

# The Freethinker

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"Thou canst not, even if thou wouldst, separate thy life from that of humanity. Thou livest in it, by it, and for it."—MAZZINI (*Duties of Man*).

MANY devout people tell us that man is an inherently wicked being; that he was conceived in sin; that all his thoughts are sinful; also most of his actions, unless checked by authority and police; that his desires are lustful; and that, generally, he is a "hell of a bad egg" (but they translate this into more polite language).

All this is absolutely false: the vast majority of men and women are kindly, decent folk. The world is full of kindness, and nowhere is this made more manifest than in the goodness of the poor to each other.

There are thousands and thousands of noble-minded men and women whose one thought is the public good, and who are working for humanitarian causes, the benefits from which they know they personally will never reap.

## "The Religion of Social Service"

If orthodox religion has declined and public worship reached a vanishing point, that in itself proves nothing. A new religion has been inaugurated—the religion of social service. A new spirit has sprung up, especially among the younger generation; the conviction that life can provide us with a fuller, richer and freer time than most of us experience.

Considering the way mankind has been tricked and lied to, fooled and deluded by its so-called teachers, it is wonderful that so much inherent decency in men and women still remains.

Never was there a greater spirit of altruism than now. Never were men and women more genuinely desirous of peace. Sick and disappointed as they may be with the past, and disgusted with the present, they still retain one thing—hope: but hope without effort will attain nothing. As Benjamin Franklin once remarked, "He that lives upon hope will die fasting."

We must harness this great mass of unorganised, uncontrolled opinion into a composite whole. It is by this means alone that hopes of a better state of affairs can be realised.

The so-called governing classes have no real knowledge how sick and bored the people are of all this unrest, these parrot-like and hypocritical cries of security, and the constant talk of maintaining Christian morality.

## The Recurring Slaughters

After all, the world is an interesting place and life itself is very interesting: why then should these recurring slaughters be accepted as part of human existence? There is no need for it; one generation of clear thinking and we would have a new race.

Man is not naturally a brute; he is only a brute when he is made one. Everyone of us has more or less a dual personality, a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but it is

always the vile, brutal, killing, smashing instincts that are appealed to.

Under the guise of national honour we preach more hatred. It is man's lowest nature that is exploited, and in that crusade of beastliness the Church, State and Press all join forces in dragging men backwards.

No sermon has ever been preached equalling in truth Tom Paine's utterance when he said: "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion."

Let us no longer listen to the false prophets who tell us that we are naturally bad: we are not, we are naturally good.

Of course the Brute is still there, and will take some time to get rid of; but he will not be eliminated by the singing of hymns and saying what wretched objects and poor miserable sinners we are.

It is no use kneeling in chapels and smiting our chests and repeating parrot-like cries of "Through my Fault—Through my Fault": it is not our fault that the worst in us is developed. Let man stop his grovelling and moaning and bleating. Let him stand erect: it has taken us millions of years to reach the erect posture; why kneel like the camels so that extra burdens can be placed upon us?

## Fear and Apathy Man's Enemy

Our great enemies are not the imaginary Devil and his works—the real enemies are fear and apathy which man has himself created.

The Brute will be eliminated first of all by education, which means correct thinking, and by decent environment—he will be eradicated when we get rid of the curses of Imperialism and War—he will be eradicated when we realise our duty to our fellow men; and if before that golden age arrives we have to fight, let it be against the forces of reaction and tyranny.

The world will not be saved by shooting bullets into people's bodies, but by putting right ideas into people's heads.

After all, nobody wants to be blistered with mustard-gas or napalm bombs; no woman wants to produce children just for the sake of having them killed and their names engraved on war memorials. No man worthy of the name, wants to feel that, if he himself is well-fed, there are millions of people on a semi-starvation diet. No woman who is proud of her home wants to feel that others are living in buildings which disgrace the name of "Home." Nobody wants to feel that there are poor little children who are damned practically from the hour of their birth, that there are women who, owing to poverty, regard with horror the birth of another child which should be looked forward to with joy.

## The Way Out of the Morass

To-day there are millions of men and women who feel dimly that there is a way out of this morass if it can only be found; that perhaps in this way—perhaps in that—we

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## The Eradication of The Brute

By F. A. Hornibrook

can arrive at the solution for the problem of the world's unrest. Brought together into one body, this mass of opinion, fighting for freedom and a better society, could transform human life in the course of a generation or two; but it requires united effort to accomplish it. It is not

enough that even this vast community of people should think along the right lines; they must also work for one common aim, namely, to awaken in all the need for this effort to be made, if those who are living now are to see some profitable result of their work.

## Christ's Rival

By F. A. RIDLEY

IN the third century of the Christian era two gods disputed for mastery over the Roman World: Christ and Mithra. Christ, it would appear, was the favourite god of the civilian population or, at least, of its poorer sections; those layers of population in the great slave empire, of whom an early Christian writer declared that they were "without hope in this world." Contrarily, Christ's rival, Mithra, was a military god; the god *par excellence* of the army. All, or nearly all, of the Mithraic remains which have been unearthed in recent years have been excavated on military sites: usually, in connection with camps. Most probably, we should imagine, the most recent Mithraic "find", the Temple of Mithras, recently discovered beneath the City of London, will also be found to have military associations.

The late Professor Browne, in his monumental *History of Persian Literature*, has denominated the ancient Persians as the most prolific theologians of their era. One national religion, that of Zoroaster, and two "World" religions, the cult of Mithra and the later cult founded by Manichæus, arose in ancient Persia. The Persians not only manufactured gods: they also manufactured them for export!

