

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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[Recently, an English translation appeared of the famous *History of Astronomy*, by Prof. Giorgio Abetti, the Italian astronomer. Much of the information contained in the following articles is obtained from that notable work.—F. A. R.]

The science of Astronomy arose, paradoxically, in the first instance, as a branch of Theology! For the earliest observations of the Heavens were in all recorded cases made by priests, usually in connection with their astrological and magical predictions. For by far the oldest science of the Heavens was not *astronomy* but *astrology*! The priestly astrologers who first turned their inquiring gaze heavenwards, sought in the celestial bodies, not the secrets of the universe but, rather, the future secrets of mankind! It was, in fact, only gradually that the science of astronomy separated itself from the pseudo-science of astrology. Not in fact, until the era of the Renaissance did astronomy finally separate itself from the occult arts of divination.

## Astronomy Before the Greeks

The classical Hellenes, or Greeks, as the Romans styled them, were the real founders of astronomy as a genuine autonomous science. However the Greeks did not absolutely originate the science of celestial observation: they knew, and utilised, the observations of earlier races. The earliest Greek astronomers in what is now Asia Minor, learned from the lore of the "Chaldeans," the priestly rulers of Babylon, and the early Greek astronomers also learned at first hand from the ancient astronomical culture of the priestly rulers of Egypt. Both the Chaldeans and the Egyptians had made considerable progress in their study of the Heavens. They had, for example, learned to distinguish the wandering planets from the fixed stars, and had learned how to foretell, and to observe, eclipses. We possess the ancient Babylonian observations of the Solar eclipse of March 19, 721 B.C. Strange as it may appear, the most advanced knowledge of astronomical science was that of an aboriginal New World race, the Mayas of Central America. The Mayas, who lived in Yucatan, Honduras, and Guatemala, have left records of astronomical data, more accurate in some respects even than were those of the classical Greeks, and which were not surpassed until the invention of the telescope. But these observations in Central America which date back to a period about contemporary with the Greeks, had, of course, no influence on *European* astronomy, since they remained unknown until the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century of the Christian Era.

## Greek Astronomy

The classical Greeks, whose astronomical observations date back to about 600 B.C., were as stated above, not entirely original in their astronomical lore, since they actually utilised the astronomic observations of earlier Oriental races. For example, Greek astronomy began in

Greek settlements, in Asia, and not in Europe, and they knew of the discoveries of the Chaldeans. Nevertheless, just as, for instance, Shakespeare's plays are fundamentally his original works, despite his admitted "borrowings" from earlier Italian sources, so one may say that the Greeks were the real founders of Science, including astronomy. For among the Greeks no priesthood dominated culture, as it did among the Oriental races. Consequently, Greek Astronomy, like Greek Science and Philosophy in general, were able to develop the secular aspects of the study of the Heavens. Thus the Greeks were able to separate it from the priestly pseudo-sciences of divination and astrology, of

which, so far, genuine astronomy had been little more than the handmaid. With this separation one can say that the *science* of astronomy was born!

## Science and Speculation

The ancient Greeks were the most intellectually daring of all races. What they accomplished by pure speculation, and by what we may, perhaps, term intellectual imagination, can only be described as uncanny. In the field of astronomy, they anticipated practically all the discoveries of a later age. Only their lack of technique, due to their failure to keep their technical progress abreast of their astonishing speculations, prevented them from reaching the stage of knowledge which only became available in recent centuries. This later knowledge was due to the discovering of modern technical instruments, beginning with the telescope. As Leonardo da Vinci later remarked, the solitary but supreme weakness of Greek science lay in its inability to confirm its daring theories by actual *observations*.

## Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus

Even amongst the Greeks there were theologians who attempted to mould science in accordance with their theological speculations. Thus, Plato, that "Christian before Christ," taught in his book *The Timæus*, that God made the stars in accordance with Plato's own theories of numeration. He admitted, however, that the world was round, a conception which is supposed to have been put forward by the legendary Pythagoras, somewhat earlier. Plato despised observation, but Aristotle, who started as Plato's disciple, carried out observations, including astronomical. He calculated that, because the planet Mars was observed in apparent proximity to the Moon, that the Moon is nearer to the Earth than is Mars, but that the planets are nearer than the fixed stars. He also made the famous experiment of proving that the stars can be seen at midday from the bottom of a deep well. Aristotle also denounced as ridiculous the opinion that the celestial bodies are exactly the same size as they appear to us. This apparently childish view was actually held by some of the greatest of the Greek philosophers, including, strangely enough, the famous Greek Rationalist philosopher Epicurus. It is such

—VIEWS and OPINIONS—

## THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY

### 1.—ANCIENT ASTRONOMY

By F. A. RIDLEY



infantile speculations that demonstrate the Greeks' lack of elementary instruments. If only Epicurus and Co. had the telescope!

