rare as Mrs. Ebury assumes me to mean. However, one can still expect stupidity in an hereditary House of Lords, and my point was that it appears to be catching in the case of those who are made peers and not born so. When I referred to denunciations of homosexuality in the Old and New Testaments, the New Testament passage I had in mind was St. Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, Chap. 1, verse 27.

### VIRGIN BIRTHS

It may interest your correspondent, G. Dickinson, to know that there have been millions of virgin births. This view is supported in *Symbols, Sex, and the Stars*, by Ernest Busenbark. Quote: "The apparent misuse of the term 'virgin' which is applied to Ishtar, Venus, Aphrodite and all of the other great mother goddesses of antiquity, is due to the fact that originally the word denoted merely an unmarried woman or maiden. She might even be a prostitute, a term which Ishtar applied to herself. As goddess of generation, she was devoted to loss of chastity and to childbirth, although not to marriage. Unmarried women of the East, whether virgins or prostitutes, wore veils to indicate their unmarried status, and when Isis is made to say that no man has lifted her veil she means that she has never been a party to a marriage ceremony.

"The hierodouloi or sacred prostitutes who served in the temples of the mother goddesses were likewise called 'holy virgins.' In Greece, children who were born of unmarried mothers were called parthenoi or 'virgin born.' Some modern writers are inclined to believe that the traditional virgin birth of Jesus was founded upon a mistranslation of the Greek word 'almah' (virgin), meaning a maiden or unmarried woman."

Many Christians do not accept, nor can they explain, these virgin births. The Latin word for virgin is "virgo," but the Latin *virgo intacta* means a maiden untouched (unsullied). Mary was not *virgo intacta*, at least it has never been so claimed.—Yours, etc.,  
J. HUMPHREY.

### VATICAN'S STAFF TROUBLE

In common with most industries in Australia, the Roman Catholic Church has been short of staff since the termination of the Second World War. The prelates in pulpit and in Press continually call for "vocations" for men and women to train for employment by the Holy Mother Church.

Evidently the Vatican has a world problem, young people of a suitable type being hard to recruit for the spook industry.

In April the Pope, in an encyclical, expressed sorrow that in some countries the number of young people "dedicating" themselves to religious life was decreasing.

His Holiness reaffirmed the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of the superiority of the state in virginity and celibacy over that of marriage, adding: "Anyone counselling married life as being preferable to total consecration to God would be inverting and confounding the true order of things."

A statement like that would be endorsed by a much-married man who is paying alimony to several ex-wives. Anyway, where would mankind be if Adam and Eve, the product of his rib, had believed that? Or where would the Pope be if his parents had remained virgin and celibate?

The encyclical is more evidence that cracks have developed in the concrete. Signs now point to the Roman Catholic Church's struggling to be a welfare organisation within a Welfare State, especially in Australia, its theology being insufficient attraction alone. In addition, it is playing St. George against the dragon, which is loosely called Communism, and that provides some excitement for its adherents.

Recently, at the opening of a R.C. School at Canberra, the Prime Minister (a Protestant leading a coalition of the Liberal and Country Parties) eulogised the R.C. parochial schools, in which most R.C.s are educated. The Leader of the Opposition (a Protestant leading the Australian Labour Party) endorsed the eulogy, despite the fact that in Australia R.C.s have the highest rate of delinquency of any section of the community. One must pander to the R.C. vote!

Sydney, N.S.W.

B. CALCUTT.