Mithra, or Mittra, is an ancient god dating back to that remote era, long before Zoroaster, when the primitive "Aryans" had not yet subdivided into the Indian and Persian peoples. The name of Mithra first appears as that of a minor god in the *Indian* sacred scriptures, the Vedas. Later the Iranians, or Aryans of what the Greeks later named "Persia," broke away from their eastern brethren in India. Hereafter, they settled in "Iran"—that is, "the land of the Aryans," as the "Persians" still officially designate their native land. Under the aboriginal sign of the sacred swastika, the Aryan ancestors of Hitler came into contact with the Western World.

They took Mithra with them. The monotheistic—or, rather, dualistic—reformation effected by the Persian "Luther," Zoroaster, deprived Mithra of most of his glory and, we may suspect, revenue. Though the name of the god occurs periodically in the inscriptions of the Achaemenian Dynasty (525-330 B.C.), Mithra had evidently been reduced to the ranks by the Zoroastrian Reformation.

A new lease of life awaited the god in the West on the fringe of the Greek-speaking world. Identified with the sun, Mithra became the patron and "godfather" of the Kings of Pontus, a borderland state between the Roman Empire and Asia. One of the "Mithraic" Kings of Pontus, Mithradates Eupator, earned a place in world history by waging a long and terrible war against Rome in the first century B.C. As it turned out, his defeat made the fortune of Mithra, who was transported to Rome by the Roman General, Pompey.

About the same time as Mithra was, so to speak, given naturalisation papers by the Romans, he also entered the world of Greek art. A famous sculptural relief in Pergamus depicting the god Mithra cutting the throat of the sacrificial bull, became as famous in Pagan art as the Crucifixion of Jesus was later to become in the art of the Middle Ages. Both scenes, we may suspect, were equally mythical!

As most historians of Imperial Rome have emphasised,

Rome became rapidly orientalised in the first centuries of (what later became) the "Christian Era." One of the "invisible exports" from the East was the Persian god, Mithra. Identified with the sun as "Sol Invictus"—"The Unconquered Sun"—Mithra soon gained a huge following in military circles. At the Battle of Bedriacum, which decided the succession to the Roman Empire (A.D. 69), the eastern legions saluted the rising sun with the clashing of shields. However, the cult of Mithra seems always to have been, primarily, a *military* cult. The cultured Greeks would never have anything to do with it. A more serious handicap, women appear to have been excluded from its initiatory rites. What a contrast to the Christian rival cult, with its Virgin Mother! It is *here*, perhaps, that we must look for the *real* reason for Mithra's ultimate defeat by Christ.

Mithra, "The Unconquered Sun," enjoyed his Golden Age in the third century of the present era. During this period it was a neck-to-neck race for supremacy between the Persian god and his Jewish parvenu rival, Christ. The era was one of growing barbarisation and perpetual civil war. The old culture perished and an army composed of barbaric mercenaries usurped the function of the civilised Roman rulers. Soldiers of humble, even servile origin, devoid of culture, sat on the seat of Marcus Aurelius. With the barbaric soldiers there arrived, simultaneously, a flood of Oriental superstitions, to submerge the rationalist culture of the classical world. Conspicuous among the imported gods from Asia, the immemorial cradle of religion, were the Persian Mithra, and the Jewish Christ. The third and fourth centuries witnessed a duel to the death between them.

At first, Mithra looked like winning. Several of the Roman Emperors of the period were ardent devotees of "Sol Invictus"—identified with Mithra, the god who Killed the Bull. One of these Mithraic emperors, Aurelian, (270-275), actually made the cult of Mithra the state-religion of the Roman Empire. He officially endowed the cult of the Sun-god with a Temple at Rome and a priesthood paid by the State (274). Of more consequence for the future, Aurelian proclaimed the birthday of "The Unconquered Sun," December 25, as an official holiday. The first "Mithramas Day" was actually celebrated in 274. Later, an equivalent date actually mentioned in the Gospels without any association with the birth of Christ, was finally "translated" into the birthday of Christ. One myth for another?

Aurelian was murdered by his soldiers; he was short of money to pay them and Mithra could not, apparently, supply the deficit! But his successor, the great Emperor Diocletian, was, also, a devotee of Mithra, who fiercely put Christians to death in the interests of the rival cult. As late as A.D. 307, Mithra was again solemnly proclaimed "Protector of the Roman Empire."

However, "The Unconquered Sun" was himself finally conquered. Diocletian's successor, Constantine, who started life as a Mithraist, finally decided—one surmises for *political* reasons—to put his money on Christ. Once on top the Christians soon extinguished the solar rays!

(Continued on next page)

# R.C. Statistics

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

"WHILE every other Christian sect shows a drop in membership, Roman Catholicism is going ahead by leaps and bounds" is a statement that I often hear in one form or another. I do not for a moment believe it. There are no reliable figures to support it, and I have come across some that give it the lie.

I had recently to deal with an inquiry originating in Italy which asked "Can you explain why the Roman Catholic Church is now making 12,000 converts a year in England?" In reply I pointed out that the R.C. principle is "Once a Catholic always a Catholic." So, every baptism represents an increase of membership, and the continuous influx of Irish immigrants is no doubt counted a gain. It is easy to show an annual growth of 12,000 from such sources; but converts?—no, it is not feasible.

Falling away from the fold is a problem of the R.C. Church equally with other religious sects. A number of ex-R.C.s join the National Secular Society every year, and for every one of these it can be assumed that a hundred or more communicants stop attending and lapse into indifferentism.

