

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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SCORES of articles and letters have appeared in the last few weeks purporting to "answer" the arguments of Mrs. Knight in her broadcasts of January. Examination of them shows that Christians have yet to learn the difference between an answer and a mere denunciation. Behind the position taken up by Mrs. Knight, and sketched so very briefly in the time at her disposal, lies a vast literature and history of research. Yet innumerable Christian letter-writers in the newspapers appeared to imagine that she could be disposed of by merely quoting the Bible. Many Church dignitaries were equally naive. "Atheism?" said an Australian Bishop—and one can imagine him blinking in dismay—"I thought all that had been thrashed out."

By far the most popular "argument" (if it can be dignified to merit that term) was that Atheism is stale. The *Church Times* spoke of the "enunciation of old, stale untruths"; the Bishop of Bradford, that remarkable ornament of the Christian faith who said he would "like to know who was responsible for her getting permission" to broadcast, referred to Mrs. Knight's arguments as "the same old stuff that Atheists have been using for years"; and a national newspaper saw them as "the stock-in-trade of Atheists for two hundred years."

Is Atheism Stale?

In the first place, if Atheism is so old then it is time Christians had found the answer to it. If Mrs. Knight used arguments two hundred years old, the reason is that they have not been answered in two hundred years.

In the second place, if the age of a belief tells against it, then Christianity with its two thousand years comes under the same objection. Intellectually bankrupt, Christianity survives on the great buttresses of Money and Power. On these it rests, sterile in possibilities and doctrinally threadbare. Christianity survives with a vacuum for a brain and a jewelled crown for the covering thereof.

For all the understanding most Christians show, Atheism might have been advanced for the first time yesterday, instead of being "as old as the hills." And surely the question for intelligent people is not whether it is old but whether it is *true*. And it is certainly not old for the many millions of young people who have never considered it.

Age and Truth

Are we to understand, then, that the validity of a proposition depends on its age? Is Copernican astronomy true or false according to the year in which Copernicus wrote? This surely is a new way of testing for truth. To put it plainly, it is a dishonest test. It is the test which Christian leaders have sought to apply to something they cannot answer with fact or logic.

Is Mozart stale because his music was not composed yesterday? Are the Shakesperian plays valueless because they were not written last week? Only a Christian short of an argument can so confuse age with staleness. Stale-

ness implies loss of point. A thing can become stale in two minutes, let alone two hundred years. A riddle becomes stale immediately we know the answer. The only stale thing about Atheism is the Christian inability to answer it.

None of these considerations weighs with the Christian when dealing with Atheism. He is devoid of arguments and full of adjectives. "Stale," "crude," "blatant," "dogmatic"—any of these will do, especially "stale": it is the new favourite.

It was G. K. Chesterton who set this fashion. His method was simply this: find the weak spot in your own case and accuse your

opponent of it quickly before he has time to use it. Tell scientists they are unscientific, call pioneers old-fashioned, accuse rationalists of being irrational, describe young ideas as Victorian, label reformers as hide-bound dichards, and identify Freethought with freewill. The German exponent, equally effective in this line, was Goebbels.

Now Chesterton did all this as well as it could be done, and sometimes wittily, but he can't be repeated. The same fireworks cannot be let off twice, as the literary dwarfs who have tried to ape him have discovered. One thing, therefore, *can* be said for the Chesterton species. It dies out in one generation.

God the Prerogative of Theology

Another widely used argument was that Mrs. Knight was only qualified to speak in her own field of psychology, and was "no authority on God." A Methodist minister put it this way: "I wish that some of our intellectuals who are undoubted experts in their own fields of research would not make such asses of themselves—God isn't found at the end of a telescope or a syllogism."

This piece of oratorical conjuring will deceive only those who fail to see the rabbit put into the hat first. The Christian is here making the grand assumption that theology is a science. Problems in science are solved by people with specialised training and aptitude, but the "search for God," as Chapman Cohen said, sees the fool rank equal with the philosopher. What would the Methodist minister say to a palmist who told him he had no right to criticise palmistry because he was not a palmist himself? To say that only theologians should be listened to on the subject of God, is to say that opinions on the validity of astrology should only be voiced by astrologers. Or that the verdict on Spiritualism shall be given exclusively by Spiritualists. To remove the God-belief to theology is to say that the question of God's existence is to be decided by those who already believe in him. Cohen was right. The fool and the philosopher have equal access to God. They start level in the search, and finish level at the starting post.

The problem of God is precisely the problem of how the God-idea took shape in the mental evolution of man. And

VIEWS and OPINIONS

The Broadcasts: A Summing-Up—2

By G. H. TAYLOR

that has nothing to do with theology. It has to do with anthropology and psychology.

Dr. Schweitzer

Mention was frequently made of the work of Dr. Albert Schweitzer as an example of Christianity in practice. What the Christians have signally failed to realise, however, is that Schweitzer's criticisms of the New Testament go far beyond anything Mrs. Knight was allowed to say. In outlook, the "Threefold Doctor" stands much nearer to Mrs. Knight's position than to doctrinal Christianity. In fact, an imposing list could be drawn up containing the names of unbelievers and sceptics who have benefited mankind. And the list would assuredly be much greater but for Christian persecution throughout the ages.

