

The Freethinker

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THE work of such eminent Rationalist historians as Buckle and Draper has familiarised us with the brilliant intellectual achievements of the "Arabic" civilisation that flourished in Western Asia, and in European Spain and Sicily, whilst Christian Europe was still plunged in the Dark Ages. Actually how far this civilisation can be called either "Arabic" or "Muhammadan" is a matter for controversy. Much light is thrown upon this civilisation by a book that appeared a few years ago, which bears the self-explanatory title, "How Greek Science passed to the Arabs." Its author was a learned orientalist, Dr. De Lacy Evans O'Leary.

The main facts about the background of this great "Arabic Civilisation" may first be briefly traced: whilst the prophet Muhammad (A.D. 570-632) was primarily a religious reformer, the *immediate* effects of his mission were felt in the political, rather than in the *religious*, sphere. In the century that immediately followed the Prophet's demise, his Arab followers, united by the Faith of Islam, conquered an enormous empire, which stretched from India to Spain, ruled over by the "Khalifs" or "successors" of the Prophet. From the cultural point of view, with which we are here primarily concerned, the fusion of races brought together by the Arabian empire, led to a new culture, which lasted to the 13th century, when the Tartars destroyed Baghdad, and the primitive Turks became the political protectors of Islam, which then relapsed into a sterile fanaticism that still endures.

Arabian, Persian and Greek

As our author indicates with a wealth of most interesting detail, this so-called "Arabic civilisation" was actually by no means purely Arabic. The first Khalifs of Islam, the Arabic Amayyads of Damascus (A.D. 669-750) were by no means fanatical Muslims, and employed many Christians in their administration, who familiarised their conquerors with the Greek language and with Greek ways of thought. But it was not until the Abbasid Dynasty, Arabs related to the Prophet, had superseded them as Khalifs of Islam that the new cosmopolitan culture can really be said to have become operative. The Abbasids (A.D. 750-1258) established themselves in Bagdad, and Persian, and even Indian influences were powerful at their court. The greatest Abbasid Khalifs seem, indeed, at times, to have been, if not Freethinkers, at least, devotees of free speculation. The greatest Khalifs, Haroun-al-Raschid and Al-Mamun (9th century), were liberal patrons of culture, under whose auspices many scientific works were produced or translated. Haroun-al-Raschid's famous ministers, the Barmaks, were Persians of, originally, Buddhist ancestry. The brilliant court and culture described by the contemporary, *Thousand and One Nights*, is a composite of Greek science, Indian speculation, Persian poetry, and Arabic religion. Actually the last-named Muhammadan aspect was not always the most powerful.

Greek Science Goes East

The discoverers and first organisers of both scientific knowledge and of scientific methodology were the ancient (Pagan) Greeks, most of whose discoveries were preserved and expanded by the (Pagan) Roman Empire. With the adoption of Christianity, science and independent research fell into disrepute. The dictum of St. Ambrose, "not by

the exercise of Reason has God planned our salvation," became the established axiom in the West. In the eastern Greek-speaking Churches, as Dr. O'Leary indicates, the hostility to scientific and philosophical speculation was never so pronounced as in the West. The use of the

Greek language itself opened the way for the diffusion of the writings of the ancient pagan philosophers and scientists which, of course, were all written in classical Greek. The heretical Nestorian Church, in particular, took up a more liberal attitude towards Greek culture. This Church spread throughout the Middle East, and produced many scholars and translators of Greek science and philosophy. Another important cultural centre was Harrar, a town in Mesopotamia, which remained obstinately Pagan amid the surrounding Christian world, and which preserved the secular and pagan traditions of Greek science.

Alexandria and Aristotle

As our author, Dr. O'Leary, who appears to be some kind of a Christian clergyman, has the honesty to admit, whilst the Christian Churches, in particular the Nestorians, played some part in its diffusion; the scientific and philosophical Renaissance which formed the basis for the "Arabian" civilisation came from secular and pagan sources. As our author aptly comments, the basis of the "Muslim" culture lay in the pagan culture of ancient Greece. On the purely literary side, Persian poetry, usually regarded as the finest in the East, played also an important part. Indian pantheistic philosophical speculation seems also to have been influential, particularly among the heretical sects then on the fringe of Islam. "Arabian" science, which we still recall in such words as "algebra," and "alchemy"—not to mention "alcohol"—was therefore ultimately derived from the famous Greek Academy in Alexandria, founded by the Ptolemies, the Greek speaking "successors" of Alexander the Great, which produced such world-famous scientists as Euclid, Archimedes, Eratosthenes, and Aristarchus of Samos, the "Copernicus of Antiquity." Particularly noteworthy among these is the geographical compiler, Ptolemy, more famous in the Middle Ages than any other ancient scientist—with one notable exception, Aristotle. For as our author demonstrates, Aristotle owes most of his fame to his "Arabic" disciples. In antiquity itself, Aristotle does not appear to have been rated in the first flight of Greek philosophers. It was in the eastern culture that he first assumed the pre-eminent role of

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

How Greek Science Passed to the Arabs

By F. A. RIDLEY

The Philosopher, "The Master of those who know," as Dante was later to describe him. Arabic philosophy was, primarily, Aristotelian, and it was via the agency of the Spanish "Muslim" philosopher, Ibn Rushd (Latinised as Averroes), that Aristotle passed to the Christian West to be duly bowdlerised by St. Thomas Aquinas and his scholastic colleagues, who almost succeeded in transforming the old pagan Rationalist into a Christian saint.

