

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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THERE is a, perhaps, inevitable tendency amongst Secularists in this country to think of Religion and of Christianity as being synonymous terms. However, this is far from being the case. There are other widely diffused religions besides the Christian Religion, and the problems which they present are often quite dissimilar. An example of such a state of things can be seen in contemporary India where a young but intensely courageous Rationalist Movement is at present fighting against tremendous odds in the sub-continent. In India the problems which confront the Rationalist Movement differ widely and essentially from those encountered here.

In general, we imagine, it would be true to state that India is vastly more religious than is the Great Britain in the 20th century. Present-day India is still mainly an agricultural country; and it is almost axiomatic that where one finds an agrarian society one also finds a religious one. An economy rooted in natural forces can hardly avoid an attitude of dependence on the unseen forces imagined as controlling nature. None the less, despite the overwhelming religiosity of the large majority of its inhabitants, India is, officially, a Secular State, and its present ruler, Mr. Nehru, is a professed agnostic! The origins of such a peculiar paradox are, no doubt, to be sought in circumstances outside the sphere of religion. However, the *fact* remains: the paradoxical fact that whilst England, the cradle both of the Industrial Revolution and of the Theory of Evolution is still officially Christian, India, with a primitive economy and a largely illiterate population, is, as said, an officially Secular State! Hinduism, the creed of the vast majority of Indian citizens, is *not* the official religion of India.

Two Rival Religions

Prior to the partition of India on the withdrawal of the British in 1947, India represented the age-old scene of a permanent battle-ground between the two rival creeds of Hinduism and Islam, the religion founded by Muhammed. These rival creeds are entirely dissimilar. Islam claims to be universal both in range and in truth; it claims to be the "One True Church," just like its Catholic rival in the West. It, too, is dogmatic, monopolistic of the truth, and intolerant towards those outside its fold. Like its predecessor, Judaism, of which it, like Christianity, represents a Universalised edition, Islam is an exclusive creed, with a Holy Book, the Koran, and a "jealous" god, Allah. Hinduism, contrarily, is a comprehensive, an eclectic creed; it includes a multitude of gods, and a paradox from our Western standpoint—even no gods at all! For several of the recognised Hindu schools of philosophy are atheistic, pantheistic or agnostic! In its essentials Hinduism would appear to be a totalitarian *social* code which embraces all phases of life from birth to burial. It is a *tribal* code, that of the "Aryan" conquerors of India; and its castes are arranged in proportion to the purity of their tribal blood-

stream: Hinduism is the "Judaism" of the East. Its bastard imitation, the "Aryan" creed of Hitler, with its originally Hindu sacred emblem, the sacred *swastika*, persecuted Judaism with all the hatred of a *rival* creed!

Indian Rationalism

The dissimilar nature of Islam and Hinduism is reflected in their current attitude to Rationalism and to the Rationalist Movement. Since 1947 and the partition of India in that year, Islam has its own State, "Pakistan"—"the land of the pure," that is, of the Muslims. "Pakistan" is now officially designated as an Islamic State; actually

there are religious minorities and other creeds which exist, and despite their "impure" nature appear to enjoy religious toleration. We are, after all, in the 20th century, and not in the "Age of Faith." Moreover, Pakistan, like other more secular regimes, needs foreign—chiefly Christian—capital. None the less, we doubt if an aggressive *anti*-religious movement could exist in contemporary Pakistan. Certainly, not one which specialised in picking holes in the infallible Koran. As far as we know, no such rationalist movement exists in present-day Pakistan.

Rationalism versus Hinduism

A Rationalist Movement, and a very active and intelligent movement, *does* exist in Hindu "Bharat"—to give "India" its Hindu designation. Here it is, of course, legal since we reiterate India *is* a Secular State. It is the more likely to be so in that Hinduism, whilst not lacking its fanatics, cannot be styled *ipso facto*, as a fanatical religion. Unlike Islam or Christianity its dogmas are not *exclusive*. Hinduism has hundreds of gods and is continually adding to their number; Mr. Gandhi is already a god; so, we understand is Buddha, the great Hindu heretic. So far neither Christ nor Muhammed has been enrolled in the Hindu Pantheon. But there is no theological reason why they should not be if their followers could be persuaded to agree to their incorporation. A learned Muslim theologian once informed the present writer that Hindus had informed him that, if the Muslims would only leave the Hindu gods alone, Hinduism would be quite ready to add Muhammed to their number. No doubt, too, the Christian Trinity could be admitted on much the same terms. In that case they—or should we say, "it"?—would find an older Trinity already established there!

Hindu Atheism

However, Hinduism is nothing if not eclectic. It is always ready to open its doors to heretical philosophies as well as to heretical gods. Several of the recognised Hindu schools of thought doubt, or even deny outright, the existence of personal gods. Our colleagues in *The Indian Rationalist* may eventually receive an invitation to continue their atheist propaganda *inside* the comprehensive Hindu fold!

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

India—a Secular State?

By F. A. RIDLEY

What is Hinduism?

What, a European inquirer may well ask, what then is Hinduism? The answer appears to be that primarily it is a code of *action* rather than of *thought*. In Hinduism you can *believe*, it appears, *anything* from Polytheism to Atheism. But one has to *do* certain things. One has, primarily, to belong to a caste! For "The sin against the Holy Ghost" in Hinduism is to be an "outcast" (a pariah)—the phrase itself derives from Hinduism. Further, as a member of a caste one has to *do* many things, to fulfil many rituals, and to engage in a round of primitive superstitions. Above all, to be a pious Hindu one must revere the higher castes, in particular the "twice-born" Brahmins, and to pin one's hopes on reincarnation in a *future* existence. For Hinduism has very cleverly allayed the frightful poverty of the Hindu masses by promising that as a reward for their resignation to the evils of life they will be born again in a higher caste and, presumably, in a more prosperous way of life.