I know of a widow, brought up a devout Catholic, who has lapsed in this way. She had a hard struggle to bring up three children, but somehow managed to pay her dues to the Church. When her eldest son took a share in the breadwinning of the household, he told his mother that he did not propose to work for the benefit of the priests and advised her not to contribute any more dues. She stopped attending Church and told the priest who visited her that she could not pay any more, whereupon his visits ceased. That family is not taken into account in R.C. statistics. I'll be bound!

Surprisingly, some figures from a Catholic source, issued in a different connection, do throw light upon the claim that the R.C. Church is making progress. Between 1948 and 1950 a series of articles appeared in *The Universe* on "The Education Acts 1944, 1946 and 1948 and Voluntary (Catholic) Schools" by Terence Quirk, ex-Editor of *The Catholic Teacher*, used later for a booklet urging R.C. claims to more schools and more money to support them. It is from this booklet that I take the following data of supported Catholic schools and numbers on the roll:—

Year	Number of R.C. Schools	Number of Pupils
1870	383	113,490
1876	632	200,700
1900	1,054	400,500
1938	1,266	377,000
1949	1,834	388,657

This table is very revealing. Note from the 1870 figures how niggardly had been the Catholic response when voluntary effort alone was left to provide elementary education. 1876 was, of course, before compulsory school attendance under the 1870 Education Act had been fully implemented. 1900 was the peak year for Catholic pupils in Catholic schools, but how overcrowded they were! In this respect the R.C. Church had the worst record of all the sects.

During the next 38 years the number of Catholic schools went up by over 21 per cent., but pupils went down by nearly 6 per cent. This presents a difficult problem to those who say that Roman Catholicism is growing in this country. If they are right, it either means that Catholics are disobeying their priests and practising Birth Control or disobeying their priests and sending their children to non-Catholic schools.

In the subsequent eleven years, Catholic schools increased by 45 per cent., but pupils by only 1 per cent. This latter figure represents a real loss of 10 per cent., since the school-leaving age had gone up from 14 to 15 in the interval.

In spite of these figures, Catholic propaganda and pressure on M.P.s to provide more sectarian schools and an increased proportion of their cost continue. It is priest-inspired propaganda without any justification from the standpoints of personal rights and public advantage.

## Chapman Cohen on Primitive Animism

THE mental world of man begins in a region of illusion. The stars, so far away that a ray of light, travelling at an almost incredible speed, takes years to reach us, seem within almost grasping distance. The earth is certainly flat. Disease is the work of evil spirits, good fortune that of beneficent ones. The air, the woods, the waters are peopled with ghostly forms that haunt man's footsteps, and to gain the goodwill of these spirits is a matter of life or death. In the medley of existing forces there appears no co-ordination; everything bears the hall mark of caprice. Dreams ape the part of realities and realities take on the appearance of a nightmare. Words usurp the place of things, and things have no clear relation to each other. Inconstancy appears to reign where later knowledge shows constancy to be the rule. If the world had been created by some almighty power, with the deliberate intention of misleading man, it could not have been better devised. For long ages, so far as men thought about things their conclusions were fundamentally wrong. Gods and ghosts were the prime movers. They were everywhere. It was the golden age of religion, and human life stood as a parenthesis between the ghost world out of which it came and the ghost world into which it went.

"Materialism Re-stated."

## CHRIST'S RIVAL

(Concluded from page 370)

They dealt with Mithra as thoroughly as he was depicted as dealing with the Bull! The remains, scorched and blackened by fire, of so many Mithraic temples, testify to the ruthless nature of the persecution of the Mithraists by the victorious Christians; it has even been suggested that the "Dragon" slain by St. George was the symbol of the great enemy of Christ, Mithra.

A Christian writer has ascribed the eventual defeat of the Sun God by the Son of God to the mythical nature of Mithra: "there never was a Mithra, and he never slew the Bull"! But is Christ, or the Cross upon which he was crucified, any more historical? One can suggest more probable reasons for the eventual defeat of the Persian creed. It was, it would appear, an exclusively military creed; it excluded women and, perhaps, slaves from its rites, whilst Christianity admitted both; and women and slaves made up the actual majority of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Further, the Persians, Mithra's countrymen, were the enemies of the Roman Empire, whilst the Jews, the originators of Christianity, had long ceased to be so by the fourth century.

These represent solid historical, not theological reasons for the ultimate victory of Christ over Mithra. Perhaps, however, the recently discovered Temple of Mithra may survive the now decaying cult of his conqueror, Christ.

## This Believing World

The great success on the screen of "The Robe" and other religious pictures has determined Hollywood to produce more films based on the Bible, and no fewer than 15 are about to be released. This should prove particularly interesting to those Rationalists who constantly decry attacks on the Bible as out-of-date. There is nothing Christians want more than that such opinions be rammed home, especially among Freethinkers. And there is nothing Christians hate more than new issues of such books as *The Age of Reason*, Paine's masterpiece, which has still to do its work, or such a scathing examination of the Bible as can be found in G. W. Foote's *Bible Romances*.

How much such works are needed can be seen in the boost-up both on the radio and on TV of the British Museum's latest Exhibition on the Land of the Bible. As far as archæology itself is concerned we have nothing to say against the Exhibition—the remains of ancient civilisations or religions are always interesting. But in what way has this Exhibition proved the truth of the Bible? In no way at all. Where are the remains of our Bible Heroes? Why has nothing whatever been found of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus, Peter, Paul, or even of any of the other Apostles? The Exhibition shows us some old stones and monuments—and even some old Bibles; but of the truth of the stories contained in the Bible there is not a scrap of evidence from archæology or anything else.