The Influence of Arabic Civilisation

In the course of his monumental *World-History*, Dr. H. F. Helmolt has indicated the Medieval-Arabian-Persian-Moorish civilisation as one of the major cultural achievements of world-history. For a westerner, dependent on translations of the masterpieces of this culture, it is, perhaps, impossible to confirm or deny such a lofty claim. Only two literary achievements of this culture are well known in the West, and both *The Thousand and One Nights*—more briefly, *The Arabian Nights*—and Omar Khayyám's *Rubāiyāt*, seem to owe a good deal to their translators. In philosophy, the "Arabs" appear to have been mostly second-hand, and to have derived their ideas from Greek and Indian sources. In positive science they made important discoveries, though here again their *basis* appears to have been mainly Greek. In the Arts, Persian poetry is highly esteemed by connoisseurs, and brilliant specimens of architecture abound in the Muslim world—the Alhambra, for example, in Moorish Granada. But the heavy hand of Muslim dogma which forbade painting and sculpture as "idolatry," severely crippled the artistic resources of the Muslim world. The cosmopolitan civilisa-

tion of the Abbasids of Baghdad, and of their contemporaries in Egypt and Spain, was beyond doubt remarkable; but it was, perhaps, too deficient in originality to be ranked on a level with the great civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome and of Modern Europe.

Islam and Civilisation

How far, in actuality, was this "Muslim" culture really Muslim, really a product of the religion of Islam? In the present writer's opinion—very little. Its main sources were Greek and, to a lesser extent, Indian and Syrian (Harrar); in all these cases, Pagans. The Khalifs, who patronised the works of secular scholars and of freethinking scientists, were very *bad* Khalifs from the strict point of view of Muslim Orthodoxy! When Islam became monopolised by primitive races, like the Turks and Afghans, the theologians soon suppressed the scientists, and the world of Islam relapsed into the arid traditionalism which now prevails. The "Arabic" science and culture is unknown in present-day Arabia, as they were in Arabia before Muhamamad! Ernest Renan, in his brilliant essay, *Islamism and Science*, surely hit the nail on the head when he remarked that "Muslim Culture" was only "Muslim" in the sense that our own scientific culture is "Christian" in the sense that it arose in a hostile Christian environment. No more than Christianity did Islam favour and promote a scientific culture.

Ask at your Library

Dr. O'Leary has written a most valuable and instructive text-book on the history of both Science and Civilisation. Freethinkers will find it of particular interest.

The Menace of Politico-Economic Religion

By MARSHALL J. GAUVIN

(Concluded from page 403)

PRIESTS are not allowed to belong to any of the secular social service clubs. In Quebec there is a separate Catholic labor union. Everything is done that can be done to keep Catholics beyond the reach of Protestant influence.

The Church insists that wherever possible Catholic children shall attend separate schools, which are avowedly extensions of the Church. And in both the United States and Canada it is pointed out by intelligent Catholics that the training imparted in Catholic schools and colleges is inferior to that offered by non-Catholic institutions of learning. The purpose of this segregation of Catholics from their fellow citizens is to create a state within a state. It is anti-democratic, anti-cultural, opposed to mutual understanding and to the finer trends in civilisation.

In the whole of North America the Press, as it were, handles the Catholic Church with white silk gloves. Many editors who contemptuously regard that church as the "sacred cow," nevertheless shrink from incurring its displeasure. News unfavourable to it or its priests is played down, often excluded. Catholic editors advise their readers to refuse to patronise the advertising columns of any paper that is unfavourable to the Church.

Throughout North America, the churches exercise tremendous influence over the movies, the radio and television. Criticism of religion is even more fully excluded from these media of information than from the secular press. In New York, Cardinal Spellman has the Italian picture, "The Miracle," removed from the screen. In Quebec, Catholic influence denies to both Catholics and Protestants the right to see the picture, "Martin Luther." The Knights of Columbus publish in newspapers and magazines lying advertisements inviting non-Catholics to write for free information—which is misinformation—about their church.

And yet, despite the strongest efforts to keep the people Catholic and Protestant, hard creedal lines are fading away, and men and women are becoming increasingly conscious of the common interests of their common humanity. In the United States, on Sundays, millions ignore the churches and crowd the movies. In Canada, outside the province of Quebec, there are no Sunday movies, but Sunday is given over more and more to sport and pleasure. And as for the announced growth of the Catholic Church in the United States, it is probable that people are leaving that Church by the back door faster than others are coming in through the front door.

Everywhere in North America there is going on a decay of religious belief, and a replacing growth of the secular spirit of humanity and friendliness. This work is being helped splendidly by the New York *Truth Seeker*, and by the National Liberal League, which battles for Freethought and free schools wherever its services are required.

The beneficent change that is under way in America from religious orthodoxy to scientific humanism, is born of the freedom the people enjoy. American civilisation was built on and by freedom. It is the flower of individuality expressing itself in creative effort. America has no totalitarian tyranny and will have none. The marvellous growth of American civilisation, which gives its people the highest general standard of living the world has ever known, is the product of the free individual spirit and of the free institutions that free men create.

Let me close an important note—a matter of positive importance to Freethought. I have heard here references favourable to Socialism and Communism and statements disparaging what is called Capitalism. Let us understand one another: and let us understand that in the broad matters

of politics and economics that, taken together, involve nothing less than humanity's way of life and hope of progress. Freethought demands that we do not shut our eyes to the basic need of freedom.