Hinduism and Secularism

In view of the above facts we think it to be rather

unlikely that our Indian Rationalist friends will join the ranks of the adherents of Hinduism, for, if Atheism is compatible with Hinduism, *Secularism* is certainly not! Secularism not only knows nothing of any life than this, but it holds that for this very reason we should try to make *this* earth a better, more reasonable and happier place than it has been in the past. Secularism certainly does not divide human beings into "twice-born" and "once-born," or, in modern political phraseology, into "first-class" and "second-class" human beings, or citizens. Neither, equally certainly, does Secularism encourage the poor and the exploited to put up with their misery here in return for a blank cheque to be cashed in a *future* life—a post-dated cheque, for the solvency of which its credulous recipient has only the testimony of the Brahmin whose livelihood, incidentally, depends on his continued credulity! We think that the Indian Rationalists will be well-advised to continue their polemic against Hinduism. Indeed, if what we hear is true about present-day conditions in the sub-continent, it will probably be quite a while before India, a Secular State already in *name*, finally becomes a Secular State in *fact*.

Missionary Heroes?

By F. A. HORNIBROOK

MANY of us remember the thrill we got when we were very young and we heard that a real live missionary was coming on the Sunday to tell us about his experiences amongst the savage heathen. We fancied the missionary, armed only with the true faith to confront a mob of howling savages, in one hand the British Bible, the source of England's greatness, and, with the other, pointing to the sky. The savages would then immediately drop their bloodthirsty intentions and fall on their knees, to be duly baptised by the missionary, from whom they learned the first verse of a Sankey hymn.

But, as Carlyle says, "Our beards have grown since then," and we know now that this fanciful picture of our childish imagination was too highly-coloured to be true. What are the facts?

The missionary of to-day would have us believe that it was Christianity that tamed all the savage tribes, and they will tell us that the comparative safety of the missionary of our time is enjoyed as a result of the wonderful example of and the sacrifices made by the missionaries of the middle of the last century—that time so rich in missionary enterprise; the industrial age, when England really became great and rich—the time of child-labour, slums, degrading poverty and rags for clothes—which was the very time when millions of pounds were subscribed to send clothes to natives who had never worn them, didn't want them, and who, by wearing them one day and discarding them the next, soon became a prey to illness, particularly lung disease.

A very interesting account of these early missionaries is given in a book the writer purchased on a second-hand bookstall, *New Zealand, together with some account of the South Sea Islands*, by Lieut. the Hon. Herbert Meade, R.N.

He also commented upon the comforts enjoyed by many of these heroes and tells us: "We found Mr. Nettleston very snugly quartered in a commodious house surrounded by a very extensive garden perched on the crest of a little hill, commanding a charming view and drinking in the coolest of the fresh and life-giving sea breezes; how many an English clergyman's mouth would water at the sight of such a parsonage, with its ample garden and well-filled larder under his lee—so neat a parish, so docile a congregation—all free of rent, rates, taxes and churchwardens."

Lieut. Meade pointed out that sometimes the natives were not converted singly, but turned Christian en masse if the chief decided to do so, and that this conversion was often hastened or retarded by political motives.

He speaks of the spirit of intolerance shown to the natives in trifling matters, as, for example, that of smoking tobacco, the one solitary luxury these simple people possessed: the repression of age-long customs, such as dancing, about which they try to impress upon the natives a sense of shame in the naked body where no such feeling existed before.

Dealing with the simplicity of the natives, he tells an interesting story:—

"In a neighbouring island, a merchant captain stopped for a short time and commenced converting the natives. He prevailed on them to destroy their idols, but had not got much farther when he had to set sail.

The islanders were therefore left with little or no religion to supply the place of the paganism which he had destroyed. He told them that he had no Bible to give them, but that they should endeavour to get one at the first opportunity, as without the Word of God they could not hope for salvation.

A long time passed before another trader touched at the island, and then their first request was for the Holy volume. The trader, seeing an opportunity for what he considered a smart bargain, replied that he fortunately had a "Word of God" on board, but that they were such exceedingly rare and valuable articles that he could not part with his except for a large quantity of oil, and an agreement was made by which the natives were to pay 120 gallons of oil, valued at least £20, for the skipper's New York Society's Bible, marked 3s. on the cover.

The natives went to work, and having succeeded in collecting the quantity demanded, obtained their Bible, but did not know what to do with the prize when they had got it, for not one of them could read a word of it. So it was wrapped carefully up in ever so many folds of tappa mats and coconut leaves, and hung up in the chief's house as a sort of fetish, where it remained for years till a few months ago, when some native teachers were landed on the island to expound the Gospel to them."

William Blake

By BAYARD SIMMONS

ON August 12, 1827, a day devoted in the English calendar to the slaughter of birds, died William Blake, the great English poet, painter and mystic. There is a certain irony in Blake's selection of this date to pass, as he puts it, from "one room into another." For no English poet has more vehemently championed the cause of the brute creation. In the days of public cockfighting he wrote:—

A Robin Redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage

and the little lamb, the tiger burning bright, and the chafer's sprite were all the subject of his constant thought and solicitude.

This century has called forth a spate of writing on this most individual of English geniuses. Neglected in his life, the interest in Blake has piled up and grown to such a volume that the inter-war 'twenties and 'thirties witnessed a spate of commentaries on his art, and reproductions, in the most expensive *de luxe* editions, of his paintings and engravings. Even busy journalists nowadays give judicious praise for his *Songs of Innocence* and *Poetical Sketches*; his engravings to illustrate the *Book of Job*, and Blair's *Grave*, are justly lauded; and his treatment by Cromek and Hayley examined from this point and that. References, if made, to his Prophetic Books are scant, and accompanied by much head-shaking.