The latest historian of the Crusades, Mr. S. Runciman, who has just published Volume 3 of his splendid work, has this to say of the Fourth Crusade: "There was never a greater crime against humanity than the Fourth Crusade. Not only did it cause the destruction and dispersal of all the treasure of the past that Byzantium had deservedly stored, and the mortal wounding of a civilisation that was still active and great; but it was also an act of gigantic political folly." And one might add the verdict of the French historian Michaud who declared that "the vices and disorders of the Crusaders were so disgraceful that the authors of the old chroniclers blush while they retrace the pictures of them." But fortunately for modern Christianity and its sponsors, very few people know anything whatever about the Crusaders except that they carried a Cross. The real truth would have to be censored!

So the Pope has "crowned"—"symbolically" of course—the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven. Why, exactly, we are not sure, for Mary has always been Queen of Heaven since she took over from the Egyptian Queen of Heaven, Isis. And they were both called *Stella Maris*—"Star of the Sea." Indeed, so like is Queen Mary to Queen Isis, that even the late Sir James Frazer was obliged to admit in his *Golden Bough* (abridged edition pp. 383-4) that "the resemblance need not be purely accidental." In truth, just as Jesus Christ took over quite a lot from the Persian God Mithras, so did Mary take over from the Egyptian Goddess Isis; and nobody knows this more than the Pope.

A correspondent to the "Daily Mirror" will have to look out—he is dangerously near heresy when he answers the question, "What is an average Christian?" He says, "An average Christian is one who embraces the principles of Christianity when it suits his purpose and, with equal facility, ignores them on those frequent occasions when they conflict with his or her desires." Very true, but it is only half the story. An average Christian is asked to believe in Hell, Heaven, Miracles, the Devil, Angels, the

Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption of Mary, the appearance of the Virgin at such places as Lourdes, together with Holy Relics, and many other things which people who are not Christians look upon as hopeless examples of sheer credulity, superstition, and ignorance. But even the *Daily Mirror* would not dare to say so.

At the age of 80, Professor Murdoch broadcast in Melbourne recently his views on the many changes he had seen during his long life. Perhaps the greatest change, he declared, was mankind's "retreat from religion"—a retreat which appears to have worried him least. He envisaged "a common religion for humanity"—but surely man has had enough of all religions? What are they but "totalitarian" organisations destined mostly to instil into him "fear"—fear of the Lord or of Humanity? Let the retreat from religion—whatever it is called—be final and complete.

## A Scientist on Religion

SCIENTIFIC education and religious education are incompatible . . . children have to learn about Adam and Noah, instead of about evolution, about David, who killed Goliath, instead of Koch, who killed cholera, about Christ's ascent into heaven, instead of Montgolfier's and Wright's. Worse than this, they are taught that it is a virtue to accept statements without adequate evidence, which leaves them a prey to quacks of every kind in later life, and makes it very difficult for them to accept the methods of thought which are successful in science. Finally, I object to the privileges accorded to religious organisations, for which I have to pay. I don't mind having a church next door to my laboratory, but I think that it should be rated and taxed on the same scale as my laboratory.

And I do not forget my army experiences. Not only was I forced to attend church parades, though I soon managed to wangle my way out of them, but I was compelled to register as a member of some religion. All I could do was to go the round of the permitted religions, ending up as a Jew, after making sure there was no rabbi in the neighbourhood.

Now most scientific men and women of my acquaintance have no use for religion. But they have very little to say against it, for a quite simple reason. The arguments for religious dogmas seem to them so weak as to be quite uninteresting, and in consequence they tend to neglect the study of religion.

Prof. J. B. S. HALDANE,

*Fact and Faith.*

## The Descent of Galatea

Stand still, cold Beauty, portrait-still . . . and cold.  
Stand marble-smooth, serene, emotionless.  
Stand slender-draped, soft-textured; to my bold  
Approach be reticent, be passionless.  
Oppose me, goddess, with a movement proud.  
Reject me with a white disdainful hand  
Raised in curved majesty, and question-browed  
In mark of elegant reproach. So stand.  
As toyed-with nectar bide. Now . . . now descend,  
My Cyprian, resisting faintly still,  
Conceding ever slowly as you bend  
To my desire, that I may take the fill  
Of each fine-graded moment as you fall  
From goddess-height to burning Eros-thrall.

G. H. TAYLOR.

# THE FREETHINKER

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

## 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.

## 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 21, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

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

### INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Second Floor).—Sunday, November 21, 6-45 p.m.; E. T. FOX, "U.N.O. and the War on Want."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 23, 7 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "The Russian Enigma."

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall).—Friday, November 19, 7-15 p.m.: Miss A. KENNEDY-WILSON, "The Lure of Jazz."

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 21, 6-30 p.m.: C. BUNDOCK, "About the Press."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, November 21, 2-30 p.m.: J. O'DOWD, "A British Trade Unionist looks at Russia, 1954."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 21, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "The Problem of Germany."

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre).—Thursday, November 25, 8 p.m.: Open Discussion—"The Meaning of Christmas."

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1, five minutes from Edgware Road Station).—Sunday, November 21, 7-15 p.m.: B. BRADLAUGH BONNER, B.Sc., "The Abortion Problem To-day."