Now while orthodox religion is dying, there is growing up in our midst a new politico-economic religion or, rather, a new phase of a very old economic religion—the belief that what the people need most of all is to have their economic and political life controlled by government—by politicians—by bureaucrats. I say that this old Spartan idea is a religion; and wherever it has been tried it has, like every other religion, proved itself to be slavery.

We see this politico-economic religion with its dictatorship over mankind in a number of countries, and we see it striving with fanatical zeal to spread itself over the whole world. It has its sacred scriptures, its priesthood—the Party—its hope of paradise; and wherever it establishes itself in real power, it rears an Inquisition that stamps out opposition with exile, slavery, torture and execution. But yesterday Czechoslovakia was perhaps the freest democracy in Europe. To-day that unfortunate country is dotted with Communist slave-labour camps.

Communism destroys the springs of human comfort, and healthy progress. It destroys freedom, suppresses individuality, makes man the slave of the State. Under Communism the individual counts for nothing; the State is everything. All the relations of life and the whole range of culture are dominated by police power.

And economically, as compared with the procedures of free peoples, it is a system of bungling inefficiency, because it destroys incentive, makes men shrink from responsibility, and robs the worker in the interest of bureaucratic government and military power.

Throughout the Communist world to-day, the United States is denounced and damned as the enemy of the common people. But let me tell you something that should be of interest to all workers. Eighty-five per cent. of all the automobiles in the world are in the United States. Ninety-two per cent. of all the bath tubs in the world are being used by the American people. Fifty per cent. of the world's hospital beds and forty-eight per cent. of its radios are enjoyed by Americans. The United States has more young people in high school and college than all the world beside. The total national income of the American people—enjoyed by the American people—is as great as that of the next highest six countries combined. And remember that the United States has only one-fourteenth of the world's population.

To-day the Western World fears, and with abundant reason, that the dreadful Communist military establishment is a threat to the lives and liberties of free people everywhere. And now the whole of Asia is threatened; and the still free world is enlisted in the tremendous effort to save, both in the East and in the West, all that can be saved from being engulfed in this barbaric surge back to the dark ages.

Freethought must entirely disapprove of this glorification of the State at the expense of the individual. Freethought must demand the emancipation of mankind from superstition, including the superstition that humanity's welfare is to be achieved through the destruction of freedom.

Freethought must embrace the whole of life. There can be no Freethought where there is no free life. And there can be no free life where the people are politically and economically enslaved. Beware of the promise of bread from him who holds behind his back a padlock for your lips and chains for your limbs.

The message of Freethought to the world is that the way of all human redemption is through the instructed individual—the free person. Economic tyranny, political tyranny,

these, wherever they exist, will have to be replaced with human liberty before man can reach and express his highest manhood. And only Freethought, working through political and economic freedom, can lead mankind to a finer civilization.

So the demand is for clear thought, and more clear thought—thought that understands the world and life, and works to make the world better. For as long as the world lasts, through whatever trials it may pass, the guiding star of man's forward destiny will be the blazing torch of the free human mind.

Religion of Tommy Atkins

"THERE are no atheists in the firing line." This one always got my goat, so when a leading Canadian newspaper called for testimony from returned soldiers on religion in the trenches I put in my bob's worth. With 14 years as a regular behind me I said, in effect, that the soldier lived without religion, even in the field. And, of course, that did it. In the Bible Belt that isn't what they want at all, at all.

I met only one praying soldier, a wartimer. Every night he'd kneel down and no one would "let on." The army makes one tolerant. And I knew only one avowed atheist in my time. Our attitude to him was funny. It said: "Who the 'ell is he to think he knows better than we do?" The very backbone of the general feeling about atheism. Jealousy and envy. Our own religion was inherited, and we conformed to usage. Why couldn't this fellow?

From habit and automatically, soldiers may pray on going into action. They're naturally scared, and "it may do some good." A man lives his religion, if any. And Tommy lives "pagan." Religion and politics are taboo in barracks. If under stress a man falls into prayer what does it prove but fear? The Pious Petes think it proves "God," heaven and hell and all the other religious fancies.

Deep down, Tommy—and the man in the street—is ashamed of religion as sissie, cowardly and opportunistic. It is thoroughly characteristic of the East from which it came and does not fit with us. Worship and credulity are not virtues. Turn-the-other-cheek, and all the rest of it, never did fit the vigorous West. The soldier of my day felt all this, being a practical man if no great student, and he lived his philosophy. You could not kid him with Santa Claus tales.

I found my Tommy "immoral" in the church sense: just a young fellow seeing life, but he was not a whimperer under fire as the holy ones infer. All this is fairly well-known, but it is falsified by "interested" parties and someone ought to speak up. Religion survives by default: no one will attack its falsehoods but a "handful of Freethinkers." So we stay in a state of semi-civilisation, an odd mixture of atom-bombs, TV, and fetish-worship.

Tommy may be immoral. That has nothing to do with religion. The jails are full of people with religion. Modern religion gets by on the specious notion that "you gotta believe to be decent." A little thought and we see this is not so. Religion is false and uses underhand strategy and naturally every sincere man is dead against it. Which all has connection with religion in the army—and out of it.

Toronto, Canada.

J.F.K.