Now, while busy journalists rightly avoid hazarding themselves among the shoals of the Prophetic Books, it is pertinent to ask whether sterner and stouter navigators have met with any reward for their trouble. Chief among these courageous fellows who have launched out into these waters have been fellow bards, to wit, Algernon Swinburne and W. B. Yeats. It is understandable, we think, that this work of pious enthusiasm should have been undertaken by poets. Surely, they argued, if Blake's other work speaks with such authentic ring (his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, for example), there must be some message of import, some rich grains, even if hidden in a bushel of chaff, to reward the patient searcher for such treasure. And who so likely to find the key to unlock the door to his treasury of wisdom than those who had themselves felt the divine afflatus, who knew, too, that imagination which is the mother of all art. So, assuredly, they must have reasoned, and with a mole-like energy, which must evoke a tribute of admiration from plain men, they proceeded (to vary the metaphor) to burrow in the tangled roots of this most exotic and esoteric of literary growths.

It is a sad fact in this wry world that industry and enthusiasm are not always rewarded. Powerful as were the pneumatic drills used by these skilled cracksmen, this safe proved to be as empty as that of the notorious French swindler, Mme. Humbert. The mole, though industrious, remains blind. These books, of which their author was so proud, remain for all the labour of conjecture, only conjecture; full of sound and fury they are, but signifying nothing. And therein lies the moral for all Freethinkers and those who seek to walk by the light of reason.

Imagination, we repeat, is the mother of all art; it is the emotive force which brings into the world of men those titanic elements that lurk in the depths of the unconscious. Strange, and beautiful, and horrific are these elements, but till birth, formless. One cannot term them shapes, or one might compare them to the luscious houris or the foul djinn. Divine or monstrous, they are ever striving upwards, seeking shape, seeking birth. But reason, oft despised midwife, must assist at this accouchement. She must select, must

reject. The monster must be strangled ere the first breath. The dionysian upsurge of imagination must have imposed upon it apollonian form. It is strange that Blake, who in his drawings was the great upholder of definite form and firm line, should in his writings have so widely departed from this sound teaching. He hated what we should now term Impressionism. "Slobbering" is a frequent epithet of his for all pictorial representation other than the classic and clearcut. Yet in his Prophetic Books, rhythm and rhyme, those attributes of form, are all to seek. Rhapsodical is too kind a term to characterise what is nothing less than an insensate outpouring.

Great Blake—and poor Blake! His revolt against the apotheosis of reason, the characteristic of his, the Eighteenth Century, with its Gibbons and Godwins and Tom Paines, like ambition, o'erleapt itself and landed him in chaos. He railed against Voltaire, and Locke, and Newton, and even the great Bacon he called "Little Bacon." The last three, he told a friend, "are the three great teachers of atheism or Satan's doctrine."

Yet for all Blake's fervour against atheism, he had small thanks from his Christian fellow-countrymen. After his death his pious Christian friends made a bonfire of his note-books, poems and designs, because they held them heretical and dangerous. A few years after the 1914 War a tablet was unveiled in the cathedral church of St. Paul to his memory, not, surely, as a great Christian, but because, like Shakespeare and Milton, he was a great Londoner and a great genius. Even in his life-time the "ranks of Tuscany" would have raised a more sincere cheer to this fearless and honest fighter than the Church that now accords him belated recognition, along with the atheists Shelley and Keats.

For, for all his enmity to atheism, he rendered one great service to the cause of reason. In 1792, or thereabouts, he warned Thomas Paine of his impending arrest by the agents of the British Government. "You must not go home," he said, "or you are a dead man." This timely warning saved Paine, at any rate, from imprisonment. If for no other cause, this one generous deed of Blake to the great vindicator of reason, should make the Freethinker join in any salute to his memory. And, in truth, no reformer could do aught but revere that great heart which vowed never to cease from mental fight till the Jerusalem of his aspirations was built in England's green and pleasant land.

HERESY AT OXFORD

Any journalist will tell us that the subject of Sex remains the biggest draw to any lecture. This is so whether it is in a little "tin-tabernacle," or the lecture hall of an old university. Recently Dr. Kenneth Walker drew the largest attendance of the term for an Oxford Club. Nearly 300 undergrads, male and female, crowded into Somerville College, a woman's college at Oxford, to listen raptly to a lecture on sex by an eminent London surgeon.

The lecture dwelt on the Church's ideal that there should be no extra-marital love-making, an ideal which he contested. Nature, he said, made "no provision for this chastity." He deplored petting, but was of opinion that there was something to be said for "trial marriages." Our readers will be interested to learn that these heretical ideas were put forward at the meeting arranged by The Heretics Club of the University, which is said to be the Home of Lost Causes, a club which aims at "promoting free thinking."

THE BIBLE: WHAT IS IT WORTH? By Colonel R. G. Ingersoll. Price 2d.; postage 1½d.

ROBERT TAYLOR. The Devil's Chaplain (1784-1844). By H. Cutner. A detailed account of a remarkable Freethinker and his work. Price 1s. 6d.; postage 2d.

This Believing World

Hurrah for Joe McCarthy, the famous senator from Wisconsin! Now that he looks like getting into hot water, the Roman Catholic Church has stepped in and 250,000 of its followers are ready enthusiastically to support him to the utmost. After all, the only Totalitarian regime they and the senator support is Popery, and a rival like Communism must be put down at all costs. The only thing we are surprised at is that the whole of the 25 millions of Catholics in the U.S.A. have not rushed to support him. But perhaps the 250,000 who have done so represent the most powerful ones in America. Hurrah then for further witch-hunting!