Many Christians seem bewildered at the prospect of squaring Atheism with decency. We are led to assume that these Christians would at once turn to crime if deprived of their Carrot and Whip, their Heaven and Hell. Their religion has always depicted man as a moral cripple, incapable of decency without bribes and punishments. Thousands who have been led to independent thought by the broadcasts may now begin to suspect that belief in fairy tales is not a necessary condition for leading useful lives. They may eventually discover they are the equal of Atheists, in respect of being able to manage without superstitions.

The Discussion with Mrs. Morton

The discussion between Mrs. Knight and Mrs. Morton found a woman of high culture faced with the most flabby fundamentalist level of debate. Mrs. Knight's professional contacts are hardly a suitable training for getting to grips with this sort of thing. Any of our experienced N.S.S. speakers, well seasoned in dealing with all types, would have wiped Mrs. Morton out in five minutes. In fairness,

however, we have to record that several representative Christian voices expressed some measure of dissatisfaction with Mrs. Morton.

One gathered from this lady's remarks that she had been rescued in some way from the Japs. We have not the slightest wish to make light of any discomforts which Mrs. Morton has suffered. But she was interpreted as implying that "God" had saved her. We do not know the circumstances of her release, but what we *do* know is God's usual method of liberation, which is to wait till the rescue squad arrives.

Mrs. Margaret Knight

Finally, *The Freethinker* pays its tribute to Mrs. Margaret Knight herself.

To Margaret Knight, the psychologist, for her scientific work in a field of first importance.

To Margaret Knight, the propagandist, for her skilful and persuasive presentation of the case for morals without religion.

And not least to Margaret Knight, the woman—who, at the moment of her sudden projection into the public gaze, retained her sense of proportion and said modestly: "I just touched off a spark which was ready to go off." Who, in a situation she could easily have exploited for her own aggrandisement, remained steadfast in her opinions and declared she had nothing to retract. Who, confronted with the most insulting and dastardly aspersions on her intelligence might have been excused some acrimony towards her enemies, but who nevertheless maintained a calm dignity in the face of fanatical religious hostility and allowed no unworthy sentiment to escape her.

To her doctrine of Scientific Humanism she added an example in good manners which stood out boldly against the background of Christian hatred.

That was her final triumph.

Streatham Debate on "Evolution and Creation"

By E. DAY

A MEETING of the Streatham Debating Society was held at the White Lion Hotel on February 25 last. The subject of debate was a motion: "That the Doctrine of Evolution disproves the Creation of Man." The Proposer was Mr. F. A. Ridley, N.S.S., and the Opposer Mr. B. H. Norris.

Opening for the motion, Mr. F. A. Ridley said that the doctrine of Evolution might now be said to be proved. It was accepted by all non-religious scientists, and even by most theologians. The Biblical account of the "six days" creation in *Genesis* was now universally abandoned, even the Pope had recently admitted that the world was 4,000 million years old! Evolution left no room for God, and people who could swallow such stories as *Genesis*, or Jonah and the Whale, could swallow anything! A perfect Creator could not, by definition, have produced a universe so full of imperfections. Life on the planets, as the Astronomer-Royal had recently said, was always the necessary product of local evolution and never of a special Act of Creation.

In reply, Mr. B. H. Norris declared that ALL attempts to establish Evolution had failed. Always there was a missing link, and all attempts to establish such a link had ended in failure. The WHOLE of the Bible was fact and was literally true, he stressed. Allegory, myth and legend had no part in the Bible at all, and he quoted parts and claimed the Bible to have forestalled Science even to the point of Evolution.

From the floor, those opposing the motion pointed out

that Evolution seemed to be another name for Reproduction and that Reproduction was not the only purpose of life. They maintained that no scientist had ever given us any evidence that the Soul existed, but the Soul does exist, they claimed, and Evolution has no bearing whatsoever on it.

Those supporting the motion countered by claiming that even though the evidence for Evolution was still incomplete, this did not make valid the claim that the hypothesis of Creation was therefore correct, and that to argue on these lines was illogical. Meanwhile, every advance of Science which had cast the slightest doubt on Church dogma was treated as heresy, and in the past, Persecution, Torture and Death had been the lot of people who had dared to support views which to-day were accepted implicitly as true.

The followers of Galileo were quoted as an example. Again, they contended, if ALL the Bible was Truth, why had the books of the Apocrypha been removed? On the question of the Soul, it would not be possible now or at any time for Science to tell us anything. The Soul, if it existed at all, was an abstraction and lay outside the limits of Science. Its existence could only be described as a hypothesis which could never be substantiated by any demonstrable evidence.

Ten speakers participated in the debate from the floor and the motion was carried by 15 votes to 4.

—NEXT WEEK—

IS OURS A SCIENTIFIC AGE?

By H. READER

The Island Beyond Japan

By F. A. RIDLEY

WHEN the invention of printing arrived in Europe towards the end of the fifteenth century, far-sighted churchmen denounced the new art as a potential danger to religious orthodoxy, not without cause! For, of all modern inventions, the printed word, which has done so much to diffuse knowledge, carries the most danger to theological, as to other forms of human ignorance. Modern literature, however much abused for reactionary purposes, has been the most powerful ally of human reason and of the mental liberation of mankind.

Apart from the major works of scientific, philosophical, and historical criticism, less ambitious works, usually described as fiction, have also played an honourable part in the task of mental emancipation. Such famous novels as Anatole France's *Penguin Island*, and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon Revisited*, must have aroused the critical instinct in thousands of mentally alert readers. Whilst, to-day, without going beyond the confines of contemporary literature, one occasionally comes across powerful and penetrating criticisms of current religious assumptions and practices. A case in point is Miss Tennyson Jesse's *Act of God*, which Messrs. Watts had the good sense to include in their widely-read *Thinkers' Library*. Few who have read this scathing satire on Lourdes and Fatima are likely to forget it. We have in mind particularly the interview with the accommodating Bishop, and his equivocal episcopal attitude towards the recent alleged appearance of the Virgin Mary in his diocese!