—NEXT WEEK—

FREETHOUGHT ANTHOLOGY
FOR 1954

This Believing World

Once upon a while, the dread enemy of Christ Jesus was two-fold—playing-cards and the theatre; now, according to a Mr. Smellie, it is the humble bicycle. He recently told the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that "a great stream of young men and women" could be seen on any Sunday morning, "rain or shine, pedalling away" from the churches, "towards the glens and mountains." And, ponder on the awful consequences, for one day, these young people will become parents, and they all will cycle "with evident gaiety" past "our church doors," not even allowing, said Mr. Smellie dismally, "the hymn-singing within to interrupt their itinerant talk." One could almost weep at the thought.

We may even suggest something worse. Supposing they also took with them some packs of cards, and had a few games for money while they were picnicking? And to cap all, after tea they all went to the nearest cinema? Mr. Smellie and his friends would then almost see His Satanic Majesty in all His Glory rubbing His hands with joy. "I daresay," he added in the end, holding back his tears, "most of them bear no active ill-will to the Church—to them it is just as irrelevant as a dead language." How right he is!—we couldn't have put it better ourselves.

Although millions of sermons and compulsory church-going—at one time—should have firmly fixed Christianity on the highest pinnacle for mankind, we note with infinite sadness that every now and then our newspapers have to open their columns to readers complaining that there are actually people like Rationalists and Atheists who do not believe in the Bible! And in any case—what right have these "forever damned" people to call themselves "Freethinkers." In the *Leicester Mercury* there has been recently a heated correspondence on that solid foundation of true Christianity, the Bible, illustrated with a picture of the Precious Word open at the title page of the New Testament. If this picture does not prove that the Bible is true, what in heaven could?

We are solemnly told that the expressions "Rationalist" and "Freethinker" are "far more appropriate when applied to Christian believers," so we had better look out. And dozens of letters from pious ladies and parsons uphold the absolute truth of every word in God's Greatest Gift to Mankind. As one very pious gent angrily exclaimed, "the Bible story of the Garden of Eden is well authenticated from Genesis to Revelation by Jesus, Paul, and the Apostle John," and what more marvellous evidence could there be than proving one Bible story from another Bible story?

Needless to say, the correspondence in the *Leicester Mercury*—which was initiated by Mr. G. A. Kirk, the President of the Leicester Secular Society, with an excellent letter—was nearly altogether from Fundamentalists, some of whom have scientific degrees. Their belief in God, Jesus, Heaven, Hell, Devils, Angels, and Miracles, is complete. And in a leader, the Editor himself throws in his lot with them, calling the Bible a "Miracle"—"changing lives, saving sinners, and making good men into saints," about as big a farrago of sheer nonsense as we have read for a long time. Would this Editor be prepared to discuss the Bible with any distinguished Freethinker?

No one need withhold every praise from the famous Dr. Barnardo whose biography has just been published and whose work in rescuing the waifs and strays of society

made his name a household one during the latter part of last century. No one man did more for the homeless boys and girls thrown out into the religious Victorian world without pity and left to starve for all it cared. His appeals for help to save them touched many people, but strange to say, lots of those who so generously gave their support actually "thanked God" far more than Barnardo!

In truth, Barnardo's work was completely "secular." The poor children could, of course, have starved to death and gone to sit with Jesus in Heaven. Barnardo saved them from that unhappy fate, and helped to make them decent citizens of this world—which is the aim of "Secularism." Naturally, Barnardo had to drag in Jesus—he would have lost a lot of his supporters if he hadn't. But his "welfare" state was like ours—*secular*. What happens in heaven is, for most people, especially these days, nobody's business.

SCIENCE FRONT

The Age of the Earth

DIFFERENT layers of the earth's crust can be arranged in a definite time sequence in a way far more satisfactory than was possible to Kelvin and his contemporaries. The age of rocks can be most reliably based on the analysis of radioactive minerals. The discovery of radium (Mme. Curie, 1898) was the starting point for researches which have enabled us to chronicle the history of the earth.

Radioactive elements shoot out particles of matter from their atoms and so change into different elements in such a way as to become effectual chronometers. The parent of radium is uranium, which, by emitting three atoms of alpha after losing five helium atoms, becomes lead. The latter can then discharge a gas, radium emanation, and finally after losing five helium atoms, becomes lead. The latter, having stable atoms, does not continue the process of disintegration. This process is timed, not haphazard. Thus, one milligram of radium after 1,700 years would, according to mathematical calculation, have only half left, the rest having turned into helium lead and the intervening traces. Uranium, a slow disintegrator would take $4\frac{1}{2}$ million years to lose half its content. Other radioactive elements have their own rate of metamorphosis. We can thus calculate precisely how long it would take for any given proportion of lead to be accumulated in a mineral containing uranium or thorium. Analyses of rocks show a time range of about 1,500 million years, our planet being roughly 2,000 million years old. Calculations regarding the orbit of Mars, a sister planet, are corroborative. In addition there can also be enlisted the evidence from meteorites, the evidence from the eccentricities of the earth's orbit, and evidence from certain other astronomical data.

Yet in collecting all these relevant facts the scientists made one great mistake. In assembling all this evidence they forgot one thing. In conducting all this painstaking research and analysis they made one awful omission. They forgot to consult Bishop Ussher, who authoritatively pronounced that the world began at 11 o'clock in the morning of September 1, 4004 B.C.

G. H. T.

PERSECUTION

The more subtle effects of persecution remain with the living. They are not screwed down in the coffin and buried with the dead. They become part of the pestilential atmosphere of cowardice and hypocrisy which saps the intellectual manhood of society, so that bright-eyed inquiry sinks into bleary-eyed faith, and the rich vitality of active honest thought falls into the decrepitude of timid and slothful acquiescence.—G. W. FOOTE.