We note that the very pious President of the American Medical Association, Dr. Elmer Hess, is angrily denouncing all doctors who do not believe in God. "Do they not know," he bitterly complained the other day, that all a doctor does is to administer the right medicine, but "his faith in God does the rest?" And he insisted that "the doctor who lacks faith in a Supreme Being has no right to practise medicine." Why does not Dr. Hess take as a magnificent example Senator McCarthy, and institute a medical witch-hunt? Any doctor who does not believe in Dr. Hess's God should be hounded, not only out of medicine, but out of the country. There's nothing like religion as a background for witch-hunting.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, Dr. J. C. Heenan, is very angry because "France will never fight again." As a member of the Church which has at its head, "the Prince of Peace," one can very well understand his anger that the average Frenchman is by no means prepared to give his life to please Dr. Heenan, or to defend that gentleman's Church. Is Dr. Heenan ready to fight—and give his life—for the Church?

The row is because instead of France being a devoted child of the Roman Church, something like half the population is on the side of Communism and, as Senator McCarthy would say, there can be no greater crime in the world than Communism—not because of any economic ideology, but because Catholicism as a Totalitarian creed cannot tolerate any other Totalitarian creed like Communism. Dr. Heenan does not put it that way—but it is what he really means. Hence his attack on France. We have an idea that France will survive Dr. Heenan.

A daring experiment was initiated the other week at Desborough. It was running a bus service for people in outlying districts to take them to church on Sundays and bring them back. And with what success? Alas, with shame do we record it, "not one worshipper climbed aboard" almost moans the Northampton *Evening Chronicle*. Naturally, "it was a foul day" which kept the people at home—or was it? Do not most people these days infinitely prefer listening to the radio or enjoying TV to praising God from who all the blessings flow?

As a matter of fact, the music of "Grand Hotel" on the radio which has been a feature for years at 7-30 on Sunday evening made such a mess of church attendances that the pious directors have had to change the time to 9 p.m. so that those true Christians, who did go to church, would not rush away before the end to listen to it. Which is such wonderful proof of the power of Christ Jesus and the fact that we are all thoroughly religious at heart. It is also a wonderful proof that the wishes of the millions of listeners who prefer "Grand Hotel" at 7-30 are, in the name of religion, just flouted.

The latest war-cry comes from the famous Methodist preacher, Dr. Donald Soper. It is, "We must unite against Materialism," which is, as he quite rightly acknowledges, "the supreme enemy." He himself has been fighting it for years and his war-cry proves that it must be very much alive and kicking—though, no doubt to please his audience, he has to say "the day of Materialism is dying." Well, how much has Dr. Soper contributed to achieve this happy result? And is it really dying? He knows as well as we do that every advance in science has confirmed Materialism and, far from "dying," it has never been more alive.

SCIENCE FRONT

The Nebular Hypothesis

THE new light which has been thrown on the nebular hypothesis has also been taken in some quarters as a breakdown of materialist physics. Such a conclusion, however, is not that of the scientists who have actually advocated indeterminacy. What, then, has happened to the theory that was dimly foreshadowed by Bruno, formulated by Laplace and developed by Herschel and others? It is not the modifications that it has undergone which are significant. What has occurred is a revision, not of the hypothesis, but of the use made of it. Laplace conceived a hot, gaseous cloud, a fire mist which, when it had reached the stake of rotation, following cooling and contraction, gave off rings of spiral nebulae which broke up and then condensed into planets. This was supposed to account for the origin of the solar system. Now it is believed that a passing star made our sun heave off knotted spiral nebulae which became collecting centres for matter, with the lighter material on the outside, like oceanic basalt. "A star almost collided with the sun and raised a great tidal wave, causing jets of matter to spurt out of the sun, now condensed as the planets."* This theory, supported in principle by Jeans, is challenged by Millikan on the ground that it would not explain rotation, and a non-rotating planet would have only one day in its year and would experience temperatures so variable as to render complex life impossible. Perhaps, then, another star actually collided with our sun.

The theory of Laplace, however, may still be of use. It does not account for the solar system. Any solar system is insignificant as compared with the stellar system, and it is here that the theory may yet be of service, for it "is still acceptable as a true account of the condensation of single stars out of a nebula,"† so that "we may end, not by rejecting Laplace's nebular hypothesis, but by promoting it to an application far vaster than he dreamed." (ib.) As Jeans tells us, "Apart from minor details the process imagined by Laplace explains the birth of suns out of nebula; it cannot explain the birth of planets out of suns."‡ The dimly coloured, misty nebula "remains true for a starting point."§ There are hundreds of thousands of such mists now existent.

Thus the theory of Laplace, developed, is now capable of being applied to the stellar system, instead of to the solar system as its author tentatively intended it, and its place there has been taken by other quite deterministic theories, like the planetesimal of Chamberlin and Moulton, the tidal theory of Jeans, the collision theory of Bickerton and the nuclear theory of Nolke.

The distrust with which Laplace regarded his hypothesis has been justified, but the important point, so far as

(Continued next page)

* Science and the Unseen World (Eddington). † Outline of Modern Knowledge. ‡ The Universe Around Us (Jeans). § Outline of Science.

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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

W. J. PYE.—Most interesting to learn, like you, that our world was created at 9 a.m. on October 24, 4004 B.C.

K. LIDAKS.—We often wonder what the author of Ecclesiastes, that freethinking pessimist, is doing in the Bible.

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 week-day, 1 p.m.:

G. A. WOODCOCK.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead Heath).—Sunday, November 28, noon:

L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

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

T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Sati's Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—November 28, 7 p.m., G. H. TAYLOR, "The Mind of the Ape."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute, Second Floor).—Sunday, November 28, 6-45 p.m.:

C. W. KEARMAN, "The Wit and Satire of G.B. Shaw."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 30, 7 p.m.:

H. HAWTON, "Rationalism in the 20th Century."

Junior Discussion Group (South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall).—Friday, November 26, 7-15 p.m.:

Miss B. M. SMOKER, "Do we need a Revised Alphabet?"

Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 28, 6-30 p.m.:

Councillor E. MARSTON, "Housing: the Human and Social Problems."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, November 28, 2-30 p.m.:

C. A. AITKEN, "The Unscientific Basis of Marxism."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 28, 11 a.m.:

Prof. J. C. FLUGEL, "Is There a Death Instinct?"

West London Branch N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place Edgware Road, Marylebone, W.1, five minutes from Edgware Road Station).—Sunday, November 28, 7-15 p.m.:

V. E. NEUBURG, "Working-Class Literature in England."

Notes and News

A member of the Blackpool Branch N.S.S., Mrs. E. M. Sandys, in addition to putting by regular sums for the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund, had the good idea of writing to a number of public figures known as Freethinkers to invite their support of the Fund. As a result of her efforts donations have come in from Earl Russell (Bertrand Russell) and Mr. J. W. Robertson Scott, C.H. Both of them, veterans well past the four-score years mark, have sent her friendly notes. Earl Russell's letter said, "I entirely agree with you about the importance of *The Freethinker*."

The recent article on Billy Graham's "sincerity" by P. V. Morris was reprinted in the *New Zealand Rationalist* for August, and F. A. Hornibrook and G. H. Taylor also both appeared in the September issue of the same journal.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged—£521 12s. 3d.

F. McVeigh, £2; W. J. Bennett, £1; A. Hancock, 1s.; Bertrand Russell, £1; H. V. Creech (Manchester Branch), 10s.; W. H. D., 2s. 6d.; Mrs. N. White, £1; C. Pustan, £1; J. W. Robertson Scott, £1. Total to date—£529 5s. 9d.

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

Last Saturday, November 20, at 1-15 p.m., some 60 friends of the bride and bridegroom assembled in the Library of the Conway Hall to witness the marriage of Miss Constance Kerr, Secretary of the Rationalist Press Association, and Mr. G. C. Dowman, Editor of the *Monthly Record*, journal of the South Place Ethical Society. The ceremony was conducted by Mr. E. J. Fairhall, Treasurer of the South Place Society, whose address was impressive in its rationality and sincerity. Mr. and Mrs. Dowman are popular figures in their respective organisations, and carry with them the good wishes of all Secularists and readers of this paper. At the wedding the N.S.S. was represented by its Secretary, and *The Freethinker* by Mr. G. H. Taylor.

A SUICIDE

"A suicide," you say, "Go take him hence,

Within this consecrated ground no place
For such as he, whose last impenitence

Has angered God, and left for friends disgrace;
For with the sainted dead in certain hope

Who wait secure the coming of their Lord,
No outcast damned by Bell, Book, Candle, Pope,
His dust may dare to mingle 'neath the sward."

'Tis true in Life his sins were rather few,

His code of honour somewhat like your own.

"Treat other men as you'd have them treat you,"
What greater virtues, Priest, to you are known?

"He took his life"—well, was it yours to hold
Until you deemed it time for him to go?

Who gave you power his destiny to mould
Or trespass on his right to end it so?

W. H. HORNIBROOK.

Nebular Hypothesis

(Continued from page 380)

materialism is concerned, is that the issue leaves determinism untouched. As a condition of scientific investigation determinism is inescapable, and is not discredited because the solar system originated in a manner other than that conceived by a French nobleman of the eighteenth century. Subsequent findings have not negated the fundamental opposition of Newton's geometer-God, who would be hypothetically empowered to interfere with his handiwork. Planets seem so nicely adjusted to the solar system that any deviation of path or change of speed would mean their absorption into the sun. This once appeared to speak of cosmic intelligence somewhere, but given a chaotic collection of planets, survival of the fittest would at once operate and the less favourably placed would be at a disadvantage, this leading to their absorption. A stable and orderly system is thus the outcome of a long and completely deterministic process. Even now there are signs of incomplete order, as refractory "new" stars indicate.

G.H.T.

In Quest of Doubt

By H. CUTNER

FROM time to time there came to *The Freethinker* office from America a curious magazine called *Doubt*. It was unlike any other magazine I had ever seen and it rather intrigued me. It was the journal of some people who called themselves "Fortean", and a good deal of its matter was derived from data collected over a number of years by an American writer called Charles Fort. On a few occasions also I have been asked about him by our own readers but was unable to find out anything except that he had written some books.

However, through the kindness of the Secretary of the Fortean, Mr. Tiffany Thayer, I have been presented with a copy of *The Books of Charles Fort*, a stout volume, beautifully printed and produced, of over 1,000 pages containing four of Fort's books—*The Book of the Damned*, *New Lands, Lo!*, and *Wild Talents*; and it has in addition a fine introduction by Tiffany Thayer and a very full index. (Incidentally, the book costs £2 2s. in England and it can be had from Markham Press, 31, King's Road, London, S.W.3).

Before going into the books themselves let me say a few words about the author who was born in 1874 and died in 1932. A journalist and novelist, he spent many years of his life both in America and in England at the British Museum principally, in collecting data and meticulously filing them. These data consisted mainly of all sorts of out-of-the-way happenings, reports published in many scientific journals of extraordinary events of all kinds, particularly strange astronomical phenomena seen by observers in all parts of the world. Flying saucers and similar prodigies reported in various journals were eagerly sought for and filed—the kind of "news" given big headlines as in, for example, our own *Sunday Dispatch* only the other day (November 7, 1954): "Strange Sights in Sky Baffle War Office Six Times in a Few Weeks." This article describes radar operators completely puzzled about some of the things picked up by them on the screen for which they can give no rational explanation. It is such reports which Fort sought for in *Nature*, the *Astronomical Journal*, *English Mechanic*, the *Field*, and hundreds of other journals. The fall of objects from the sky, strange animal footprints, floods, fireballs, swarms of insects, modern and ancient witchcraft, curious murders and disappearances, and so on, all interested him beyond measure, and the four books are packed with this kind of data with "chapter and verse."

