

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXIV—No. 45

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

THE scientific studies of modern times are distinguished from those of previous ages by their *specialised* character. The enormous expansion of knowledge in recent centuries has necessitated a rigorous sub-division of the available knowledge into numerous divisions and sub-divisions. Gone, presumably for ever, are the days of the "universal" men who embraced within their ubiquitous mental grasp all the essential knowledge available in their era. To-day, a scientific specialist may be accurately as well as humorously defined as "one who knows more and more about less and less." Our age, we repeat, is, *par excellence*, that of the specialist, of, let us say, the microscope rather than of the telescope.

Far other was the situation in early civilisations. In particular, in those—and they represented the great majority—which were dominated by priests, and in which Theology represented "the queen of the sciences." Which ever species of Theology we may select, Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, we shall find the same dominant feature in all of them: that type of authoritarian philosophy commonly described as scholastic, a type of which that sceptical student of Theology, the late Dean Inge has pronounced the classical definition: "a system of thought in which there are no *problems* to be solved, but only *authorities* to be consulted." In the light of some divine revelation, "of the Truth once for all delivered to the saints," all knowledge was included in a single final and unalterable system propounded by "Universal Doctors," masters of all available knowledge. The Age of Theology was the Age of "Universals." It was dominated by "Universal Doctors" who, to invert the modern definition, knew "less and less about more and more"!

"Universal History"

Whether history can accurately be classed amongst the sciences, is a debatable question, upon which, perhaps, the last word has not yet been said. But, whether or not it be such, the evolution of historical writing has followed the pattern which we have traced above, an age of "Universal History" has given way to an age of minute, perhaps of excessive, specialisation. Formerly history was written in the grand style by the grandiose authors of "World History." To-day, it tends more and more to deal with ever smaller fragments of Space and Time in an ever more detailed manner. Nor is there any difficulty in ascertaining the reason for this: Universal History, like Universal Philosophy or Theology, can only be written as the expression of the Absolute of Universal Truth, valid for all the multiple times and places which make up Universal History, so in fact has "Universal History" been construed by classical—or rather, mediæval—world-historians.

The Theocentric Interpretation of History

The oldest form taken by the writing of Universal History was represented by that species of literature, which may be described as *The Theocentric Interpretation of*

History, in which all human history is expressed, usually in symbolical language, as a successive manifestation of God's Will. Two examples of this species of writing, also found in other religions, exist in the Christian Bible: *Daniel*, in the *Old Testament*, *Revelation* in the *New Testament*. In both these books contemporary history is revealed as the Finger of God moving across the human stage. Since the dawn of Biblical criticism, *Daniel* has been recognised as partisan history of the enemies and oppressors of the Jews; whilst *Revelation*, under terrifying and often obscure imagery, deals with contemporary Roman history from the standpoint of some of God's Chosen People.

Christianity represented the universal edition of Judaism. Judaism stripped of its exclusive national character and in which salvation was no longer solely confined to the Hebrew blood-stream. Consequently, Christianity, which inherited the Jewish way of looking at history, enlarged its theocentric conception from the tribal to the "Catholic" (that is "Universal") level. The pre-eminent, Christian World-historian was St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) whose *magnum opus*, *The City of God* (427) fixed the Christian Interpretation of World-History, and, equally the Christian style of writing it, for the next thirteen centuries. World-History, according to St. Augustine, represented the Revelation of God's holy will manifested, first in the history of the Jews, the preparation for the Gospel, and, more completely, in the Catholic and Universal Church, which will last to the end of Time. History according to St. Augustine, is human experience guided by Divine Revelation!

From Augustine to Bossuet

The work of the African Doctor set the subsequent mould for the Christian Theocentric Interpretation of History. As such, Augustine had many successors who wrote world-history as the unfolding of the Divine Plan.

The Catholic historians of the *Ancien Régime*, Bossuet eloquent "Histoire Universelle" (1679). Indeed, as late as 1750, on the very eve of the Industrial Revolution, the French Catholic historian, Rollin, wrote a widely read "Universal History" in this Augustinian style. One can, relevantly add that this entire species of writing World-History reduces itself to a single fundamental pattern: *facts, as such, have no significance: what gives them their importance is, solely, their place in the Divine Plan.*

"The Last of the Mohicans"

The Catholic historians of the *Ancient Régime*, Bossuet and Rollin, were, however, not the last world-historians of, what we have described as The Theocentric Interpretation of History. That distinction must now be accorded to an Englishman, a contemporary, Prof. Arnold Toynbee. Prof. Toynbee is a product of Oxford University, that proverbial "Home of Lost Causes," and, true to his university tradition he has revived, and become the champion of a

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

Mr. Toynbee's "City of God"

By F. A. RIDLEY

philosophy of History that the modern scientific revolution appeared to have killed stone-dead two centuries ago. Mr. Toynbee is the last exponent of The Theocentric Interpretation of History, the last Christian world-historian, one might almost style him "The Last of the Mohicans."