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.

T. GUNN.—Atomic explosions do not affect the weather; Bronowski recently said they do not bear comparison with the forces of an ordinary thunderstorm.

ALAN WILKINS.—The universe as a whole is not "running down." Expenditure and replenishment co-exist.

OLIVER MARLOW.—It is inconceivable that the earth could be knocked out of its orbit by atomic explosions, its path being determined by gravitational forces.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

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

F. ROTHWELL.

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, December 26, noon: I. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

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

INDOOR

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Large Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, December 26, 2-30 p.m.: J. HARRISON, M.P., "Colonial Affairs."

In Quest of Doubt—II

By H. CUTNER

BELIEVERS in flying saucers and kindred phenomena should thank Heaven for the amount of data collected by Charles Fort in his four books—collected in one volume under the title of *The Books of Charles Fort*. He did not see any of the phenomena himself, it is true, but he has most painstakingly recorded many strange happenings in the sky as he found them in the pages of scientific and other journals. All readers of this paper who feel that there ought to be no surprise at visitors from another world in space ships or saucers should pay homage to Fort—even more than to Jules Verne.

The data he collected are very gratefully recognised by Desmond Leslie in his book *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, which is now almost as sacrosanct to flying-saucer believers as the Bible is to Christians. And certainly, if Fort's data are to be trusted, all sorts of things have been seen in the heavens; though, after reading some of the records, I cannot see how anyone could possibly explain most of them. The descriptions are extremely vague, and should be no more trusted than the "veridical" accounts of witches flying on broomsticks, which many witnesses swore they had seen, in witch trials.

Fort wanted to believe many of the extraordinary happenings he relates—he wanted to believe in "teleportations," in such things as "apports," in "occult forces" of some kind. "If, in other worlds," he writes, "or in other parts of one relatively little existence, there be people who are far ahead of terrestrials, perhaps, teleportedly, beings from other places have come to this earth. And have seen

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

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

nothing to detain them. Or perhaps some of the more degraded ones have felt at home here, and have hung around, or have stayed here. I'd think of these fellows as throwbacks: concealing their origin, of course; having perhaps only a slightly foreign appearance; having affinity with our barbarisms, which their own races had cast off. . . ."

Over and over again Fort returns to the idea that this earth of ours has been visited by the inhabitants of other worlds. He writes:—

"There have been suggestions that unknown creatures and unknown substances have been transported to this earth from other fertile worlds, or from other parts of one system, or organism, a composition of distances that are small relatively to the unthinkable spans that astronomers think that they can think of. There have been suggestions of a purposeful distribution in this existence. Purpose in Nature is thinkable, without conventional theological interpretations, if we can conceive of our existence, or the so-called solar system, and the stars around as one organic state, formation, or being. . . . If we can think of our whole existence, perhaps one of countless organisms in the cosmos, as one organism, we can call its functions and distributions either organic or purposeful, or mechanically purposeful."

It can be said that all this is rather vague or not particularly lucid. What then did Charles Fort really believe? I am not at all sure. He himself insisted, sometimes, "I believe nothing." He even said: "I believe nothing of my own that I have ever written." In fact, "I shut the front door," he wrote, "upon Christ and Einstein, and at the back door hold out a welcoming hand to little frogs and periwinkles." Doubt, doubt—everything is in doubt.

Years ago I read a book—entitled, I think, *The Riddle of the Earth*—which got a severe handling from our scientists. It claimed that "earthquakes" were, at least in the main, not caused by the earth splitting from internal causes but from concussions of falling meteorites. Fort does not appear to have read this book, but here is what he says:—

"It is funny to read of an 'earthquake' described in technical lingo, and to have a datum than indicates that it was no earthquake at all, in the usual seismological sense, but a concussion from an explosion in the sky. August 7, 1921—a severe shock at New Canton, Virginia. See *Bull. Seis. Soc. Amer.*, 11-197—Prof. Stephen Taber's explanation that the shock had probably originated in the slate belt of Buckingham County, intensity about V on the R.F. scale. But then it is said that, according to the 'authorities' of the McCormick Observatory, the concussion was from an explosion in the sky. The time is coming when nothing funny will be seen in this subject, if some day be accepted at least parts of the masses of data that I am now holding back, until I can more fully develop them—that some of the greatest catastrophes that have devastated the face of this earth have been concussions from explosions in the sky, so repeating in a local sky weeks at a time, months sometimes, or intermittently for centuries, that fixed origins above the ravaged areas are indicated."

Any number of the conclusions of our most learned astronomers are vigorously challenged by Charles Fort—though, as I have already indicated, he appears to have had no scientific training. He claims, for example, that when Venus approached the earth in December, 1909, crowds stood in Rome watching it (or her). Similar crowds

watched it in New York, and "one supposes that upon these occasions Venus may have been within several thousand miles of this earth. At any rate I have never heard of one fairly good reason for supposing otherwise." Our astronomers, no doubt whatever, look upon such supposition as not worthy even of a notice. Yet Fort read assiduously numbers of scientific journals, and he must have seen that a mere "suppose" was no answer to the laborious calculations and observations of great scientists.