Charles Fort wanted to be a naturalist, but became a reporter, writing short stories and a novel—*The Outcast Manufacturers*. And he achieved a style of writing which put him in a class far above ordinary journalism. Mr. Thayer insists that the writings of Fort are "for the curious, prying, inquisitive-minded," though he admits that there are people who will disagree with him—"those who find reading difficult and those who wish (Fort's books) had never been written." He wrote for those who understand him—just as the Marquis de Sade proudly declared that his books were written only for those who understood him. It is not everybody who can understand Newton's *Principia* or even Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Apart then from his books, the life of Charles Fort seems strangely uneventful. His one novel (published in 1909) soon went out-of-print, but the *Book of the Damned* caught the attention of discerning readers who saw in this fantastic conglomeration of facts and unorthodox opinions something far away from the usual run of books. For Fort asked questions of science just as G. W. Foote asked

questions of religion. He was in "doubt," and he wanted an answer. And he became, like so many people whose "testimonies" he so carefully collected, one of the "damned."

It was "damnable" to query the verdicts of great astronomers. We are told that the moon, for example, is about 240,000 miles away, and that its diameter is 2,160 miles. Fort, rightly or wrongly, questions these figures. It may be that he did so because he has had no scientific training, just as some people object to any Freethinker—like myself—questioning the historicity of Jesus because we are not trained "historians." Only a historian has the right to dogmatise on the problem, and only an astronomer has the right to say anything about the distance the moon is from the earth, or about its size. This attitude Fort challenges on *all* subjects. It may be that he is wrong, but it surely is the proper attitude for Freethinkers.

Fort quotes a "Mr. G. B. Shaw"—he does not say whether it is *the* G. B. Shaw—in one of the numbers of the *Observatory* as saying that the moon is only 37 miles away. Fort proceeds to ask an "intelligent question." The craters of the large volcanoes on the earth are roughly about three to seven miles across, while those on the moon are given as about 60 miles across. Is there any good reason, he asks, for the little moon to have so much bigger volcanoes than the larger earth? Given the same proportion as exists on the earth therefore "the moon is not 2,160, but about 100 miles in diameter." I do not doubt that this kind of "doubt" makes our astronomers squirm, but why should it not be asked?

We just hate to have our cherished beliefs unstuck. As an instance, take both Foote and J. M. Robertson on the problem of Shakespeare. Both made mincemeat of the Bible, Robertson being one of the stoutest propagandists of the Myth Theory of Jesus. But they were both horrified when some "doubters" questioned the almost fully accepted belief that William Shakespeare of Stratford wrote the plays. The sceptics have always been bitterly assailed.

Mr. Thayer points out that "Charles Fort was the arch-enemy of dogma—not of science"—and this should be emphasised. Scientific data can be accepted "temporarily" at least, but there is no reason why they should not be carefully discussed and objections dealt with. And it is this attitude which makes Fort, not the enemy of science, but the "arch-doubter." I feel, reading his books, that he was always actually searching for "doubt." And Mr. Thayer considers that Fort wrote "one of the greatest books ever written in this world, right up there at the top, surely among the first ten." He bases this opinion on the fact that Fort makes his "readers think without telling them *what* to think." Does this power in a book really make for its greatness?

Mr. Thayer feels that "we should have an Intermediate Academy for the Sons of Atheists," for surely we Freethinkers would prefer "to have the love of knowledge awakened in our offspring rather than have them trained to be docile taxpayers and obedient soldiers?" What a pity it is that not all the children of Atheists have "followed in their fathers' footsteps."

But I would like to say a little more of the "doubts" of Charles Fort and will do so in another article.

To lose one parent . . . may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.—OSCAR WILDE.

The Negligence of God

By E. H. GROUT

IT was shockingly careless of God to have created Adam and Eve, and the Garden of Eden, and let the blissful scene be spoiled by the artful serpent. If God had foreknowledge, He must have known what would happen. Why didn't He take steps to prevent the serpent from entering Eden? Perhaps He couldn't, perhaps He would have liked to scotch the snake but lacked the power—in that case, bang goes His omnipotence. It seems that the omniscience must go, too, for later on says the Bible, God repented that He had made man, for men had turned out such a naughty lot of blackguards. He surely wouldn't have created man at all, if He had known that he would give rise to such sinful progeny.

But why were Adam and Eve and the rest of them such wretched sinners? They were as God made them: if He had been all-good, they also would have been all-good, for the Perfect cannot create the Imperfect. (It is necessary to keep our tenses clear!)

The imperfection of the creature must reflect the imperfection of the Creator, for the creature was made in God's own image, and God looked upon it and saw that "it was good." What a bundle of contradictions and absurdities it all is! That is admitted by many "divines": they explain that these stories are mythological (so broad-minded of them!), and in their moments of expansion acknowledge that the Jewish writers simply "lifted" them from Babylonian epics. But these mythological stories are still read as part of the Scripture lessons in our State schools, without any warning to the scholars that the stories are not true. They are still read in churches and chapels in parsonic tones, without a mention of their pagan origin and fictional character. The parsons are not at all anxious that the people who lived in darkness should see a great light.