Quite dissimilar, but equally outstanding, is a novel published in 1929 by Mr. John Paris, entitled *The Island Beyond Japan*. Mr. Paris is quite a well known novelist, who specialises in the Far East, and his novels, depicting Japan, have been re-issued in popular editions. *The Island Beyond Japan* has not yet enjoyed such popularity, nor, we should say, in the present apparent mood of the reading public, is it likely to do so; only one edition, the initial, is listed in the official catalogue of the British Museum. The reason for this neglect of an outstanding satire is, unfortunately, obvious: Mr. Paris indicts priest-crafts and superstition with too sharp a pen! Moreover, his dialogue is too incisive, and cuts across too many popular conventions inspired by religious concepts of morality. The present writer has always deplored the neglect of this remarkable book, in particular, by the Rationalist public. It deserves, in our opinion, a place on Freethinking book-shelves among the relatively small group of works of fiction which have a permanent intellectual value by reason of the critical mentality which they embody.

"The Island" is a fictitious island called Thulia, "somewhere in the Pacific." It enjoys—if that is the right word?—a peculiar system of government, situated in a peculiar capital, and administered in a peculiar way; all vividly described by our author. Briefly, Thulia is a priestly despotism, governed in theory by a Divine Emperor, Mandobil the Fourth, but, in practice, ruled by a close corporation of priests, who exercise absolute power. For the Divine Emperor, like other gods on this side of Japan, is without "body, parts or passions." At least, if he has, no one has seen them and come back to tell the tale! For the Emperor and his court are invisible to mortal eyes, including all their Thulian subjects, with, again, the exception of the Heads of the priesthood. These visit His Divine Majesty periodically, in order to report progress in the terrestrial world below, and to convey to His Majesty the loyal greetings of his faithful subjects.

In visiting the Emperor of Thulia his subjects do not have to climb as far as Heaven. For the Emperor Mandobil and his court live amid Arcadian delights in the crater of Mount Ulamort, a fifteen thousand feet volcano, which towers over the Thulian capital. Here "above the clouds" dwell in eternal bliss the Divine Monarchs of Thulia, ever since the distant day when King Colan the Holy had retired from this world and ascended Mount Ulamort via the "cave of Divine Approach"—of which more anon. "There," declares the official textbook, "everything grows in abundance which the earth can produce, and there dwells the emperor in a palace of porphyry and gold raised, as it were, to a middle stage between Heaven and Earth, the Guardian of Mankind and their intercessor with the Nameless Ones." The Emperor has, at least, one god-like attribute. No one, except the Heads of the priesthood, has ever seen him, and, to make sure that his Divine Seclusion is respected by profane eyes, a cordon of sentries is stationed at all the approaches to the Holy Mountain, with orders to shoot all unauthorised intruders at sight.

However, once a year, His loyal subjects have access to His elevated Majesty. For once every year the Thulian priests usher a selected number of guests into the appropriately named cave of Divine Approach whereafter they become invisible to mortal eyes, and ascend into the everlasting bliss of the Divine Emperor. At least, all loyal Thulians assume that they do; since on payment to the priests, they receive news of their dear departed; "in a brief telegraphic non-committal style like news, from soldiers at the front." Only a few benighted foreigners profess a publicly concealed scepticism about the whole business. In Thulia the system, as the official text-book proudly proclaims, has worked perfectly for centuries.

"The cult of the Sacred Mountain answers man's demand for a mystery, which will never be visibly clear to him, but the general implications of which he can perceive beyond the veil. It is a perfect State religion, and Thulia is the perfect religious State. Founded upon so solid a rock, no revolution can shake her, no disintegrating doctrine can undermine her material prosperity and her spiritual peace of mind."

However, this confident prediction eventually proved to be "more than somewhat" premature. For into this priestly Garden of Eden the serpent entered in the person of a foreign diplomat, one Mr. Archibald Harrowby, who was scheduled to succeed the then British Ambassador, Sir Joachim Thyme. This gentleman was an aged diplomat of the Palmerstonian tradition, who declared that "it would be damned bad form for God to damn an old Etonian," and who eulogised his life-long passion, a game of chess, in a passage of such lyrical precision that it certainly deserves inclusion in any literary anthology devoted to that most intellectual of human pastimes. How the newly-arrived diplomat eventually found his way to the crater of the Holy Mountain and what he saw—or, rather, did not see there; forms the theme of our author's bizarre but enthralling narrative. Against the appropriate background of the erupting volcano, revolution sweeps over "The Island." The people, outraged at the priestly fraud so long practiced upon them, break into the "Cave of Divine Approach" and find it full of skulls. One massacre is then avenged by another, that of the former clerical rulers of Thulia at last detected in their age-old imposture and its bloody sequel.

(Continued on next page)

This Believing World

At last the "Sunday Dispatch" has published Mr. Godfrey's Winn's final conclusions on "Faith Healing." And at the outset, though he must have been told of thousands of cures of cancer, he insists that cancer and "diseases of a malignant nature" are *not* cured. There might be a little improvement in non-malignant cases, but that is all. Mr. Winn found out, however, that the "spiritual" healers—who are very rare—get their results from "spirits," while "divine" healers, who practise the laying-on of hands, get their power from God; striking proof, of course, that God and spirits do exist.