## Notes and News

The N.S.S. Dinner Sub-Committee asks us to invite opinions on the knotty problem of whether there shall be a Concert or a Dance after the Annual Dinner to be held on February 26 next. One need not argue the case for the Concerts that have so often been an enjoyable part of the proceedings. The advocates of a Dance, however, suggest that everyone is satiated with B.B.C. Variety nowadays, and that a change would attract more young people, and provide all present with welcome opportunities of meeting one another, either on the dance floor or sitting out at the tables around. Will those with opinions on the question please write to the N.S.S. Secretary now?

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £509 14s. 8d.; W. H. Humphries, £1; H. Blewett, 4s.; A. George, £1; "Old Stiff," £4; F. M. Blake, 2s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; Mrs. R. Brook, £1 10s.; T. H. Darlington (Panama), £1; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Aust, £2 2s.; Mrs. J. Wightmore, 5s.; H.C., 10s. Total to date, £521 12s. 3d.

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

## From Mrs. Chapman Cohen

The name of Mrs. A. C. Cohen in the list of donors to the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund is evidence that the wife who for so long was a familiar figure at N.S.S. conferences, dinners and meetings, and whose help contributed so materially to all of "C.C.'s" achievements for freethought, is still keenly interested in the movement. The writer, who has the privilege of regular talks with her, knows how little she misses of what appears in *The Freethinker* these days. Her memory of important events and personalities connected with freethought during the past half century is remarkable. "I should not like the paper to die during my life," were the words accompanying her gift.

## The Christian Record

By A. YATES

A FAVOURITE theme of Christian apologists, whether in the Press or the Pulpit, is the beneficent effect of the Christian religion on human character and conduct.

One would think that a very little knowledge of history would be sufficient to dispel the delusion.

In order to judge what influence Christianity has had on human behaviour let us take a brief survey of some of the events which have marked the progress of a religion which was, according to the legend, heralded by angels singing "Peace on earth and goodwill to men."

It has been the fashion to extol the purity and innocence of primitive Christianity; but the true character of institutions, as of parsons, cannot be known till they have the power to express it. It was only when conditions favoured their development that the seeds of discord latent in Christianity bore fruit. It is not going beyond literal truth to assert that every step of its advance from an obscure Messianic sect of Judaism to a world-religion has been marked by strife and bloodshed. The spirit of discord displayed itself early. Until the "conversion" of the Emperor Constantine, Christianity was in a state of fluidity. No sufficient authority had yet settled what was the orthodox belief. Heresy abounded. Gnosticism numbered over fifty different sects whose doctrinal differences frequently gave rise to a rancour of contention only to be sated by mutual slaughter. At this time arose the Trinitarian controversy which convulsed the Church for centuries. On a question the essential contradictions of which no effort of the human intellect can reconcile, the chief cities of the Empire became the scenes of furious contests which often ended in massacres.

It would need many volumes to describe in the briefest manner the hatred and strife which characterised the early ages of Christianity. As the Emperor Julian (called for his renunciation of Christianity, "The Apostate") declared "he had found no wild beasts so cruel as Christians were to each other." It is enough for the purpose of this article to mention a few of the acts of persecution by which the Church, having emerged triumphant from this welter of dissension, enforced her corruption of Christianity.

In the 13th century, the Albigenses, an early sect of reformers, settled in the southern provinces of France, incurred the hatred of the Church. By a decree of Pope Innocent III they were extirpated with every circumstance of horrible cruelty.

In the year 1478, by a Bull of Sixtus IV, was introduced into Spain the terrible engine of persecution, the Holy Office, or Inquisition, under the administration of the Dominican Inquisitor, Torquemada. It has been computed that during the eighteen years of his authority over ten thousand victims, charged with Judaism and heresy, were burnt alive at the *autos da fe*, while an unknown number perished by torture in its dungeons.

The great schism of the 16th century, the Reformation, intensified the spirit of religious intolerance. It lit the "fires of Smithfield" in which over three hundred heretics were consumed. It was the chief cause of the war of religion in France between Catholics and Huguenots which culminated in the massacre of St. Bartholomew.

In the Netherlands, then under Spanish dominion, the reformed religion had spread rapidly. Roused by the inflammatory preaching of its ministers, the populace of some of the principal cities committed certain excesses against Catholic worship. Philip II, a merciless bigot, resolved to crush the heresy. A Spanish army under the infamous Duke of Alva invaded the country, and for a period of ten years, the Dutch provinces were an inferno in which every form of atrocity that religious hatred could devise was inflicted on the wretched inhabitants.

The next count in this indictment of the religion of "peace and goodwill" is provided by the Thirty Years' War between the Catholic and Protestant powers of Europe. It has been said that the misery and desolation which were the consequences of the protracted conflict were such "as no historian has been able adequately to describe." I am content to leave it at that.

The blot of intolerance and persecution does not rest entirely on the Catholic Church. Protestantism bears a considerable share; it persecuted where it had the power to persecute. Witness among other instances the burning of Servetus at Geneva, and the bitter animosity between the Established Church and the non-conformist sectaries in England and Scotland during and after the Civil War.

It may, at this point, be objected that these evils did not spring from true Christianity, but from the perversion of it. The objection prompts the question: What is true Christianity? Every Church and sect from the Vatican to the back-street Bethel has claimed the truth for itself while denying it to every other. Those who were guilty of these excesses regarded them as meritorious acts for which they had the authority of Scripture.

But we can judge the nature of a thing only by its effects. To this rule Christianity is no exception. For nearly 2,000 years the Christian religion has had an opportunity to manifest its true character, and the foregoing record is the result.

Is it thinkable that a religion that has been productive of so much crime and suffering was ordained by an all-wise benevolent Being for the salvation of mankind?