Mr. Toynbee's "City of God"

Mr. Toynbee's recently finished *magnum opus*, *The Study of History*, has been widely acclaimed in the religious world, and by intellectual reactionaries everywhere, as the greatest historical work in the English language since Gibbon's monumental *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Certainly, it has at least one feature in common with that of Gibbon: whether or not it is "luminous," it is certainly "voluminous." However, if the journalistic scribes who have sung its praises so lavishly knew rather more about its subject matter, they would have compared it, not with Gibbon, with whose work it has nothing in common except in the size!—but with the "Universal History" of Augustine or Bossuet, of which, and of the school of thought of which, it represents the lineal successor. For Gibbon wrote an actual history, that of the Roman Empire in decline. St. Augustine, however, "Justified the ways of God to Men" in fifteen volumes. Like God himself in the number of his commandments, Mr. Toynbee only takes ten. But the methodology and aim of the African theologian and of the Oxford professor are precisely identical, to explain and to justify World-History, not as simply World-History, but as the Revelation of God's Holy Will. Toynbee's *Study of History* is *The City of God* of the 20th century. The First World War produced Oswald

Spengler's *Decline of the West*; whilst the Second has produced Toynbee's "Back to the Ages of Faith"!

Mr. Toynbee's *Study of History* leads him back to "Christian Civilisation" that is, to the Middle Ages, the "Agé, par excellence, of Faith": it is history pressed into the service of reaction, all historical by-paths—and there are many in Toynbee's work—lead back to the Vatican.* It is this fact which explains the uproarious welcome given to *The Study of History* by reactionaries everywhere. This is the sort of "History" that both ethical and political conservatism desires us to "study." It will take us far away from "dangerous thoughts" in the Future, if we fix our gaze resolutely on the Past.

Classic or Curiosity?

In our opinion, evolution is a *fact*. The world, as Galileo is reported to have stated, "still moves on," and so, presumably, does the history which describes its successive movements, we do not think that because of either the Will of God or the erudition of Mr. Toynbee, the modern world is likely to retrace its steps to the remote ages of St. Augustine or the author of the *Book of Daniel*. We think that other more secular tools will be needed for "The Study of History." We are of opinion that Mr. Toynbee is a relic rather than a portent and that his many volumed *Study* is more likely to live in History as a curiosity rather than as a classic!

* In his latest volumes Toynbee appears to have become an eclectic in religion. His "Christian Civilization" now appears to have borrowed heavily from other non-Christian faiths. We doubt if his Catholic predecessors would have approved of such a "Christianity."

Facts for Freethinkers—Roman Catholic Religious Orders

THE R.C. Church divides its clergy into two sections, namely, "regular" clergy under a religious rule authorised by the Church, and "secular" or parochial clergy who live "in the world." The former are enrolled in a large number of religious Orders. The rules under which these monastic Orders function vary considerably, but they all exact the canonical oaths of poverty, chastity and obedience from their members, who, unlike the "secular" clergy, cannot own property. Most of these religious Orders also live in religious "houses" or monasteries, which they cannot leave without permission. The Jesuits, in this respect as in others, live under a modified rule with some features peculiar to themselves.

The chief religious Orders are:—

1. *The Order of St. Benedict*, founded in the 6th century by Benedict of Nursia, a Roman nobleman, at Monte Cassino in Italy. The Benedictines were the first western Order to abandon the extreme asceticism of the eastern monks and to make corporate labour a regular part of monastic life. The Benedictines were the missionaries of the Church during the "Dark Ages," and included Pope Gregory "the Great" and St. Augustine (first Archbishop of Canterbury). This is the most learned Order and specialises in research.

2. *The Franciscans* are now divided into three separate Orders, having been founded by Francis of Assisi in 1209. An itinerant Italian preacher, he played a part in the history of the Catholic Church rather similar to that of John Wesley in English Christianity. At a time when Catholicism had lost contact with the masses, Francis sought to reclaim them. The Franciscans specialise in work amongst the poor.

3. *The Order of Preachers (Dominicans)*. Founded in 1217 by Dominic de Guzman, a Spanish contemporary of Francis, they specialise in preaching, controversy and theological study. Nicknamed the *canes Domini* (watchdogs of

the Lord), the Order founded and subsequently directed the inquisition in both Rome and Spain. (In the opinion of the late Prof. Coulton it was the joint activity of the Franciscans and Dominicans that postponed the outbreak of the Reformation from the 13th to the 16th century.)

4. *Company of Jesus (Jesuits)*. Founded in 1540 by a Spanish ex-soldier, Ignatius de Loyola, and organised in military fashion, the Jesuits are the most famous and powerful of Catholic Orders. Their training, based on Loyola's "spiritual exercises," lasts about seventeen years and is very severe. They specialise in missionary work. They take a special oath of obedience to the Pope, but have always been very much a "church within the church." Their motto is "To the greater glory of God." Suppressed by the Pope in 1773, they were restored in 1814. Since Pascal attacked them in his Provincial Letters (1656-57) the appellation "Jesuit" has been synonymous with intrigue and duplicity in popular speech.

Among minor Catholic Orders may be mentioned the *Servites* (servants of Mary); the *Trappists* (distinguished by their oath of perpetual silence); and the "*Congregation of the Oratory*," to which Cardinal Newman belonged.

There are no mysteries in nature; there are only problems. Mysteries are the stock in trade of the priest, the conjuror and the knave; problems are the raw material on which science works to create knowledge.

Earth can best dispense with those who are most certain of getting to heaven.

Conscience is a splendid thing. It enables the godly to get by a roundabout method what they dare not get by a direct route.

INTERVIEWS WITH N.S.S. SPEAKERS

W. J. O'Neill

THE *doyen* of Speakers' Corner! Such would appear to be the future role for which W. J. (Paddy) O'Neill is cast. After only a few years as our speaker on the famous Hyde Park orators' ground he is enjoying phenomenal success, and is already one of the best known there.