But when it comes to "retarded" children the healers, even with God Almighty's help, utterly fail. In fact, Mr. Winn appears to have very little faith that the Lord bothers at all in any of the sick cases. How else can he explain the "cures" among unbelievers? And even the "healers" get ill and die like ordinary people in spite of help from the spirits or God. Mr. Winn has been "bombarded" with pamphlets and "asked to believe many things he cannot believe." He would have believed them all right—and on the same evidence—if they had been written about in the Bible.

It must have thrilled the heart of the Archbishop of Canterbury with joy as he listened to the prisoners in Maidstone Jail lustily singing some grand old hymns. He was "prompted" to ask how many of them had been choir boys and, with pride, the Archbishop was told "practically the whole lot." This is a most striking proof that children properly taught religion and singing in choirs will never, never take to crime. Or is it?

The Rev. F. Coplestone, of Liverpool, must thank his lucky stars he is not living in the Ages of Faith for the pious Heads then knew how to deal with parsons or priests who complained that the Church was narrow and dull. "The Scriptures" he declared, "are often read in an uninspired way calculated to bore, and great truths are expressed in archaic words not used to-day." And he added that hymns were "vague" in meaning while the Church "suffered from bigotry." But what Mr. Coplestone did not tell his congregation was how to read the Bible without finding it boring, how to make silly hymns less "obscure," and how to attract people into a Church who have found out that the old Oriental religion taught there is simply not *true*.

The advance publicity about the coming campaign for Christ by Billy Graham is already in full swing. This does not cost him a cent and is quite as valuable for primitive Christianity as B.B.C. broadcasts. And to make the "Crusade" a success, the London *Star* gives some of the results of last year's "Mission." 34,661 Christians stood up for Christ and were enrolled. 20,350 now regularly go to church—though 1,036 declared they never went to church and had no intention of doing so. More figures are given, but they do not add up to much one way or other. So Billy is coming back this year, and the Fundamentalists in Glasgow will have him soon for six weeks. Joy in Heaven . . . of course!

Already replies have been pouring in to the daily Press in answer to the Bishop of Southwell who has, very sadly we may be sure, had to admit that Adam and Eve are myths; and that surely implies, therefore, there was no Fall of Man or any need for Jesus as a Saviour. Some of the replies make pungent reading like those of the people who also have given up Adam and Eve, but who will

never, under any circumstances, give up the Fall of Man. One writer indignantly asks how could Jesus possibly save us if there never was a Fall of Man? As in the case of many other Biblical riddles—we brokenheartedly give up answering that one.

Leicester is being shocked to its foundations by a discussion on the Colour of Jesus. Was he white or brown—or even black? Certainly if Jesus was a Palestinian Jew or Israelite he must have been brown—like the Arab. There were no white Jews or Israelites in those days. Modern Jews are not descendants of the Palestinians but of white converts made after the fall of Jerusalem—and, of course, there is a mixture of Mediterranean blood in them; and living in ghettos for centuries has perpetuated many "foreign" traits. The easiest way out of the difficulty about Jesus is to proclaim him a myth—as he was.

Chapman Cohen said—

Universal suffrage gives to every man the right to vote for a candidate selected by someone else.

God, being everywhere, has nowhere to go. Knowing everything, he has nothing to learn. He is immovable and unteachable. Pity him; and for his own sake, if not for ours, let us hope he is a myth.

No one should say, short of the clearest evidence, that a person really believes what he says. It is an aspersion on his intelligence.

An advanced politician is one who has the courage of another man's opinions.

Explaining the world by God is like trying to cross a hole in two jumps.

The laughter of the liberated mind sounds the death knell of superstition.

Who started the talk about the wisdom of old age? I suspect it was old men: If the old men of the tribe had had their way I doubt if man would ever have lost his tail.

A conscience, like the digestive organs, is in a bad way if it clamours for attention.

In matters of brute force Society honours its heroes and condemns its cowards. In intellectual matters it crucifies the heroes and crowns its cowards with honours.

The Island Beyond Japan

(Concluded from page 83)

Mr. John Paris has written a powerful satire on clerical fraud. I have only had space to outline its barest essentials. But the book abounds in original touches. The capital, also named Ulamort, which consists of one vast circular street, sets a new fashion in Utopias. The dialogue is enlivened by brilliant flashes, such as, the professor who was "one of the eminent Victorians who just fell short of eminence," or this epigram, "Suicide is the triumph of reason over animal instinct." Then, as mentioned, there is the aged diplomat's splendid eulogy of the game of chess, which verges on the classical. In overlooking *The Island Beyond Japan*, the reading public and, in particular, its rationalist section, has certainly overlooked a real contribution to critical literature.

THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3-50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Correspondents are requested to write on one side of the paper only and to make their letters as brief as possible.

To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed, or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

H. R. TURNER.—Thanks for interesting cuttings and episcopal idiocies.

C. B. DEITCHELL.—Your letter on "Billy" in your local paper is good and succinct. We shall be glad to hear results. Other matters in your letter to us passed to appropriate departments.

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, March 20, 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. (Satis Café, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, March 20, 7 p.m.: H. M. VICKRAOE, "Juvenile Delinquency."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, March 20, 6-45 p.m.: A. H. WILKINSON, "Horoscopes and Holy Water."