As Christian apologetics is mainly the art of ignoring or denying what cannot otherwise be defended, I will propound to its professors a final question, to wit: Would these evils have been if Jesus Christ had never been heard of? There is but *one* answer—and it is conclusive.

## An Unpublished Letter

To the Editor of " . . . "

DEAR SIR,—Will you allow me to say "dear colleague," since both you and I are sometimes suspected of being "Almighty."

Allow me to present my compliments and to offer my congratulations on your truly remarkable newspaper.

My reading hours are greatly restricted nowadays owing to the meteoric increase of fallen sparrows and so on; and the equally meteoric increase of newspapers and magazines; making it hard for me to read every publication.

I think you will be interested to know that *The Times* is one of the most popular journals in the Common Room of the Archangels. Their happy laughter reaches me even in the Holy of Holies and (between you and me) I am given to understand that your newspaper has quite supplanted that hitherto famous national journal or magazine called *Punch*.

The subject of my letter must indeed appear trivial to you who have the ominous future of Mankind so pressingly near your heart and mind. Nor need I mention the menace of the newly invented means of extermination—the atom and the H-bombs; though it is whispered that this latter may prove a solution of all your human problems.

No, dear colleague, it is my name, or rather the name the English have given me that causes my distress: GOD!—to rhyme with: cod, rod, quod, sod, pod, nod and so forth.

Let me freely admit that in the past and even in the present, I have been spoilt with such names as Jehovah, and Dionysus—and now GOD. Why, GOD? Of old I ventured to show myself to man's imagination in many guises. What fun the Greeks had with me, how they adored my every variety of aspect. I had hopes in those days of being discoverable in every vestige of creation, trees, flowers, beasts, men and women. Why, my beloved Greeks built temples to my every *mood*: whether male, female or fish. It was all divine. So it is nowadays and "staring them in the face" as they are wont to say.

Then why this strange recession of nomenclature? For we must admit that the name is an incarnation of the spirit.

Now I really do not like to be so "distilled" as it were. It is as though Creation had been put through some horrible processing in order to catch me.

Perhaps it is a compliment. My dear Archangel Michael tells me that the power of love is often referred to as "It." A girl is said to have "It." This is indeed a simplification of those million lines the poets have set down in attempting to describe what we, in our simple invention, called love. It is probably more practical. We must move with the times, dear editor. How else can we remain immortal?

So I must accept a monosyllable that has to express, and include, the distant galaxies, the rhythm of the Milky Way, the thunder and the lightning, the blast of the atom, the rainbow and the wood anemone; and even the horrible old man with long white beard perpetrated by the painters in an attempt to give a visual aspect to the heavenly being called GOD. Do you feel with me, dear colleague? (Michael, to whom I have shown this letter, is much amused, and tells me that I am not permitted to make public appearances in the British Isles, even in print.)

This assurance of anonymity tempts me to abuse your patience a little longer. The question of the significance of a name is worth consideration. After the flamboyant beauty and expressiveness of those earlier names, it is evident that GOD is a pseudo-scientific designation, which, by avoiding any individual, any human note of devotion, is intended to mean everything, and so far as any human

—NEXT WEEK—

INDIA, A SECULAR STATE?

By F. A. RIDLEY

significance is concerned, means nothing. I do not think that man will ever allude to me as Mr. "O" but I stand a very good chance in the near future of being designated Mister "X."

Perhaps this is as well, and man will re-discover the divinity of creation when he finds, to quote a junior arch, "his fantastic and monstrous so-called religions are simply bosh"—the thought gives me hope that the horrid old gentleman in the crêpe-hair beard, called GOD, will go up in the general conflagration of the H-bomb.

There is so much I should like to discuss with you, for you will agree it is a lonely thing to be Almighty. I do my best to keep up with the modern trend of an ever-changing universe. Our discussion group in the Common Room, as you will gather from the titles of some of our subjects, is progressive.

1. "Is the erect posture suitable to the spirit of Mankind?"

2. "Does the act of begging for special consideration constitute prayer?"

3. "Was it wise or honest to bill Jesus Christ as 'my only begotten son,' and who was responsible for this programme?"

You see we encourage the free discussion of all topics. It is an essential safety-valve.

Greetings, dear colleague! And please don't address me as

GOD.

## "Thou Shalt!"

By GEORGE MILLER

IN 1945, when I was skidding into my own private twenties, I chanced to run across an article, a contribution to "newspaper religion," which was so exceptional as to be worth preserving. While upholding the divine inspiration of the Ten Commandments it yet suggested others to supersede them, and this aroused suspicion.

Under the title "Thou Shalt" Dr. W. E. Sangster uttered a public answer to a young man who discovered that a religion is too prohibitive. "If you go into an old church (complained the embryo rationalist) the first things you see painted on the wall are the Ten Commandments, and these are all negative. Some religious people add other prohibitions and frown upon a drink, a smoke, and a little flutter. You will never win youth with a religion of denials."

Dr. Sangster said he understood what that young man meant, which was likely, for the lad made himself terribly clear, and both were, moreover, of one mind in one respect. Both accepted "Christianity" as synonymous with "religion," a child of error also incubated in the craniums of the alchemists responsible for religious education in schools. Peace to all such. Dr. Sangster believed that if "ordered and decent" life is to survive there are certain practices from which *homo sapiens* must refrain. The decalogue enumerates these, and we might well question its value after reflecting that during the ages of faith, when there was a general hearkening to Jehovah's command, life was anything but ordered and decent.