A veritable tiger on the platform, he is not easily drawn into print. Special talent: outdoor speaking. Hobby: outdoor speaking. Favourite meal: parsons. Six for Sunday supper is ideal; anything less leaves him still hungry. "When does O'Neill finish?" a listener asked me. "He doesn't," I replied. What he has started on the platform he is prepared to continue at ground level, and the official end of the evening is only the unofficial re-start among eager groups.

His meetings are always carried through in the spirit of cheerful aggressiveness, with the perfect blend of dignity and punch, and his whole bearing reflects credit on the society he represents. It is no difficult matter to attract a large crowd at Marble Arch by dubious means, and hold their attention for worthless purposes. To attract a large crowd for healthy, wholesome discussion, and to retain its rapt attention for purposes of cerebration, is an entirely different matter, and on looking across the thirty or thirty-five conglomerations of humanity, of differing size, calibre and temper, which spread over this historic arena, one is proud to belong to a society which can hold the intelligent attention of a crowd comparable with the biggest. This, too, in competition with moneyed Christian and other organisations often mouthing the most futile and unadulterated rubbish it is possible to unload on a trusting public.

Generous to his opponents, with a generosity born of complete confidence in his case, Mr. O'Neill, in common with our other speakers, rigorously excludes anything personal and insists on the points at issue. The mere sight of an approaching dog-collar sets his coat trailing, and we see him playing Spider to the parsonic Fly.

Eminently lucid in language and delivery, and blessed with infinite patience, he allows his audience to determine the tempo of the proceedings, and I have often noticed as much as half a minute tick away with nothing said: it seems that no one moves and everyone is thinking. To say that he "lectures" in the exact sense is utterly inadequate, and in fact does him an injustice. He stage-manages. He provokes to dissent; he engages in discussion; he converses; he debates, always taking care to re-state his opponent's case (and often bettering it in the process). I have sometimes seen him appoint himself as a sort of master of ceremonies for the purpose of conducting a cross-talk between two Christians in the audience, who have cancelled one another out, to the general amusement of all.

He spends a considerable portion of his spare time re-reading and analysing the Bible, in attacking which he is an acknowledged expert, a kind of walking Bible Handbook. The legend is that he wrote the Holy Book himself. But woe unto the Modernist Christian who thinks that O'Neill is vulnerable on other matters. More than one fool has rushed in, only to find that the speaker has a pretty thorough grip on the whole freethought field.

Is it true that your custom is to speak to one particular individual in the audience?

That is so. No matter where I'm looking, my selected individual is always at the back of my mind, and I keep check of my effect on him—or her.

You like the crowd to take part in the meeting as actively as possible?

Yes—that's of fundamental importance. I want them to *feel* part of it.

And this applies to supporters and antagonists alike?

Yes, but I would urge supporters not to deal with hecklers themselves. Always let the speakers do it. Most hecklers make a good chopping block.

Do you think the crowds for secularist meetings are getting bigger and more enthusiastic?

Yes, and the reason for that is not so much that the N.S.S. is growing; the principal cause is that we are getting the goodwill of more and more "fellow-travellers."

You favour our giving Hyde Park priority as the best hunting ground?

We must bear in mind that Hyde Park contacts are widespread. In fact many visitors from abroad come to our meetings there.

What major event would you like to see in the freethought world?

Just one great irreligious revival!

Are the clergy getting any braver?

They won't bite. I had five the other week in my audience at the same time. I invited them, cajoled and even dared them to get up and defend themselves.

Columns could be filled with Paddiana.

* * *

The late-lamented and best-liked R.C. priest, Fr. McNabb, with whom our speaker frequently crossed swords, was continuing the argument as they walked home together. "Now, Paddy," he said after a while, "we are entering my parish, and I'm going to cross to the other side of the road, for if they see me talking to you they'll think you are taking me to Hell."

Besides being a talented speaker, Mr. O'Neill is also a talented listener, and has frequently enjoyed himself among audiences at Christian platforms. On one occasion a speaker giving Christian "evidence" had talked himself hoarse trying to deal with O'Neill's objections. Finally, unable to carry on, he got down, saying: "Here, Paddy, you get up and give it them from the atheist standpoint while I have a rest."

Another Christian speaker, apparently not knowing O'Neill, and unable to deal with his questions, shouted: "Go away and have a meeting of your own if you can!" The crowd became expectant. "Would you mind repeating that louder?" asked Paddy. The crowd simmered. The speaker obliged. The crowd awaited the effect of the challenge. Choosing the correct psychological moment, O'Neill moved away to begin his meeting—taking the bulk of the crowd with him and leaving the astonished speaker with a few dwindling remnants.

One night, as O'Neill finished speaking, a Hand was laid on his shoulder. It belonged to a police sergeant. "I want a word with you," he said. This was ominous. They moved away together. Then the arm of authority delivered himself thus: "I just wanted to say thanks a lot for showing me the truth."

"There are things in the Bible unfit to be read aloud," said Paddy from the platform one day. A lady on the front row was most indignant and defied him to prove it. After playing around with the situation in characteristic fashion, he finally produced a passage and handed it to her to read out. "This is horrible!" she screamed, "it's not in the real Bible. You wrote this one yourself!"

(Continued on page 357)

This Believing World

Christianity has not got all the rights to credulity and gullibility. The people who profoundly believe in "Flying Saucers" have got a good share as well as those who imagine that in the very near future we shall go as easily to Mars as to Brighton. Some short while ago was spread the "news" that a Flying Saucer had dropped in Mexico from another world, and that out of it hopped some "little" men. It is now admitted that this "Flying Saucer" was a balloon sent up by the U.S.A. to probe the stratosphere—and the "little" men were monkeys used in the test. But will this affect belief in Flying Saucers? Not on your life.