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 22, 7 p.m.: Rev. A. PEACOCK, (1) "World Religions—Their Changing Patterns."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, March 18, 7-15 p.m.: M. L. BURNET, "Asian Revolution."

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 20, 6-30 p.m.: F. SUGARMAN, "The Middle East in the 20th Century."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate).—Sunday, March 20, 7 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Power and the Secrets of the Jesuits."

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare St.).—Sunday, March 20, 2-30 p.m.: F. R. HORNBY, "Post-War Educational Developments."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 20, 11 a.m.: Dr. W. E. SWINTON, "Sir Arthur Keith, Anatomist and Humanist."

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Wanstead Community Centre, Wanstead House).—Thursday, March 24, 8 p.m.: Open Discussion—"History of the Christian Church."

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 20, 7-15 p.m.: B. WILLIS, "Spiritualism—Debunked."

Notes and News

"The Work of Joseph McCabe" is the title of an address to be given by Mr. Archibald Robertson at the Sunday morning meeting of the South Place Ethical Society on March 27, at 11 a.m., in the Conway Hall. The subject is of special interest to members and friends of the N.S.S., and in writing to draw attention to it Mr. J. Hutton Hynd, Secretary of "South Place," says that they will be very welcome.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £799, 10s. 2d.; W. H. D., 2s. 6d.; In Memory of E. Pankhurst, £1 1s.; James F. Kirkham (Canada), £5; A. Hancock, 1s.; E. W. Shaw, £1 1s.; Leon M. Spain, 7s. 8d.; Edward Morrison, 10s.; Mrs. A. Kean, 2s.; Mr. R. Aksed, £1. Total to date: £808 15s. 4d.

NOTE.—In our issue of March 4, a contribution to the above Fund for 5s. 6d. was erroneously credited to Mr. and Mrs. Askey. This should have read "Mr. R. Aksed," whose contribution for a further £1 is acknowledged above. We much regret the error in question and offer our apologies to Mr. Aksed.

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

Tributes to Joseph McCabe

We have had McCabe in Bradford and we all recognise the great debt this movement owes to him. We hope that some day his life will be written up for later generations, and even for those of us who have admired him so much.

BRADFORD BRANCH, N.S.S.

My husband and I were greatly grieved to learn of Mr. Joseph McCabe's death. We met him personally for the first time at the Leicester R.P.A. Conference, although we have read and enjoyed his books for many years. He was such a splendid fighter for the cause of freethought and will be greatly missed. The conversation we had with him, and the short Sunday walk round Oadby will be treasured memories of a great man.

ELIZABETH COLLINS (Mrs.), Lewes.

Religion and Morality

LIKE the political influence of religion as a means of tying together the members of the same social unit, so also the moral influence of religion has often been greatly exaggerated. I can find no solid foundation for the statements that "the beginning of all morality is to be found in religion" (Pfleiderer); that "even in the earliest period of human history religion and morality are necessary correlates of each other" (Caird); that "all moral commandments originally have the character of religious commandments" (Wundt); that in ancient society "all morality—as morality was then understood—was consecrated and enforced by religious motives and sanctions" (Robertson Smith); that the clan-god was the guardian of the tribal morality (Jevons). It seems to me to be a fact beyond dispute that the moral consciousness had originated in emotions entirely different from that feeling of uncanniness and mystery which first led to the belief in supernatural beings.

The old saying that religion was born of fear seems to hold true, in spite of quite recent assertions to the contrary. It appears that in all quarters of the savage world, fear predominates as the initial element in the religious sentiment, that people are more inclined to ascribe evil than good to the influence of supernatural beings, and that their sacrifices and other acts of worship more frequently have in view to avert misfortunes than to procure positive benefits.—(E. WESTERMARCK, *Early Beliefs and their Social Influence*.)

Henry David Thoreau

I am as desirous of being a good neighbour as I am of being a bad subject.

If there is an experiment you would like to try, try it. Do not entertain doubts if they are not agreeable to you.

It's impossible to give a soldier a good education without making him a deserter. His natural foe is the Government that drills him.

Where Stands the R.P.A.?

By H. CUTNER

LET me begin by pointing out that I have been a member of the R.P.A. for nearly 50 years, that I am still a member, and that I hope this article will not be construed into an attack on the Association to which I owe so much. I was buying R.P.A. reprints as far back as the year 1900, and it is to them that I feel nothing but gratitude for introducing me to the world of Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, Grant Allen, Spencer, and many more of the great nineteenth century writers. Later, I read John M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, Adam Gowans Whyte, Thomas Whittaker, and W. R. Cassels—but I do not want this to be a mere catalogue of names. I have grown up with the R.P.A., and I should be very sorry if even Mr. Hector Hawton felt that I was in any way unfair to its splendid work all this century.

He says that the attitude of Mr. Drapier and myself "is curiously insensitive to the tremendous changes that have taken place in the climate of opinion in the past fifty years." I wonder if he will be astonished to learn that this sentiment takes me back to 1911 when I was able to use the R.P.A. Library a great deal and had many talks with the late Charles A. Watts? He said the same thing in almost the same words. Not for him the "crude" Bible-banging, the head-on onslaughts on Christianity, the long discussions on Bible discrepancies and "atrocities," and our general "secular" aggressiveness. And as for "labels," he did not like the word "Atheism"—it alienated potential Rationalist "sympathisers." How different indeed the word Rationalism sounded! No, Mr. Watts wanted Anthropology, Evolution and Science in general to *undermine* the Christian religion—and he pointed out how he was commissioning Joseph McCabe to give lantern lectures on Evolution and other scientific subjects. If Mr. Hawton goes even as far back as 1900, and looks at the *Agnostic Annual* published then—the Twentieth Century Double Number—he will find that Mr. Watts' attitude was always the same. Above the title is stated that the number contains articles by Leslie Stephen, Haeckel, the Rev. A. W. Momerie, and Prof. J. S. Mackenzie, none of whom surely had any use for "aggressive" Secularism. It was only the gentle persuasion of science which would undermine Christianity.