It is absurdly easy to compile a list of sins, real or fancied, which men are prone to, peremptorily prohibit them, and call it unique because it covers all. After which it remained for Dr. Sangster to declare that "the Ten Commandments have not been superseded." But perhaps the continued need to rebuke a flock stubbornly persisting in sin would demonstrate the futility of the Ten Commandments as a corrective measure. Sin obviously has a priority hold on human affections.

So will anything forced upon a people defeat the purpose intended. The Ten Commandments were imposed upon

the Israelites, after their Egyptian tour, by that desperate character Jehovah himself, who was not merely jealous but also a nasty-minded bully, the sort of chap who would be thrown, hat and all, out of any respectable school, or would have appeared in the Nuremberg Trials, and probably did if reincarnation be a fact.

Dr. Sangster admitted that Christianity is a bit severe on ordinary human beings (who have only heart and soul and considerable courage to help them fight it), but not, he assures us in heavy type, if we approach it aright. It must be understood in a certain way! Then it becomes plain that Moses, the prophets, Jesus and Paul were all along encouraging us to enjoy thousands of good things to which only our marvellous ignorance blinds us. This being the position, Dr. Sangster offers ten new commandments, which with occasional curtailments run as follows:—

(1) Thou shalt enjoy this lovely world which God has made: sun, moon and stars; fields, flowers, etc. (2) Thou shalt enjoy the gift of love from parents, sweathearts, wife. . . . (3) Thou shalt enjoy home, where you do not visit but belong. . . . (4) Thou shalt enjoy the trustfulness of little children. . . . (5) Thou shalt enjoy friends. . . . (6) Thou shalt enjoy wholesome laughter, the ludicrous incident and the side-splitting joke. (7) Thou shalt enjoy art, music, the cinema, literature, eloquence, animals, singing, rhythm, games. (8) Thou shalt enjoy the privilege of helping others: the poor and sick, the aged and the maimed. (9) Thou shalt enjoy peace. . . . (10) Thou shalt enjoy God: the knowledge that He is there and that He is love.

Whacko! Our response to No. 1 is that we can, like Whitman, enjoy this world without doting on God. No. 2 exhorts us to enjoy love, but since God is love this makes it identical with No. 10. No. 3 is a statement of the obvious, and impossible to enucleate satisfactorily. No. 4 is ambiguous, for to enjoy the unsuspecting trustfulness of little children could prelude a somewhat unsavoury episode in one's career. We accept No. 5, and so, when questioned, do all the cannibals in our address book. No. 8 applies primarily to the nursing profession, and No. 9 we endorse with hope, enthusiasm, zeal and frantic eagerness. No. 10 looks so peaceful. Nos. 6 and 7 were held back so that we might fittingly conclude by asking "How did *they* get in there?"

After furnishing us with a new set of moral exhortations, which he claims are *all his own*. Dr. Sangster committed a first-class howler when he asserted, "Don't be caught by a caricature of Christianity. The religion of Christ is positive, affirmative, enriching and life-giving." So Dr. Sangster is the latest incarnation of Jesus Christ. His humane revisal of our religion is not true Christianity, and one imagines that the mediæval smellers out of heretics would have yearned for a modern incinerator to burn him in.

Since making Commandments is, it seems, a human fault, kindly souls will tolerate the following of my own. But I beg not to be mistaken for a new incarnation of Jesus Christ, having hashed up that part once already in an amateurish school play. Mine do not run, but trip along merrily, as follows:—

(1) Thou shalt not believe the Bible to be divinely inspired, or the Christian Church to be divinely instituted, but both as being human in origin, as are other "revealed" religions, in which all that is revealed is human ignorance and credulity.

(2) Thou shalt instead believe, with Stanley Holloway, that the recipe for Yorkshire Pudding was revealed to Tykes by a Heavenly angel.

(3) Thou shalt occasionally visit second-hand bookshops, where rows of Bible Commentaries and similar works (R.I.P.) may be seen, standing like monuments to the memory of oblivion, and thou shalt sit with a pensive and

solemnly beautiful countenance considering what a waste of good effort it all was.

(4) Thou shalt believe that the Ten Commandments, first given in Exodus XX, had no ameliorative effect upon their recipients, judging from the last 37 books of the Old Testament.

(5) Thou shalt steal, should the opportunity arise, as much as thou canst grab from the funds intended for the rejuvenation of senile churches, and give the spoils to worthier causes.

(6) Thou shalt take no Commandments seriously, these least of all, at which thou mayest smile, on condition that thou shalt roar with laughter at those of Exodus XX.

(7) Thou shalt not expect any Commandments after this one.

We suddenly realise that imperious bossing of the lives of others is truly immoral and serves to lump together priests, Popes and dictators, and if you will accept the word "Lump"\* in its German sense that would be a capital way to terminate this article.

\* Rascal, Blackguard.

## N.S.S. Executive Committee 10th November

Present: Mr. Ridley (in the Chair), Mrs. Venton, Messrs. Griffiths, Ebury, Taylor, Hornibrook, Tiley, Shaw, Johnson, Corstorphine, Barker, King and the Secretary.

Nine new members were admitted to the Parent, Edinburgh and Bradford Branches. Decisions were reached on recommendations of the Annual Dinner Sub-Committee. The President reported on a meeting of the Humanist Council at which a programme to be submitted to the B.B.C. was approved. The Secretary announced that a legacy of £25 had been received from the Estate of the late Ellis Lyons, member of the West London Branch, who died last July. He also reported on his visits to Manchester and Liverpool. Messrs. Ridley and Shaw reported on a successful debate at the Orpington Debating Society, at which they had respectively proposed and seconded the motion, "That religion is the opiate of the people," in opposition to a local Congregationalist minister.