Fort prayed "for opposition" to keep him happy "and to some degree interested in my work." And he wrote: "The science of physics, which, at one time, was thought forever to have disposed of werewolves, vampires, witches, and other pets of mine, is to-day such an attempted systematisation of the principles of magic, that I am at a loss for eminent professors to be disagreeable to. Upon the principles of quantum mechanics, one can make reasonable almost any miracle, such as entering a closed room without penetrating a wall, or jumping from one place to another without traversing the space between." This is the kind of criticism which make a lot of people call Charles Fort "a crackpot," but perhaps he wrote a good deal with his tongue in his cheek or hoped that the reader would eventually see what he was driving at. Look at the way, he cried, "Prof. Einstein applied the Principle of Uncertainty not

only to atomic affairs, but to such occurrences as the opening and shutting of a shutter on a camera." This Principle of Uncertainty was Charles Fort's "Doubt."

Science must be based on "ideal certainty," he maintained—"anything else is to some degree guesswork." And therefore, "As a guesser, I'll not admit any inferiority to any scientist, imbecile, or rabbit." He thought that the position to-day in physics was confusion, and that "even in the anæmia and frazzle of religion, to-day, there is no worse state of desperation or decomposition."

But it is necessary to read *The Books of Charles Fort* as a whole to understand what he was driving at. To pick bits here and there, and to base his complete "philosophy of doubt" on just a few items is manifestly unfair.

For my own part, I must confess I share a good deal of his "doubt," and I have my doubts on many subjects which he either does not deal with, or barely touches upon. I could never have been a Freethinker otherwise.

The Books of Charles Fort is an expensive work, but it must shake up any reader and make him think again. Your local library will get it for you if you persist, and I hope its new readers will agree with that stout Fortean, Tiffany Thayer—"It encourages the curious to question, the prying to pry, the inquisitive to inquire. Is there an higher mission on earth? I deem not."

Advance Guard of Fundamentalism

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

THE Bible-thumping Billy Graham and his team of professional evangelists are planning to return to these shores in the spring of 1955. Planning is, indeed, their strong point. When they want to put something over on the British public they leave nothing to chance or to God, but stake their money on publicity and organisation every time. So, from an office in Gate Street, Holborn, their representatives in this country are making arrangements for a repetition in the coming year of the triumph they claim to have achieved last spring.

The first step in the campaign has been a typically ambitious one. They have produced two films based on their 1954 effort and have taken the huge Stoll Theatre, Kingsway, to present them. The show is now on, advertised mainly by posters on the Underground. The kind British newspaper Press marked the opening night by reporting the attendance of a distinguished gathering of representatives of high society, and stage and screen, who graced the occasion by their presence. The film critics were, nevertheless, unable to praise the qualities of the pictures shown, and, having seen them, I can understand why. Influenced either by their employers or the glamour of the unique Billy, however, the hacks paid the films the best compliment they could. They were "thought-provoking and sincere." Now that Dr. Graham appears to enjoy the approval of President Eisenhower, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Winston Churchill, let no criticism be heard!

On the evening I went, the cheaper parts of the theatre were very sparsely occupied. I refer to the 1s. 6d. and 2s. seats upstairs. The rest of the house, for which charges up to 5s. were made, was out of my sight, and may have been fuller. The Billy Graham fans are prepared to support their idol with cash and visits, but they are not the usual kind of audience found in cinemas. A few curious visitors, the staff of local offices, were present, but the bulk were parties from churches and chapels such as filled Harringay Arena last spring. A coach-load arrived as I passed the main entrance, and a number of coaches I saw parked in Lincoln's Inn Fields later told a story of the Billy Graham success-technique in action once again. Still, the

organised parties were far too few to fill the theatre. The organisation had banked too much on the pulling power of its advertising, and no hint from on high had been forthcoming to enable them to whip up more support from the pious.

To indicate to what lengths the latter will go to ensure the appearance of success for such a Crusade, let me say that I have just heard from a Christian source that one whole Sunday School was taken *ten times* to Harringay to support the previous campaign! At the same time they were putting up the house-full sign and turning away people who had not been once. A great guy, Billy! And so sincere!

The programme at the Stoll starts with "God save the Queen" and the first picture shown is a black and white one called "The Greater London Crusade." It is obviously addressed to an American audience and follows the lines of what are known as documentary films. It opens with scenes of the 1953 Coronation, showing the state coach on the way to Westminster Abbey and the robing and crowning of the Queen in that sacred edifice. Of course, the presentation to the Queen of a Bible as the source of all wisdom is not omitted. The reason for all this is to drive home the story of the innate spiritual and religious outlook that is the real British tradition, from which, alas, a large part of the nation has strayed. We are then shown scenes of cars on country roads and of children feeding the ducks in a park, and, horror, are told that these pictures were taken on a Sunday. (The Sabbatarian sponsors of the picture, who will not, be it noted, *show* it on a Sunday, seemingly did not object to cinematographers being employed to take it on one.) To underline the dreadful nature of car-rides and duck-feeding, we next see a church interior with a congregation of four or five at the most. This was the situation that led a group of public-spirited Christians in this country to send out a call for help to the United States for Billy Graham to come and achieve what the combined churches and chapels of Britain were failing to bring about.

The film shows us the ship bearing the redoubtable Billy, his arrival and reception at Waterloo Station, crowds going

to Harringay, converts coming forward to seek the advice of "counsellors," a children's service with film star Roy Rogers (mounted on "Trigger") performing his cowboy tricks and the final rally at Wembley (with the Archbishop of Canterbury in attendance). We hear hymns sung by the "4,000 strong" London Crusade Choir. Some of us may remember that it was only 1,000 strong last spring. As I have said, however, the picture was obviously made for American consumption; and the main activity of the Billy Graham Outfit in the States is dollar-raising, which is probably enough justification for a four-fold multiplication of the size of the choir.