The intensive campaign waged against religion in Russia for nearly 40 years does not appear to have had much effect according to a *Daily Mail* reporter allowed to visit Moscow. He found "standing room" only in the churches. But the congregations in both the Orthodox and the Baptist churches there were much the same—nine out of ten were women, mostly older women. There were also some young girls, very few boys, but a number of middle-aged men. The President of the Baptist Union said that one of the anti-religion leaders in Moscow told him that, "You cannot build Communism among a people many of whom believe in God and half of whom are in fear of the Devil." But the packed churches surely prove the contrary?

It is an old platitude but sometimes confession is good for the soul. The Archbishop of York in a recent speech on the Press admitted that "sermons are no longer as popular as once they were." We sometimes wonder if they ever were, even in the heyday of Protestantism last century. Did people really enjoy the boring rubbish which was regularly published by so many curates and vicars? Did they feel better for the "uplift"? Our national Press may print a lot of "news" that is out-of-date the next day, but we fancy it never sinks to the low intellectual level shown by most of the millions of sermons which their authors fondly imagined were necessary for salvation.

An echo of the kind of thing dished out to our grandfathers however still survives in some quarters—for example in *The Herald of Abundant Life*, a Protestant magazine packed with Bible quotations, and wonderful cures of incurable ailments through the use of "annointed" handkerchiefs and other holy appliances. In addition, "Millions of souls are going to Hell," it shrieks—not quite as pleasant a thought as the famous "Millions now living will never die" which brought so much fame and prosperity in the shape of funds to Jehovah's Witnesses. *The Herald* wants to know what are we doing to stop the souls going to Hell? Nothing whatever. For our own part we would find it a better fate than to read any more numbers of *The Herald*.

Whether the Bible is or is not a "best seller," there is little doubt that it is very widely distributed. But whereas best sellers are actually read—who reads the Bible these days except the clergy and theological students? Fancy anyone reading the ravings of Ezekiel for pleasure, or the "lamentations" of Jeremiah! A writer in a Jersey newspaper seems to think that no astronomer better expressed the truth about the earth than Job who said that God "hangeth the earth upon nothing"—as if the earth was really "hanging" upon nothing. In any case, the Jews and the Christians who took their astronomy from the Bible took no notice of Job, and imagined a "flat" earth resting on "the waters of the great deep" whatever that

meant. Or perhaps they envisaged the earth with the "pillars" of Heaven hovering about somewhere.

Clergymen and priests in general shirk defending the Bible from the point of view of science. Genesis is "poetry" or "symbolism"—a day in the Creation Story doesn't mean day but means an era or a period of time or anything, please God, but a day. The Bible was meant for simple people, and it was far easier to show them the handiwork of God Almighty in a simple beautiful story than befuddle them with the intricacies of Evolution. In the good old Christian days, these pious points were emphasised with torture, imprisonment, or even death; nowadays the average man of God looks quite hurt if you suggest that he *believes* every word of the Creation Story as Gospel Truth!

A Crib for Christmas?

At Bolton a controversy has been raging on the proposal to erect a crib for Christmas at public expense. The Entertainments Committee Chairman said it would symbolise true Christian faith. Then the fight started! What is "true" Christianity? The local nonconformists strongly opposed the idea, as did freethinkers and rationalists on other grounds. According to a Council meeting report in the Bolton *Evening News* "letters in the local press showed that a feud had arisen over the crib," and "important clergymen in the town had attacked it with such fury."

In the end Bolton Town Council had to reject the crib proposal, rather than face the antagonism. They rejected it by 43 votes to 19. The local newspaper comments: "The passions which have been aroused must be regretted, for Christianity is a religion of love and brotherhood, not of hatred and enmity." (As witness the crib dispute!) And now we know what "true" Christianity is compounded of: love, brotherhood, and a policeman to keep order.

Deploring the crib dispute, the Bolton paper apparently blames "the forces of materialism which threaten the Church everywhere."

A statement like this, of course, has the obvious advantage of offending neither Catholics, Church people, nor chapel folk, among its readers, and may be interpreted by way of the three as they choose, as militating against the other two. The definition of "materialism" for the *News* readers is, of course, "anything nasty you like to think of." A Liberal councillor gave a brilliant reason for supporting the crib idea. He favoured it because "I am on the side of religion against materialism." That should be worth a few Christian votes.

Very Disappointing

For the purpose of launching a £20,000 appeal for a new church, 220 people were invited to the Council Chamber at Wolverhampton on October 6, according to the *Birmingham Gazette*. They included the Mayor, Councillors, civic officials and industrialists. Eight turned up out of the 220. The patron of the appeal commented: "I'm very disappointed with the lack of support. I wonder how many of these people have realised that the church we want to build might still be here in 500 years." Possibly that explains the absences.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE GERMAN SCENE
By F. A. RIDLEY

THE FREETHINKER

41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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.

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.

P. H. LORD.—The first to propose arbitration in disputes between nations was not Paine, as he himself gives the credit to Henry II of France (see *Rights of Man*).

FRANK OLDROYD.—The Bishop of Bradford did not take up the challenge, at least not in public. It is not his custom to attack Freethinkers in any place where they can hit back.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.:

F. ROTHWELL.

Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle St.).—Sunday at 8 p.m.:

J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.:

G. A. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, November 7, noon:

L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.:

T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

J. CLAYTON'S Lectures (Bardin Club, Colne Road, Burnley).—Sunday, November 7, 11 a.m.: "The Birth of the Soul." (Discussion Class, King's Hall Cinema, Accrington).—Sunday, November 7, 6-30 p.m.: "What Does the Bible Conceal?"