The fact is that the Christian scheme of "salvation" is a clumsy business, a very shaky business. The reverend gentlemen don't wish to spread the knowledge that the "Fall of Man" is a mere myth, for they teach that by this Fall (that never happened) sin was brought into the world, and millions of people have gone down to the burning pit, punished eternally because man's original ancestors ate some fruit. This is a scheme of the most colossal injustice that the world has ever heard of.

But God "in his loving mercy" repented again. The clear-cut thing for Him to do, of course, would have been to remit all this hellish punishment. That was too easy! He must have had the examining spirit of a Board School Inspector. He came down to earth in the form of an embryo that He implanted in the womb of a certain Mary, whom nobody had ever heard of before. This lady was married, or affianced, to a certain Joseph (origin equally obscure), who did not like the look of things, and was "minded to put her away privily." To quieten him, God sent an angel in a dream to reassure Joseph that Mary had conceived of the Holy Ghost. Joseph is said to have accepted this peculiar explanation, and very soon fades right out of the picture. (He is not mentioned at all in "Mark" and "John," which have no record of this miraculous conception.)

In due course, the child is born, and the world had to wait some thirty years before the God-man Jesus was crucified and resurrected. It didn't matter (to God) about the millions that died and went to hell during those thirty years. But from *circa* A.D. 30 the great scheme operated: all those who believed in this story were relieved from the penalty of Adam. Only believe that Christ was the Son

of God, who grew from babyhood to manhood, and died on a cross to save mankind (from the punishment that God himself had ordained), and "your sins are forgiven you." How ridiculous it is! How utterly clumsy and irrelevant! Supposing all this curious array of circumstances were true, it has no bearing at all upon whatever wrongs you and I may commit. The consequences of actions are not so easily evaded. It doesn't affect the matter, what we believe, whether true or false; whether we make confession or restitution and penance; whether we bombard the "throne of grace" with interminable masses and prayers—the chain of events that we put in motion by our deeds proceeds unswervingly from cause to effect, cause and effect, eddying through time and space.

What a roundabout and unconvincing plan of "salvation" it is. If God is able to save mankind from pain, surely it is His business to do so—without imposing obligations of belief, without exacting petitions and prayers, without expecting gratitude. If my cat is stretched out on the hearthrug, I take care not to tread on its paws, but I don't imagine that I'm a fine fellow for showing this very ordinary bit of decent behaviour. Any God that is worthy of his name should treat mankind with this ordinary consideration.

The very idea of a God having a son is only attributing to God the methods of men, it is utterly incompatible with the idea of Godhood. But even supposing that it were true, what good did it do to anybody that the Son should have been born of an earthly mother but without any earthly father? There are certain human beings that have been born by "Cæsarian section," but I'm not aware that they are any the better for that. Some people are born with a cawl, but I've never known anyone to brag of it—David Copperfield simply mentions it in passing as an odd fact. According to G. Stanley Hall, one in every 500 persons is born with supernumerary breasts, a proportion so high that I must have met many such polymasts—but none of them has mentioned their abnormality or claimed on that account to be better than their fellows.

If God did in fact arrange for such a case of asexual reproduction, it was grossly negligent to have failed to provide unimpeachable "controls" for the experiment. Seeing what is *claimed* to have depended upon this prodigious birth, it should have been attended with abundant witnesses and full records of the progress of the interesting case. Yet there is not the slightest supporting evidence for this anomalous birth. It has also been claimed that Attis, Plato, Confucius, Buddha were born of virgins—there are fashions in such matters! For an ordinary birth there is a legal compulsion to register it, naming the father and mother. But for these extraordinary births, for which extraordinary evidence should be provided, there is no evidence at all.

Nor is there any corroborative evidence for the remarkable series of events that are supposed to have occurred in the life of Jesus. For instance, there is not a single bit of straight, indisputable evidence that Jesus was ever crucified, let alone resurrected. The Father, who cares even for the sparrows, ought to have seen that there was indisputable evidence for those stupendous happenings. The absence of evidence nullifies the whole scheme of salvation.

A Christian apologist, the ex-Dean of Exeter, has now admitted that "religious experience" (perhaps the last prop of Christian argument), "may conceivably be an illusion . . . a very large and a very old one."—(*Christianity*, p. 148, Pelican Book, 1953.)

Pagan Gods

AT the time of the life or recorded appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, and for some centuries before, the Mediterranean and neighbouring world had been the scene of a vast number of pagan creeds and rituals. There were temples without end dedicated to gods like *Apollo* or *Dionysus* among the Greeks, *Hercules* among the Romans, *Mithra* among the Persians, *Adonis* and *Attis* in Syria and Phrygia, *Osiris*, *Horus* and *Isis* in Egypt, *Baal* and *Astarte* among the Babylonians and Carthaginians. And an extraordinarily interesting fact, for us, is that notwithstanding great geographical distances and racial differences between the adherents of these various cults, as well as differences in the details of their services, the general outline of their creeds and services were—if not identical—so markedly similar as we find them.

I may roughly say that of all or nearly all the deities above mentioned it was said or believed that:—

- (1) They were born on or very near Christmas Day.
- (2) They were born of a Virgin-mother.
- (3) And in a cave or underground chamber.
- (4) They led a life of toil for mankind.
- (5) And they were called by the names of Light-Bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour, Deliverer.
- (6) They were however vanquished by the Powers of Darkness.
- (7) And descended into Hell or the Underworld.
- (8) They rose again from the dead, and became the pioneers of mankind to the Heavenly world.
- (9) They obtained Communions of Saints and Churches.
- (10) And they were commemorated by Eucharistic meals.

EDWARD CARPENTER,

Pagan and Christian Creeds.

Correspondence

SECULAR EDUCATION

In summing-up the result of his inquiries as to children being withdrawn from religious lessons and worship at school, Jean Toudic expresses his view that "with the law for once on our side, we should all take position, if only so that the exception in our favour does not fall into desuetude."