Requests from Birmingham and Bradford for Headquarters to send speakers in the New Year were agreed to, Messrs. Ridley, Ebury and Shaw being selected to visit Birmingham, and Mr. Ridley to go to Bradford to open their 1955 programme.

P. VICTOR MORRIS, Secretary.

## Correspondence

### WE ARE AGGRESSIVE!

From time to time in the Press can be noted opinions to the effect that the N.S.S., *The Freethinker*, or some writer or speaker is aggressive.

There are several kinds of aggressiveness. One may be aggressive because of hate or jealousy, or because one is conscious of an injustice and wishes to defend an idea which is misunderstood. The Freethought Movement generally condemns aggressiveness such as that mentioned, but it should suffice to study *The Freethinker* or to give N.S.S. speakers a hearing when it will be realised that they are defending a just cause. The arguments of our adversaries we well know; according to them we are aggressive when we dare to criticise their opinions and their attitude. Because we criticise Christianity, and Theism in general, we are aggressive, therefore they are innocent victims, who need not reply. In reality, they have no reply.

The tendency of evolution is mainly through polytheism to monotheism and, eventually, atheism, and it may be argued that we should leave evolution to take its course without propagandist efforts. There are two very important reasons against this. First, there is the established religion and its organised churches. Then there is the Principle of Inertia. Religious systems have good financial support, and their teachings are difficult to eradicate. It therefore often needs acute and sometimes violent effort to oppose it.

The principle of inertia acts even more strongly. Men who have all their lives studied, and sometimes lived their religion,

become irritated by arguments of an anti-religious nature. It is not human to change one's opinions easily. Adaptation requires considerable effort; to reproach others requires none, therefore the majority of people prefer to reproach others rather than to adapt themselves.

The adversaries of Secularism desire to maintain the *status quo*; they love their own systems with a love like that of patriotism. They think that having learned and lived by a system they will not give it up so easily.

What then are we to do? Be silent? Agree with them? We are, or should be, indignant at the suggestion!

All creative movements have at first caused discussions, often dissention, because they must at first conquer the indifference of the public. They must shake the public out of its apathy and, in particular, convince the "old school" of error. Secularists are aggressive because conscience demands it in the defence of Free-thought.—Yours, etc.,

G. L. DICKINSON.

### A VERY STAINED WINDOW

I am glad to see *The Freethinker* and N.S.S. against blood sports, sanctioned so often in that book of Christian ethics, the Bible. I recall that in 1914 the Archbishop of York (later of Canterbury) performed a eulogistic service over a clerical fox-hunter at the church of Moor Monkton, in which he attempted to defend that degraded "sport." The fox-hunt, he said, "develops courtesies to man and beast"; it "draws the classes together," and so forth. To the memory of the old clergyman who had broken his neck in the Hunt a stained window was dedicated.—Yours, etc.,

J. LOUDEN.

### OPEN LETTER TO FR. PARIS

You contend that we are answerable to a personal Authority, for our shortcomings, misdeeds, wrongdoing. You imply that we, like the motorist and manager, will be brought to Justice, and Judgment, and accorded blame and punishment for sins committed. This raises an important question.

Who is Responsible for so-called "Acts of God"? It is said: "HE only is the maker of all things, near and far." It is also said: "It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves." If this is true, He is not only the cause of earthquake, drought, blizzard, etc., but also responsible for ignorance, cruel tendencies, avarice, selfishness, and all other ugly human failings.—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

### HEATHEN SCOTS

[*The Evening Times*, Glasgow, has recently featured the decline of an old Scottish custom of going to the Kirk on the Sabbath. The Editor of the *Evening Times* has invited his readers briefly to explain why. Following is a copy of a letter sent to that journal by the stalwart Glasgow Secularist, Mr. R. M. Hamilton.]

Iain Crawford, in asking "Why don't people go to Church?", gives the answer himself, i.e., "The modern Sunday is spent on the golf course or driving round the countryside, going to the cinema, etc." This invites the question: Then why do people go to Church? Those who normally attend Church are those who have never questioned the ethics of Christianity, or who have never tried to understand religion. There are others who consider going to Church a badge of respectability. Praying, singing of hymns and sermonising are pernicious. They teach us to rely on some supernatural power when we ought to rely on ourselves. I certainly agree "You can't be a part-time Christian." The illogical and immoral aspect is, nominal Christians take advantage of the freedom won by Freethinkers, Agnostics and Atheists, men and women who have suffered imprisonment and social boycott in the fight against the dead hand of the past.—Yours, etc.,

R. M. HAMILTON.

### MR. F. A. RIDLEY AND THE POET

I think readers of *The Freethinker* might be particularly interested in the friendly and happy glimpses of Mr. F. A. Ridley which appear in *The Corruption of a Poet* (James Barric, 15s.). Kenneth Hopkins's autobiography is delightfully gay, and tells how the penniless young man came to London and found Charles Lahr's bookshop. "My chief crony in those days," Mr. Hopkins writes, "was F. A. Ridley." The poet used to go to the Park to hear Ridley lecture; and one day the older man confided that the way to collect a crowd is to speak so quietly that people can't hear you, so they come in a little nearer, and then you can begin to speak loudly and confound the hosts of heaven. But there are other delightful incidents, and the author records how he typed Ridley's book *Marxism and Anarchism* on a borrowed machine.

I feel sure that many of your readers will be glad to have their attention drawn to this new book.—Yours, etc.,

London.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.