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Second Floor).—Sunday, November 7, 6-45 p.m.: Open Night.

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 9, 7 p.m.: Dr. W. BEIR, "The Problem of Cruelty."

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall).—Friday, November 5: A Lecture, "The Political Situation in Austria."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 7, 6-30 p.m.: JACKSON HALL, "The Unimportance of Truth."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, November 7, 2-30 p.m.: Councillor E. A. C. ROBERTS, "Coventry—Civil Defence and the H-Bomb."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 7, 11 a.m.: HECTOR HAWTON, "The Problem of Evil."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1, five minutes from Edgware Road Station).—Sunday, November 7, 7-15 p.m.: W. A. GAPE (Anarchist), "Some Free Thoughts Concerning Freethinkers."

Notes and News

To that great veteran of Freethought, Mr. Joseph McCabe, visits were recently paid by Mr. F. A. Hornibrook and Mr. P. Victor Morris. Mentally alert as ever, Mr. McCabe talked vividly about the articles he still hoped to write, but his recent illness has perhaps made it impossible for him to take the platform again. All the same, we hope to see yet many articles from his pen—and even perhaps to hear that a book or two will be published to add to the 100 volumes (or more) that bear his name. What a great reputation he has made in the Freethought movement he has so faithfully served for nearly 60 years!

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged: £459 17s. 3d.

D. Davies, £2; A. N. Richmond, 4s.; A. Brooks, 10s.; Mrs. A. Vallance, £1 10s.; J. White, £2; R.E.S. (in memory of John Seibert), 10s.; F.E.M., £5 5s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; T. Murphy, 10s.; W. Maybank, £5; J. L. Mashiter, 2s. 6d.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; A.B. and A.D. (in memory of George Bazin), £2; Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Vernon, £1; H. Meulen, £3 16s.; Miss M. Plumb, 10s.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1; A. F. Rand (U.S.A.), \$2 (13s. 3d.). Total to date: £486 11s. 6d.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

Appeal by N.S.S. Vice-President

FOR me *The Freethinker* is a tradition. It is the first thing I look for at the breakfast table every Friday morning; it is something without which the week would not be complete, without which life would be very much poorer. It is not just a paper but *the* paper, and I cannot be dispassionate about it: one cannot be dispassionate in love! Yet there is more to it than that. *The Freethinker* was founded for a special purpose and I consider that purpose to be important.

Introducing the first issue, Foote declined to give his readers "a catalogue of promises that may never be kept," but stated that it would "wage relentless war against superstition in general and against Christian superstition in particular," employing "the resources of Science, Scholarship, Philosophy and Ethics" as well as "any weapons of ridicule or sarcasm that may be borrowed from the armoury of common sense." These intentions were faithfully fulfilled by Foote and his associates. They were kept even when Foote was imprisoned for blasphemy. They were kept by Foote's successor, Chapman Cohen, and they are being kept to-day by the present editors.

Methods, of course, have changed, and rightly so, but *The Freethinker* still continues, in an up-to-date way, to do the work that Foote started. Thus the tradition of *The Freethinker*, like the great tradition of Freethought itself, is not dead or static: it is a living and growing tradition. Each generation of freethinkers makes its contribution, and the cumulative total is passed on.

No one contributed more to this process than Chapman Cohen, and it is fitting that the fund should bear his name. *The Freethinker* was his organ of expression and it is ours. It is, I believe, the paper Foote would wish it to be were he living to-day. I am proud to be a contributor to it. Not all of us may have the time or the inclination to be this, but we can all be contributors to its Fund.

COLIN MCCALL.

Interviews with N.S.S. Speakers—W. J. O'Neill

(Concluded from page 355)

At a big Christian meeting addressed by a Canon, Mr. O'Neill, from the audience, asked: "Jesus said he would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. XII, 38-40). According to the Bible he died on Friday (Mark XV, 42), and he was out of the grave early on Sunday morning, so he was only dead for two nights. What was the third night?" The Canon looked surprised. "I can only give you an answer in cricket parlance," he said, "You've got me stumped!"

And so ends our series with outdoor speakers. They will have served their best purpose if they encourage new and younger speakers to try their skill, and therefore I repeat here a remark made by one of the speakers, J. W. Barker: "You might be better than the other fellow."

G.H.T.

Divine Healing

By H. CUTNER

SOME readers have asked me what I think of the "spiritual" or "divine" healing which is now getting such splendid publicity in our daily and weekly press. And first, it should be noted that healing the sick with positive results has always had a good press. I doubt whether Jesus Christ, if he had confined himself to ordinary miracles like flying about with a Devil, walking on water, or stopping storms, would have attracted half the attention he did when performing miraculous cures. Stopping a storm is naturally very wonderful, but not half so wonderful as restoring the sight of an incurably blind person, or bringing back to life a completely dead one.

Spiritualists have now more or less taken for granted automatic writing, clairvoyance, apports, and materialisations, and even messages from Summerland or the Etheric World—whatever these are. But it took hundreds of thousands of "cures" of incurable people by "spirits" to make our national press sit up and take notice.

Do eminent healers—like say, Mr. Harry Edwards—really cure people then? This is one of those questions to which a blunt yes or no cannot be given.