The picture, "The Greater London Crusade," is, in fact, all "hokey," made for the purpose of soliciting a sort of American-aid Britain can certainly do without. Before it closes, we get a talk from the Bishop of Barking, who was the earliest of the Anglican Bishops to give Billy Graham his approval. We see him seated in his study, and he tells us that the Crusade has really started people thinking about religion. "Good!" I thought, "that is just what the N.S.S. wants them to do."

The other picture, "Souls in Conflict," is based, we are told, on the experiences of people actually converted at Harringay. It is nothing but a hash of novelettish nonsense, unconvincingly acted, but in colour. The converts are an actress, an airman and a working-class girl.

The actress, daughter of a country vicar, is already disenchanted with the glamour of stage life. At Harringay she hears one of Billy Graham's golden-voiced singers of saccharine sentiments calling sinners to come home, so home she goes to the vicarage and (one presumes) the life of a village church-worker. The airman must have been easy game for the revivalists. Even before his conversion we hear him say that Heaven seems near when he is up above the clouds. A Billy Graham baseball-player revivalist tells how he had come to realise his sinfulness, so the young airman duly visits Harringay and seeks the aid of one of the "counsellors" there.

The working-girl is a real comic. After being saved she behaves so strangely at home that her parents are worried. "It's all different now that I know Jesus died on the Cross to save me," she explains. Mother accordingly goes to Harringay and is saved herself, and becomes sweetly-reasonable ever after! Dad, meanwhile, blues his pay-packet one week-end under the erroneous belief that he has won a big pools prize. He goes home broke, expecting a nagging, to find a dreamy-eyed pair of angels in the house. "Eat your supper, dear," says yesterday's sharp-tongued shrew; and "God will look after us," adds the ex-jazz-addict daughter.

The two pictures were followed by a prayer-session, not advertised on the posters, with the usual call for converts to stand up. Others were asked to place themselves in the hands of counsellors wearing rosettes. Few responded to either appeal, but no doubt the audience of organised parties found it all very thrilling.

To anyone with a gleam of mental independence and honesty, however, it could not be other than a display of sickening cant.

People fashion their God after their own understanding. They make their God first and worship him afterwards. I should advise you however to postpone coming to any conclusion at present; and if you should happen to die in the meantime, you will stand a much better chance, should a future exist, than some of these braying parsons. —OSCAR WILDE.

GOD AND THE UNIVERSE. By Chapman Cohen. A Criticism of Professors Huxley, Eddington, Jeans and Einstein. Price, cloth 4s. 3d.; postage 3d.; paper 2s. 6d.; postage 2d.

Dirge for the Falcon

II

Long lay the grass-snake on his narrow ledge
And thought about this passion for the sky:
Of that last leap beyond the ravine's edge,
The falcon's choosing such a way to die.
He looked into remoteness, and asked why
Should height, or distance, foster those day-dreams
Of happiness—that end in roaring streams!

"What did you see, dead Falcon, in this wild,
This bottomless ravine without an end?
How is it they the wingless-ones beguiled
Into belief that wings and sky transcend
All forms of life, and flying recommend?
What is it in the sky appears so clear?
Oh, could I only fly one moment there!"

No sooner said than done: up in the air
In knotted circle shot a leaping snake,
A ribbon bright in sunshine did appear;
Th' experiment a moment took to make:
On stones he fell, but they no bones did break.
The snake forgot that creepers cannot fly:
And thought he had ascended in the sky.

The snake laughed loud, "I know the charm of flight;
The pleasure in it is the dropping down! . . .
These strange, demented birds deem they are right;
They do not know the soil; they seem to frown
On Mother Earth, as they would soon be gone;
As if they walked upon the earth with pain,
And high up in the sky would rise again."

"Birds such as these seek life in desert places,
In empty space, with light but little food;
Naught there sustains the living-body's graces.
So, why this pride? Why think none else is good?
The reason now I well have understood:
It is a cover for their mad desire,
And useless living, rousing honest ire."

"For me their speeches can deceive no more!
I know their motives! I have taught myself!
I saw the sky; I into it did soar,
And took its measure; falling on this shelf
Received no harm; believe more in myself.
Let incapacity, that loves not earth,
Seek not to cheat me, now I know its worth."

Leave now this snake and journey to the sea,
Snake full of pride curled once more in a knot:
The sunlit waves are singing of the free
High-hearted falcon that the river brought:
Their song is set down lest it be forgot:

"We sing the glorious madness of the brave,
Courageous madness, that all life can save."

"O, Falcon brave, who battled with fierce foe
Unto the death, know not in vain was shed
Your young, hot blood; yours is no tale of woe;
Those drops of precious blood like sparks are sped
Through life's dark purlieus, till they, augmented,
Kindle with mighty flame a maddening thirst
For light and freedom in souls not accurst."

"We mark your death; but does it signify
That never will you lie in warrior's grave?
Nothing is lost, to this we testify,

They do not die who great example gave.
All song is of the resolute and brave:
Freedom and valour; proper theme of glory;
The madness of the brave: life's finest story."

BAYARD SIMMONS.