There is an article in this number by F. J. Gould who believed only in the sweetest approach to the "enemy." Gould therein dealt with "Popular Freethought" of the nineteenth century, mentioning Carlile, Robert Taylor, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, as well as Huxley, Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose, among others—but says nothing whatever of G. W. Foote, excusing himself by saying that he made "no mention of the men and women whose full activities are still engaged in the promotion of" Rationalism. They belonged to the "Twentieth as well as the Nineteenth Century." This would have been fair if he had not mentioned Dr. Moncure Conway and the author of *Supernatural Religion* (then anonymous), both of whom were still living. I mention it because Foote was still classed as the "crude" aggressive Atheist who was "insensitive" to the big changes going round him in the eyes of both Watts and Gould. We had to have a different method of approach.

But Foote had been *popularising* Freethought for thirty years, and J. M. Robertson for over twenty when Gould wrote, and he mentions neither. I suspect that Robertson was omitted because he had the temerity to assert that Jesus Christ was a myth. (Robertson himself had the greatest contempt for Gould's "reverence" of religion.)

In confirmation that Watts advocated a different line of approach, look at the lists of "Honorary Associates" always shown when the R.P.A. advertised itself. As the years went by, the number rose from twelve in the above *Agnostic Annual* to just under forty in the *Rationalist Annual* for 1936. I wonder how many of all these illustrious names were responsible for "conversions" from Christianity to Rationalism? How many came into our fold through the efforts, let us say, of Prof. Bouglé, Dr. G. Evans, Prof. C. J. Patten, and others just as "famous?"

After World War 1, I started writing for *The Freethinker* and had many long talks with the late Chapman Cohen. And surely he ought to have been classed with the curiously insensitive? Not at all. He was strongly opposed to the old Bible-banging methods, as well as the "billiard-ball" atoms of the old Materialists. He wanted us to meet Christianity with the weapons of History, Philosophy, and Evolution. He had little use himself for Bible contradictions or articles on the age of the Gospels. And if Mr. Hawton would read C.C.'s articles he would see quite another method of approach to the one he no doubt thinks still obsesses "Secularists." Chapman Cohen practised what he preached—as most of our readers know.

The truth is that it is not a question of being curiously insensitive at all. We of this generation are up against exactly the same problems that Bradlaugh and Ingersoll and Foote—who all made converts—were faced with. If anything the position is worse for us. They did not have the Fundamentalist barrage we have to meet from the B.B.C.—a barrage which even elevated an ignoramus like Billy Graham to sacred heights with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Science as such has, of course, convinced the *intellectuals* in the Church that much of the Bible is completely mythological—but their followers are assured of the exact contrary. Freethought (or Rationalism) may bore a public who never go near a church, but the same public listen avidly in their millions to the B.B.C. religious broadcasts.

Some years ago, in a discussion on "advertising" Christianity, led by the Rev. C. B. Mortlock at the Publicity Club of London, in which I took part, I thoughtlessly said that nobody in the large audience there believed or could believe in the Virgin Birth. I was almost howled down. They *all* believed in it. After the meeting, I was assailed by a crowd of these hard-headed business men and women, most of them in their thirties, and told it was sheer impudence on my part to have made such a statement. Does Mr. Hawton feel that the approach made by him in the *Literary Guide* during the past few months would have had the slightest effect in gradually "converting" them?

There is nothing the Churches want more than a "Rationalist" review mostly devoted to literary articles of articles on art and music. They do not mind even articles on the "age" of the Gospels or whether archæology has proved that Abraham once lived in Ur. You can fill your Rationalist Review with articles on the "Nazarene Gospel Restored" so long as Jesus is "King" Jesus, so long as Mary is a pure Virgin, so long as, in fact, you refer to the "Son of God" as "our Lord." The Churches can stand this kind of thing for another 1,000 years and still come up smiling.

What it cannot stand is the "aggressive" Atheism which classes Jesus with other Pagan Gods, and which calls his miracles "sheer drivel." Nor can modern Rationalism

stand these things. The Churches, and modern Rationalism as envisaged by Mr. Hawton, deprecate attacks on "our Lord."

No one more bitterly attacked the Churches, particularly the Roman Church, than Joseph McCabe—but by no means so much in his early years. Let me give an example.

In the original German edition of *The Riddle of the Universe* Haeckel gave the well-known story of the "jump-

ing" Gospels which he took from *God and His Book*, by the late W. Stewart Ross (Saladin). He was fiercely and indeed foully attacked by all classes of German theologians for referring to it as the kind of thing they believed in; and McCabe begged Haeckel to omit it as Saladin had no reputation in England as a "theologian." We were doing our cause harm by printing the story—so anxious were our Rationalists to keep the movement "clean"—exactly as Mr. Hawton wants now.