I was for some years with a very well known patent medicine firm and it astonished everybody except the heads there how many letters came in every day from people claiming that they were cured by this medicine after being given up by doctors. The statements in these letters were quite positive, and it never was a question of mere "faith." Yet my doctor friends ridiculed both the medicine and the cures even when confronted with the clearest evidence before them that the patients were cured.

Then take the way doctors have consistently ridiculed the cures claimed by homœopathic doctors—though even in my own small experience I can testify to some remarkable cures after the patients were discharged from great hospitals as incurable. And what about our more or less modest herbalists? Dotted all over the country are little shops selling herbal remedies scorned by the medical profession, yet even in an era of free medicine for all, bought by sick people who have implicit faith in their curative properties. Do herbal medicines cure? Of course they do. Shops specialising in herbal remedies would have disappeared long ago if they did not.

But what about Christian Science, that queer religion which is neither Christian nor science? Well, Mrs. Eddy died one of the richest women in the world with millions of followers filling their own churches in both America and Europe. I can hardly believe that if Christian Science healers *always* failed to cure she would have amassed such an enormous fortune, and left such a vigorous body of belief. Just as at Lourdes, some cures must be placed to their credit.

But this does not mean that there is anything miraculous about the procedure of all these people. There are old farm labourers who live to be centenarians on pork, beer, and tobacco—a diet which could easily send to an early grave lots of other people. The why and the wherefore of the mysteries of good health and poor health have never really been solved. There are of course a few basic rules on which nearly all experts are agreed—but there are also exceptions which baffle even the greatest specialists.

Sometimes mere "faith" cures—that is, sometimes a doctor will give some harmless coloured water to a patient and it works wonders. And sometimes the only result is that the patient gets worse. A strong, healthy man will succumb to pneumonia while a weak, always ailing woman will be up and about from a bad attack in a couple of

weeks. Medical history is full of the most extraordinary cases of cures and failures which follow no logical course and baffle our cleverest physicians.

And with all this, it is a fact that there are "old women" remedies, especially in country districts, that do cure sick people, let orthodox doctors say what they like. The curious reader should look into the work of the famous F. V. Raspail (who has a statue put up to him and a boulevard named after him in Paris) and learn what he thought of the medicine of his day and its cures. Raspail was not liked by doctors but the common people in France had almost infinite faith in him and followed his remedies.

And now, what about Mr. Edwards? In a recent issue of *Picture Post* there is an excellent article by Miss Hilde Marchant who tells us what a thoroughly sincere man he is and how he claims to have the "divine power of healing." He, and no doubt Miss Marchant, believe that there was a Jesus and that he really did go about healing the sick—and he, Mr. Edwards, has exactly the same power. It is not a question of just "faith" on the part of the people cured either. It was not faith which cured when Sir Herbert Barker healed so many soldiers after the First World War, and incurred the wrath of the orthodox doctors who had completely failed to do so. And it was not faith which made the Roman Catholic priest Fr. Kneip so famous a healer with his "water-cure" last century in Bavaria. "I am not a faith healer" declares Mr. Edwards, "It does not matter to me whether the patient believes in me, or the faith I hold." And that faith is, that all his cures are done by "spirits" and that therefore Spiritualism is true.

Does Mr. Edwards—that is, do his "spirits" always cure? "There are tragic, bitter failures," declares Miss Marchant. This is rather curious, for Jesus Christ never, never had any tragic, bitter failures. He always cured. But then his cures were never done by "spirits," they were always "miracles." Only a God can perform miracles, and Jesus was a God.

In any case, as far as I have read about Mr. Edwards, he has performed thousands or even tens of thousands of cures—cancer, blindness, deafness, too long or too short limbs, and a hundred other ailments disappear like magic whether he does the "manipulation" on the patient, or only with "absent" healing. And so what is Miss Marchant's own conclusion after studying Mr. Edwards at first hand. "He sincerely and honestly," she says, "believes in his mission of healing. Of that I am certain. Of the rest of his claims, and the tremendous implications that arise from them, I do not know." Could anything be more damning—"I do not know."

Either Mr. Edwards really does cure—like Jesus—or he does not. And Miss Marchant should know.

The medical profession could test Mr. Edwards' claims quite easily. He could be taken to St. Dunstan's and asked to cure the blindness of the unfortunate inmates there. He could be taken to a hospital ward where there are serious cases waiting for operations—and cure them all without operation. He could be given a dozen cancer cases certified incurable by specialists, and cure them. And so on. Only in this way can the men and women who have devoted their lives to medicine and surgery be convinced.

That some cures regularly take place I see no reason to doubt. They do with patent medicines, herbal remedies, and homœopathy. They do even with Christian Science and at Lourdes. But when anyone talks about "miracles," or the power of Jesus Christ, or about "spirit doctors," or equally fantastic theories—he is talking nonsense.

The N.S.S. and Broadcasting

(RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUB-COMMITTEE)

THE views of this Society, which is widely regarded as the most militant wing of the freethought movement in this country, have never been allowed expression by the B.B.C. We hold that, whatever question is being discussed, differing points of view should be plainly stated, and that this principle applies to discussions about religion equally with those about other topics.

Of recent years this claim has been more and more accepted by enlightened religious people, and representative speakers from the N.S.S. have been invited to state the case for Secularism and the ideas for which it stands by discussion groups in all parts of the country. Invariably, however much these audiences may disagree with our speakers, interest in the ideas put forward, and appreciation of the sincerity of the addresses are evident. Whenever it is mentioned that our point of view is excluded by the B.B.C., the information arouses indignant protests.