Theology No Science

By LUKE STRAIGHT

AS a young man, brought up in the orthodox Christian traditions and nurtured in the normal religious atmosphere, the writer of this article had ideas of entering the Church and was ear-marked for the Nonconformist ministry. Under the guidance of his church minister and a lay-preacher of local prominence, he began to acquire a religious library. Thus equipped he began to make some study of the origin and development of the religious idea, of the growth of the Christian faith and traditions, and of comparative religions. From the orthodox textbooks on Theology, he began to acquire a knowledge of the basic structure upon which the average professional religionist builds his stock-in-trade.

It soon became apparent that the orthodox professional guides to heaven had embarked upon their voyage in an ill-found barque, with an ill-defined chart, and with an inefficient compass and faulty sextant. Such heavenly guides reiterate their claim that Theology is a Science. Theology, they assert, is derived from the Greek words *Theos*, meaning God, and *ology*, meaning science. Hence Theology—the Science of God. Such a title is so much more seemly than God-ology, which term can so very easily be vulgarised into Codology.

It soon dawned upon the mind of the writer that, whilst the textbooks taught that God possessed a host of Divine attributes, such as, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Omnipresence, etc., they were not at all convincing as to the nature of God, in which these attributes were supposed to inhere. When one began to enquire as to what precisely is that Being, Force, Power, or Influence, in which the aforementioned attributes are supposed to inhere, one found all sorts of advice, but never an answer which stood up to examination. God, one was told, is the Incomprehensible, the Indefinable, the Unfathomable, the Unknowable, the Intangible. God, no spirit, or a spirit.

But, if God is the Incomprehensible, who has comprehended it? If God is the Indefinable, who has defined it? If God is the Unfathomable, who has fathomed it? If God is the Unknowable, who has known it? If God is the Intangible, who has contacted it? If God is spirit, then what is spirit, or a spirit? How can spirit, or a spirit, be cognised and recognised? How does spirit possess definable attributes and qualities and how does human sense become aware of such phenomena? If God is a spirit, what then is the spirit of God? The spirit of a spirit would appear to be most elusive and very tenuous.

"Science" is a term which has a particular connotation. It is the word which, in any language, means the objective study and examination of a definite phenomenon. It is a study of something capable of such observation and examination, and the exact recording, as data, of the results and findings observed. Hence, the word *science* can only be legitimately employed in relation to the study of observable phenomena. There is not the slightest evidence that God, whatever it may be, comes within this category. God, then, being a word quite incapable of precise definition, cannot be a phenomenon capable of scientific examination. There can, therefore, be no such thing as the Science of God. Theology is a misnomer and a fraud.

As a militant atheist and an ardent propagandist of free-thought, secularism, materialism and determinism, this writer has often come into contact and verbal conflict with theologians of varying degrees and accomplishment. Theo-

logians, both professional and lay, endeavour to dodge the type of question most feared and detested by them, the type which permits of no equivocation, What is God? What, precisely, is the thing, object, phenomenon which Theology postulates as the possessor of Divine attributes? What is this thing which theologians purport to observe scientifically? Where *is it*? What does *it do*?

An unbeliever cannot fairly be accused of blasphemy; it is therefore not to be regarded as blasphemous, if one supposes this question to be put up in "Twenty Questions" on the radio. How would the sepulchral voice from the depths announce the *object*? Would his pronunciation of the proper noun rhyme with pod, with card, with lord or bawd? Would, say, Mr. Gilbert Harding introduce it as animal, vegetable, or mineral? Would he suggest that the object on the card was concrete or abstract, real or imaginary? Would, say, Mr. Richard Dimbleby ask if the object was pleasant or unpleasant? Would, say, Miss Anona Winn want to know with which particular sense we cognised it? Would, say, Mr. Jack Train ask, Can you eat it or drink it? Would any member of the panel ask its geographical location?

The reaction of the theologian to such direct questions is frequently along the lines that God, of course, is the Supreme Being. He fondly imagines that this is the final answer and there is nothing further to be said. But, a being is a thing, or object, which has existence, and in which properties and attributes inhere. Supreme is a word which means the best, the highest, the noblest of its kind. The further question now arises, What is the type, or class of being, of which God is supreme?

The next tack of the theologian is, that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Again he imagines he has settled the argument and pronounced the final word. But the question still remains unanswered. What is God as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe? How does it function as Creator and Sustainer? Even a creator must presumably have some powers with which to create, and presumably some material to work upon. What then are the powers of a creator-sustainer, how are they applied, and upon what are such powers effective? In what do such powers inhere? And, incidentally, what, in turn, creates and sustains a creator-sustainer?

Probably the final resort of the theologian, if he has not already lost his patience and temper, or discovered an important engagement somewhere else, is the one, that God is the Eternal Mind behind all things. But here again the theologian is in difficulty. Mind cannot be dissociated from matter. There is no shred of evidence that mind exists apart from matter. We do not know and cannot know *mind* apart from consciousness, and we cannot conceive of consciousness apart from a living organism of the animal order.

From the foregoing the writer submits that we must conclude that God is purely mythical, a personification of an idea, a creation of the human mind, or a figment of the imagination, and, finally, that Godology is codology. God belongs to the same category as Jack Frost, Santa Claus, King Neptune, Mephistopheles, and Prince Rudolph of Ruritania. Devils and angels belong to the same category as fairies, ghosts, banshees, leprechauns and mermaids. And heaven, hell, limbo and purgatory are no more substantial than Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Ruritania and Erewhorn.