(To be concluded)

Pernicious Effects of the Bible

By E. H. GROUT

AT the Reformation the tyranny of the Pope was replaced by the tyranny of the Bible. The monarchical tyranny remained so too did the arrogance, the hypocrisy, the greed, and (for the most part) the ignorance of the clergy of all denominations. The Bible became at once the touchstone of truth and a teeming fountain of cant. "The Bible says so" or "It's not in the Scriptures" was the facile mode for settling all arguments. Conversations and letters were interlarded with quotations from the Bible. It is nauseating to read (for example) Oliver Cromwell's letters, so much does he drag in Biblical texts: their appositeness is often not apparent, and some historians consider that he used them deliberately to mislead.

This Bible-mongering was just as strong in France. It became known as the Language of Canaan, and was taken up—not with all reverence!—by the flying-squad of beautiful, charmingly-dressed ladies that Catherine de Médicis maintained in order to bring pressure upon men (such as Henri of Navarre) whom she wished to get on her side. At a time when it was her policy to placate the Huguenots she encouraged her ladies to adopt the favourite Biblical phrases, and these volatile Sirens took up the new game with great zest. They would talk with a straight face of "the counsel of Gamaliel." With eyes sweetly upturned, they would say "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace!" They referred to the King as "the Lord's anointed," "the image of the living God." They called upon the Lord to "judge between me and thee!" "I call the everlasting God to witness." "Before God and his angels." When practising their proficiency in this language of Canaan, Catherine's bedchamber re-echoed with the laughter evoked by the solemn rubbish. The Belles Lettres of the time (such as the *Life of Philippe de Mornay*) show that this "take-off" is not overdone.

One of the most learned scholars of the period was Isaac Casaubon. When he showed his first book to his father and mentioned his other classical projects, the father said "he had rather have a single observation on the sacred volume than all the fine things he was concocting." Mark Pattison cites this in his biography to show what a powerful rival Biblical study was to any secular subject.

Not merely by vain repetitions and by disparagement of secular studies did the Bible have pernicious effects: it encouraged every bawling bully to get up and rant. This type found its exemplar in the fulminating Prophets and the ill-tempered curses of "our Saviour," as when he cursed the bloody cities. John Knox, that slanging, pulpit-banging, self-righteous apostle of the unco'guid, fancied himself in the rôle of Jeremiah, and was never more happy than when denouncing the Whore of Babylon with special reference to Mary, Queen of Scots. And a very large part of the laity delighted in such ranting: they looked for it in the pulpit just as it was looked for on the stage—Marlowe provided it in his *Tamburlaine*, Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus*, etc.

Certain Biblical texts have furnished the stimulus for the infliction of dreadful suffering upon harmless individuals. Chapman Cohen said that if he had to base an indictment of Christianity on two biblical texts, he would cite "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me" and "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Fortified by this Biblical authority (!), organised Christianity has time after time indulged in such widespread orgies of assault, torture, imprisonment, slaying, and burning that it is a marvel that anyone can be found brazen enough to call himself a Christian. The horrors of the Slave Traffic were likewise condoned, by reference to *Leviticus 25* and *27*.

It is not easy to track down all the vitiating effects of Biblical domination, but one writer, John Ruskin, has revealed some of them in his writings. He fantasised himself as a prophet: he'd got to denounce, he'd got to bring in Biblical passages by hook or by crook. In his childhood and early youth he had been constrained to read the Bible *aloud* every day, and to learn whole chunks of it by heart.

He continued to read the Bible as long as he read anything. He was always obsessed with the emotive rhythm, the sonority, the obscurity the archaism, and awful associations of this living text within his brain. We shall never know to what extent the obsession impeded his power of thinking, but no one who has really studied his writing will, I am convinced, deny that this obsession fatally impeded the precise externalisation of his thought. The remembered language continually intervened between the thought and its expression, and often side-tracked the thought itself. (R. H. Wilenski in *The Great Victorians*.)

A contemporary of Ruskin's, Thomas Carlyle, was also accorded the very questionable appellation of "prophet," and certainly I think he fancied himself one. The American "prophet," Emerson, visited Carlyle, and his impressions are enlightening and amusing. "I had good talk with Carlyle last night. He says over and over for months, for years, the same thing. [And that is just what Emerson did!] . . . His sneers and scoffs are thrown in every direction. He breaks every sentence with a scoffing laugh—"windbag," "monkey," "donkey," "bladder"; and let him describe whom he will, it is always "poor fellow." Carlyle was about 52 years old then. His *Reminiscences*, written when he was 71, show the same attitude of superiority expressing itself in denunciation of nearly everybody. That cute observer Herbert Spencer gives the reason in his *The Man versus the State* (p. 66)—

It is curious how commonly men continue to hold in fact, doctrines which they have rejected in name—retaining the substance after they have abandoned the form. In Theology an illustration is supplied by Carlyle, who, in his student days, giving up, as he thought, the creed of his fathers, rejected its shell only, keeping the contents; and was proved by his conceptions of the world, and man, and conduct, to be still among the sternest of Scotch Calvinists.

The unhygienic and absurd practice of kissing a Bible or a New Testament on taking an oath in a Court of Law is still persisted in, but the Oaths Act, 1888, confers the right of a witness simply to affirm.