It is realised that there is an active minority of bigoted listeners who will at once complain if Secularists are allowed to broadcast their views. Therefore it is suggested that such permission will necessitate a preparative talk to explain why everyone should be pleased to listen to views with which they disagree. Our Society would gladly provide a speaker to do this.

Our speakers are experienced lecturers and debaters, well qualified to take part in discussions on such questions as the following:—

“The Relative Values of Religion and Science to Mankind.” “Has Christianity done more harm than good?” “Why have a State Church?” “The Case for Secular Education.” “The Secularist Approach to Social Problems.” “Secularism and Youth.” “Why Religion?”

We also think that it is time that talks should be given about the meanings of such widely misunderstood terms as Atheism, Agnosticism, Materialism and Determinism by those who subscribe to these views. It is further suggested that listeners would gain a clearer insight regarding the whole field of freethought, if a discussion between representatives of Secularism, Rationalism and the Ethical movement was arranged with no religious participant.

Prose and poetry readings from such great freethinkers as Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlaugh, R. G. Ingersoll, G. W. Foote, Chapman Cohen, Shelley, Swinburne, James Thomson (B.V.) and others should be occasionally given.

The allocation of a week of the 7.50 a.m. “Lift Up Your Hearts” period to freethinking speakers, for the broadcasting of inspirational talks divorced from religious connections, should be made from time to time.

Historically important personalities and events, hitherto unmentioned or not given full recognition in broadcasting should be the subject of talks and dramatic presentations in a manner calculated to do justice to such subjects, e.g., the trial and execution of Giordano Bruno, the career of Thomas Paine, Charles Bradlaugh's fight to take his seat after his election to Parliament, Charles Bradlaugh's Affirmation Bill, G. W. Foote's trial and imprisonment for blasphemy.

The speakers that the National Secular Society can provide for the foregoing items are its President, two Vice-Presidents, Secretary and local Branch officials and members. As in the case of religious broadcasts, when ordinary men and women are put forward to testify to the effect of their faith on their life and work, so freethinkers should be allowed to tell their fellows how their views

influence their responses to the situation they encounter in their daily round.

To summarise, the National Secular Society demands for itself, and for other minority groups, the right to inform the public by means of the B.B.C. facilities of views that challenge orthodox beliefs that they consider untenable in the light of modern knowledge.

Biblical Revelations

By ERNEST BUSENBARK

THEOLOGIANs maintain that the human mind by unaided reasoning is capable of arriving at a true knowledge of God as the creator and ruler of the universe. They contend, however, that no adequate system of theism and of natural religion has ever been developed and maintained independently of divine revelations. As the Bible is widely believed to be a true record of these revelations, it is considered the final conclusive proof of God's existence.

The reasoning upon which these conclusions are based may be stated as follows:—

Because of his omniscience and omnipotence, God may, if he wishes, favour chosen agents with immediate personal revelation in which he aids their natural reasoning powers by confirming what they already know, and by imparting to them much that they could not otherwise know. It is held that knowledge so obtained, being guaranteed by the authority of him who is infinite truth, is the most certain and reliable knowledge that man possesses.

It is assumed, further, that the authors of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures were such chosen agents of God and wrote directly under his divine inspiration and guidance. Proof of such supernatural revelations is said to be contained in the Bible and guaranteed by such evidence that men are reasonably bound to accept it.

But even if it be conceded that such direct communications from God are possible, the messages could not be accepted as authentic because the human mind is a very imperfect instrument, subject to severe aberrations, and there would be no way of determining with absolute certainty which messages were bona-fide and which were merely hallucinations, resulting from mental disturbances.

The public has grown accustomed to newspaper and radio reports of groups of religious fanatics selling off all of their personal goods and assembling on hilltops to await the end of the world, which event, their leaders assure them, has been foretold in direct communications from God, or is predicted in some vague statement in the Bible. At frequent intervals, thousands of devout, credulous religionists gather at spots where someone reported having seen the Virgin Mary.

However, let us consider how the Revelation argument applies to the principal Christian Scriptures, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It has been established to the satisfaction of many modern students of comparative religion that the Gospels were not handed down by disciples of Jesus but were written by unknown authors who lived a century or more after the reputed time of his crucifixion. The statements and miracles attributed to Jesus are conceded by many authorities to be legends which were invented many years after the date given for his death. It has also been observed that there are numerous conflicting details in the Gospel accounts of his crucifixion and resurrection: indeed, the Gospel testimony regarding the crucifixion falls far short of meeting modern historical standards. Numerous writers, including eminent Christian theologians, have expressed doubt regarding the virgin birth of Jesus, and many other more sceptical scholars declare that the whole story of his birth and life is mythology.

As far as the facts presented in this series of studies are concerned, the writer thinks they have contained overwhelming evidence that belief in the existence of a personal, infinitely wise creator is but an ancient superstition. And, if the accepted theories attesting the existence of God are false, stories which describe events in the life of Jesus, the Son of God, must be doubly fictitious. Then, the virgin birth, teachings, resurrection, miracles, and other incidents attributed to Jesus are revealed as, perhaps, the most colossal and most successful venture in character invention known to history.

All criticism made against the authenticity of the Gospels is equally valid against the Jewish Scriptures. Modern authorities have devoted an enormous amount of research to the origin and nature of these records and the results of their efforts have been published in many books.

To summarise the results briefly, however, it may be said that most progressive thinkers in the church concede that the Bible is a man-made mixture of history and mythology and can no longer be regarded as having been written under divine inspiration.