This is admirable so far as it goes, but the law is still definitely against Secularist principles in that daily religious instruction forms part of the curriculum in our state schools, and that in consequence children are brought up imbued with the belief that the worship of Jesus Christ, miracles, prayer, virgin-birth, resurrection of the dead, heaven and hell, and other items of religious belief, are all accurate and true. Children's minds should be spared these theories in publicly maintained schools, where purely secular and moral schooling should prevail.

The secular education principle has in fact lost ground. Whereas before the war the religious sects were quarreling on the subject, the Education Act of 1944 came to their rescue when it fastened religious instruction and workshop compulsorily upon our state schools. Children therefore grow up with supernaturalism ingrained in their natures, and after schooldays are over it is very hard to dispossess their minds of this taint.

Before the war the National Secular Society and successive annual Trade Union Congresses recognised the importance of secular education, and the sooner the campaign for it is renewed the better.—Yours, etc.,

ALFRED D. CORRICK.

INTELLIGENT BELIEVERS?

Mr. Bennett says that there are intelligent believers—he gives the examples of Inge, Barnes and Schweitzer—and explains these men's refusal to go further than the "portals of freethought" by suggesting that they are in fact tied to a faith that they do not want to surrender. To all this I can assent: but can we accord to them the *highest* degree of intelligence, if they take all other steps but not the all-important step of throwing over God? Or, to put it another way, is it perhaps a question of courage and of intellectual honesty and integrity? It is barely conceivable that such acute thinkers *really* believe in God and immortality in the sense in which the humble often do: therefore they must be telling themselves fairy stories rather than face the truth. If this diagnosis

is correct, these men are dishonest and cowardly: if the other possible diagnosis (that of genuine belief) is correct, then they are soft-headed. It is hard to say which diagnosis is the more flattering, but whichever it is, I think such men are not worthy of humanity's greatest respect, however much one may admire their goodness. Surely the man most supremely deserving of our respect and admiration is the man who is good and kind and courageous *while facing up to the complete truth?* Truth and beauty are quite as precious as goodness, but ever since Christian times the last of the three has tended to receive the lion's share—while joy hardly gets a "look in." Even sympathy is needed by the joyful just as it is by those who are suffering, as Oscar Wilde pointed out!—Yours, etc.,

EVELYN BELCHAMBERS.

INTELLIGENCE AND RELIGION

Mr. G. I. Bennet's article on *Intelligence and Religion* is good but does not quite dispose of the matter. What is "intelligence" anyway? Most of us are intelligent in some respect and not so in others. The mathematician, the physicist, the physician who, desirous of supporting things he is predisposed to believe, hangs up his intelligence with his hat is, for the time being, and regarding these things, is not behaving as an intelligent person. After all, in this matter of religion and gods, there is so little on which intelligence can be brought to bear that emotion and sentiment must hold the field. If or while the native faculty of reason is not exercised, or applicable, no marks can be awarded for intelligence, even to the most "intelligent."—Yours, etc.,

W. Australia.

COLLIN COATES.

AN R.C.'S CRITICISM OF ANGLICAN HYMNS

The following is extracted from the *Quarterly Paper* of the Fraternity of the Blessed Sacrament (an Anglo-Catholic circus) and is signed by the Superior-General, Dudley Symon, in the November, 1954, issue:—

"Some of our best known and loved hymns are not particularly good in themselves, for the emphasis is exaggerated and the whole flavour is too sentimental. But it would not be advisable to scrap them just yet. . . . How one longs for the banning for fifty years of 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' 'The Church's One Foundation,' 'Thy Kingdom Come' and many others! Many of the hymns habitually sung in Anglican Churches are sufficient in themselves to keep any intelligent inquirer out of the Church. . . ."

Has the reverend been reading *The Freethinker*.—Yours, etc.,

F. M. BLAKE.

A QUERY

What would the preacher at the village chapel, who bought a pup, and shut it, saying he was "Against Drink," say if someone bought the village chapel, and shut it, saying he was "Against Religion"?—Yours, etc.,

C. E. RATCLIFFE.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A point on which the Secularist movement is I think against tribal security is the question of Capital Punishment. You openly advocate abolition of the death penalty. In this you think you are being humanitarian. In reality you are simply being led up the garden. Don't forget that Eton and Harrow are Catholic at heart, and are working hand and glove with the Vatican. British Imperialism is linked with the Imperialism of Rome. The Catholics outnumber heavily the Protestants in the prisons. The Catholics head the list for indictable offences. So when you hear of some Tory leader like the Earl of Cadogan advocating abolition of death penalty and the cat and flogging, etc., you know at once that the Catholics are trying to ease the blast against their own people. And the Secularists are mugs enough to fall for it! Can't you use your imagination? Who do you think are behind much of this thuggism in our midst? Why, the Catholic-Tory front, of course. The ranks of the Protestants are thinned by active and veiled threats of thuggism. When the Catholic thug is caught and sentenced, he does not get the cat or Dartmoor because some kind Tory humanitarian has succeeded in bluffing these mugs of secularists that it isn't humane to let the Catholic thug get his punishment. So please, pull the wool out of your eyes, and drop this attitude that the death penalty is wrong and that the corporal punishment of thuggism is wrong. It is not wrong. I support both corporal punishment for thuggism and the death penalty where it is given. I support both of these if for no other reason than it saves Protestants and Secularists a lot of money. Don't trust the Tories, anyway. They are laughing at you all the time when you advocate abolition of corporal punishment and the death penalty. You can print this if you like. You won't, of course, but it is the truth.—Yours, etc.,

EDWARD WILSON.

WANTED.—Secondhand copy "Second Sex," by Simone de Beauvoir. Pollard, Nadderwater, Exeter.