Northern Notes

By COLIN McCALL

AT the Church Assembly, the vicar of Glaisdale spoke about ridiculous and sometimes irreverent inscriptions on tombstones and asked for them to be limited to the names of the dead person and the date of death. This is a most mundane suggestion coming from a parson. No mystical flights of fancy; no Biblical quotations; no hymns! No opportunity for displays of the rather macabre wit that I confess I enjoy. The Archdeacon of Rochdale quoted an example that he had seen, namely: "He fought the good fight—and lost." Among my own favourites is the famous epitaph in Elgin Cathedral:—

"Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde:
Hae mercy o' my soul, Lord God,
As I would do, were I Lord God
And Ye were Martin Elginbrodde."

* * *

The Rev. Wilfred Garlick, of Stockport, has been considering the problems resulting from the transfer of the peak of the wedding season from Easter and June to the month or so before the end of the financial year in time for income tax rebates. He points out that these dates normally fall in Lent and "the Church has, for centuries, held that Lent is an inappropriate time for a wedding." This is, he says, "a minor problem. . . . But it is more important as a symptom of the way that the modern pattern of life militates against the traditions of religious life." Mr. Garlick calls for a "radical new approach" to the job of reconciling the Church's festivals with the organisation of modern society. Or, perhaps modern society needs to be "more thoughtful of the traditions of the past." "The Treasury," he continues, "might be sympathetic to post-Easter weddings for instance." And "The Church must try to understand about the income tax!" How are the mighty fallen!

* * *

The Rev. Garlick also has a good deal to say about Mrs. Margaret Knight's broadcasts. He tells us that: "These topics have been debated in student groups in schools and universities for a century, at least, and the Christian faith has survived." (To which the reply would seem to be: Yes, but this is radio!) He then descends to cheap sneers. "If Mrs. Knight is right, the sooner we get these things into our heads the better. Let us close the churches and open the psychiatric clinics. We shall need them!" The reply, this time, is that we have always needed them but are only just beginning to get them. "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased. . . .?" asked Macbeth. To-day it is often possible.

* * *

A less scientific "Ministry of Healing" has been established at a church in Manchester and thousands are flocking to see apparent faith cures by the minister. It is painful to behold the cripples in bathchairs and on crutches, waiting to enter the church. Inside, when the *Daily Dispatch* reporter, Mr. G. Tansey, was there, the aisles were blocked by the bathchairs and "The blind and the hunchbacked struggled and stumbled and raised their hands to be seen." He draws our attention to the fact that "hundreds of thousands of ordinary people every day are acting in the belief that faith can do more for their physical bodies than the National Health Service." Well, here was surely a golden opportunity for decisive demonstration that the belief was justified: it does not seem to have been grasped. True, he reports, one arthritis victim who walked and another who walked "at first semi-supported, but finally,

the last few yards to a pew, alone and unaided." But did the blind regain their sight? On this matter he is silent. Were the hunchbacked straightened? Apparently it was difficult to tell. "Many were convinced, I am sure," that one man was "less hunchbacked than he had been," says Mr. Tansey, but "I should have needed medical proof of it." This illustrates a significant feature of "faith healing." Mr. Tansey needs proof: the faithful don't. The latter are convinced beforehand.

Correspondence

TWO VIEWS FROM TWO KINGSTONS

I

What a gem of wisdom from J. F. Kirkham in his "Canadian Candour" (*The Freethinker*, February 25). What is *The Freethinker* but our organ by which the truth is carried to those who are capable of thinking for themselves, or should be. But what have we in fact got? I find that my copy is useless without a dictionary and often both are discarded because the mental effort is too great. Needless to say, I am not alone in this attitude, and I am certain that our sales are not very much greater because the general reading matter is not interesting enough for the ordinary type of person who is a possible future member of our society. . . .—Yours, etc.,

Kingston-on-Thames.

E. MILLS.

II

Reference Mr. J. F. Kirkham's letter published in your February 25 issue. I write to hope that you will *not* act upon his suggestion that you go "louder and funnier." To me, the most interesting parts of your paper are the articles by Mr. F. A. Ridley and others, while the feature "This Believing World" may supply a little light relief, but cannot take their place. In case I am assumed to be one of the "converted," may I say that my views are approximately Unitarian, and I read your paper for criticism. Your lively correspondent's light-hearted reference to "collegemen" need not, perhaps, be taken too seriously, but (which *is* serious) it would be deplorable if journalistic "snippets" were made a substitute for reasoned argument—and incidentally, how boring.—Yours, etc.,

Kingston-on-Hull.

G. W. CARK.

RELIGION WITHOUT MORALS

The real importance of Mrs. Knight's broadcast lies not in what she said but in the savage reaction of her Christian detractors.

The followers of Gentle Jesus set upon her like wolves possessed by fiends.—Yours, etc.,

MOLLY ROCHE (Mrs.).

Points from Letters

Why does Mr. Ridley refer to Chapman Cohen as a Rationalist? Cohen repudiated the label.—H. IRVING.

The tide of Freethought is on the turn. Mithras showed the B.B.C. the way to Mrs. Knight.—S.B.

Dream for Winter-time

(After the French of Jean Arthur Rimbaud)

In winter, we will go in a small carriage rose

With cushions blue.

Soft transport! A nest of madcap kisses will repose

In corners soft—for two.

Thou wilt close thine eyes, to see not through the glass,

Each grimace of twilight shade,

Those snarling monsters, which will us encompass,

Demons and dark wolves to make afraid.

Then thou wilt feel upon thy lightly brushed cheek . . .

A little kiss, as if demented spider

Took thee by the neck . . .

Thou, head inclined, wilt say, "Search! I will be meek,"

—And we will take our time to find this idler

—This much-travelled speck . . .

BAYARD SIMMONS.