It is definitely known that the Books of Moses were not written by Moses: the Books of Samuel, Judges, Kings, and Chronicles were not written during the time nor by the authors to whom they have been attributed: much of the contents of the Books of the Prophets were added by unknown writers years and even centuries after the time in which they are supposed to have been written. The Bible, as it now stands, did not exist before the Exile in Babylonia but was compiled during and after the Exile.

The nature of the text itself is conclusive evidence that the Jewish Scriptures are not a divine revelation. It is well known that the myths, customs, laws, literature, religion, handicrafts, and implements of a people are a reliable measure of their cultural development. For the sociologist and student of ancient history, the Bible is therefore one of the most valuable reference sources in existence. Its language and moral tone do not, however, show any indication that it was written by holy men under divine guidance. Instead, the men who wrote the Scriptures were of a lusty, primitive, uncultured people and the Scriptures are just about the kind of literature we should expect such men to have written.

From the *Truth Seeker* (New York), September, 1954.

BRANCH LINE BLACKPOOL

By kind invitation of a local Secularist, the Blackpool Branch will try house meetings this winter, and these will be advertised. In this place of many counter-attractions it is difficult to obtain attendances for cultural and intellectual pursuits large enough to warrant the hiring of rooms, and here the most effective work has been done during the summer by the use of Mr. Jack Clayton as outdoor propagandist, though his efforts have been sadly spoilt by rain. The violent outburst of Christian indignation which greeted him on one occasion proves there is still much groundwork to be done before the freethought message can be guaranteed a fair hearing. The chairman of the branch, J. G. Burdon, 182, Watson Road, recently entered a local newspaper controversy on Sunday afternoon cinemas and, though the editorial guillotine came into play, he got some good points over.

KINGSTON

The outdoor season, despite the weather, has been a satisfactory one with well attended meetings on an excellent speaking site. J. W. Barker and E. Mills have been regular speakers, and the "guest speakers" from West London

Branch were W. J. O'Neill and G. H. Taylor. Secretary: E. Mills, 16, Lancaster Gardens, Kingston-on-Thames.

MANCHESTER

A new venture has been made in the circulation of a Branch Bulletin to members, and the first has already appeared. Its aim is to keep members and supporters in close touch with the activities of the Branch. Six monthly meetings are to be held in the New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate, the next speaker being Mr. H. Day (Bradford) on Sunday, November 28. Mr. Wm. Collins has resigned the branch presidency but will, as ever, continue as an active member. The President is now Mr. Colin McCall, and the new secretary is Mrs. Hilda Rogals, 25, Derby Road, Manchester, 20 (RUSHolme 5279). G.H.T.

Correspondence

ANARCHIST LECTURE

The West London Branch opened its indoor session with an interesting lecture from P. Sansom, Anarchist, who told us, as indeed do most propagandists with pet theories, that we are wasting our time, that superstition is virtually dead, and that the fight against authoritarianism is all that matters.

He delivered himself into our hands, however, in an answer to a quotation from D'Holbach, who expressed fear at the effect that might be produced upon undisciplined minds by the sudden breaking down of restraint born of centuries of mental suppression. Sansom's answer was to the effect that Anarchists only visualised the removal of authoritarianism when the people were fit to cast off their own chains. Are we then waging a useless battle, we who are fighting the superstition and lies that cloud men's reason? We who are breaking the hold of priestcraft and kinglycraft? Our work is here and now, in the present, amidst the ignorance. To them, perhaps, the future.

His criticism of the early Bolshevik leaders fell also at the same hurdle. They did not inherit a people fit to cast off their own chains, ignorance engendered by centuries of poverty and superstition thwarted them, so they supplanted the old tyranny with a discipline they believed better.

The flowering garden may be Anarchy, but we, the Freethinkers, will have done the spade work, torn up the briars and sown the seed.—Yours, etc.,

EVA EBURY.

NOAH'S ARK, SAYS CLIMBER

Such is the caption on the prominent statement in the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser* of July 27, that "The U.S. Embassy in Ankara is checking reports that an American climber has found the remains of Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat. He is a Californian, John Libby, who reached the village of Dogubayazit, near Turkey's eastern frontier, after an ascent of 17,160-foot mountain, saying he believed he had found what was left of the ark. He will return to the mountain when the weather clears."

No letter thereon has appeared in the *Dundee* paper, although I sent them a letter on August 4 stating that "No amount of excavations, 'relics,' and pious hopes can prove that absurd flood stories, and their ludicrous theological 'explanations' are true. Allowing for the 'incumbrance' of the earth's land mass above sea level it would require a flood 5.2 miles high above sea level to cover the earth's highest peak 5.49 miles high—a flood of about 1,025,477,955 cubic miles, a cubic mile containing 4,095,324,674 tons of pure water (224 gallons to the ton). The daily rainfall is 8,236 inches in the case of 40 days rain, and 2,196 inches for 150 days.

On the surface of the Ark itself, 500 ft. by 83 ft. 4 in., the total rainfall is 31,828,076 tons, that is 795,701 tons each day for 40 days, or 212,197 tons each day for 150 days.

Will some theologian tell us whence came this extra flood water all above sea level?

Such was my rejected letter. Is mensuration utterly unknown to, or beyond "funny mentalists," embassies, and orthodox editors? "It is not well to tell the truth," says the hierarchy of the sole Church of Truth. Too often it is made impossible to tell the truth.

As a pointer to infallibility, inspired writing, correct interpretation, etc., Enoch might easily be mistaken for Noah in Hebrew script, which at that time had no vowels.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE ROSS.