### Aristarchus of Samos, the "Copernicus of Antiquity"

The most advanced point reached by Greek astronomy was attained by Aristarchus of Samos, in the Third Century, B.C. Aristarchus made calculations of the size and distance of the sun and moon much in advance of his predecessors as regards their accuracy. He also anticipated the later discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo by announcing that the Earth went round the Sun, a belief promptly denounced as blasphemous by the contemporary pagan theologian Cleanthes. In the same manner the rediscovery of the same heliocentric theory was to be denounced nineteen centuries later by the Christian theologians in the time of Copernicus and Galileo. It must however, be pointed out that this daring speculation of Aristarchus, was never accepted by the majority of even Greek astronomers. Prior to the discovery of the telescope, it was impossible to *demonstrate* it, whilst it obviously runs counter to the plain testimony of our eyes. These *see* the sun rise in the East and set in the West. All the later Greek astronomers after Aristarchus and his pupil, Selenus, held that the sun goes round the earth. The furthest they would go was to admit that the inner planets, Mercury and Venus, might go round the sun, whilst the sun and the outer planets themselves circled round the earth. It was an opinion very flattering to the earth and to its inhabitants! Besides being "obvious" to anyone with normal eyesight!

### Hippachus, Alexandria and Ptolemy

The chief centre of Greek science, after about 300 B.C.

## Chapman Cohen on a Personal God

THE God in which religious folk believe must be a person. No genuinely religious believer has ever been foolish enough to think of God as anything else. No one could continue worshipping a God, or to pray to a God, who was no more than a mere principle or a mathematical symbol. Let anyone try the experiment of praying to something that does not possess the quality of personality, and see how long he will continue the practice. The religionist may be foolish, but he must not be obviously foolish to himself. To call anything "God" is a device that may silence a not very acute critic, but it has no religious value.

Attempts are made to evade this awkward fact by the explanation that the personality of God is higher than the personality of man. But whether it is higher or lower the fact of personality remains. It is still man's personality magnified. On the other hand, if the personality of God is different from the personality of man, then it is not personality at all, and the question of higher or lower personality does not arise. Most things may be classed as higher or lower in the group to which they belong, but that fact does not preclude their fundamental identity—the classification assumes it.

The truth is that the sophisticated religionist in trying to be profound ceases to be honest. What he sets out to do is to prove the existence of a God, and instead of doing that, he tries to establish the existence of some "principle" or some force, and then quietly assumes that he has established at least a presumption in favour of the existence of God. Actually, he has done nothing of the kind. Granting the truth of his demonstration the thing he produces is not God at all. . . .

The God in whom men have believed from the earliest times is a person, and a person in the same sense that man

was Alexandria, where the Ptolemies, Greek kings of Egypt after Alexander the Great, established a famous "Academy." One Greek scientist, Euclid, fixed the form of geometry for the next two thousand years. Another scientist, Eratosthenes, measured the circumference of the earth with substantial accuracy. Yet another, Hippachus, a native of Greek Asia Minor, made a catalogue of over a thousand stars, besides calculating the distance of the sun from the earth in *millions* of miles—though still at only about one-nineteenth of its actual distance. Hippachus seems to have finally reduced ancient astronomy to a fixed system, but his work is only known to us through that of his Egyptian successor Ptolemy (c 150 A.D.). Ptolemy was the last of the great astronomers of classical antiquity. He summarised the knowledge of the Heavens gained by the Greeks in their seven centuries' continued observation and speculation on astronomic themes. Like his master, Hippachus, he rejected the heliocentric theory, and taught that the earth was the centre of the Universe, and that the motions of the planets were regulated by a complicated system of epicycles. From the name of its last leading representative, classical astronomy was henceforth known as the "Ptolemaic" system. Ptolemy's own book, known by the later Arabic title of the "*Almagest*," was universally recognised throughout the Christian Middle Ages as the standard text book, as "the last word" on the subject of astronomy. It was, in fact, not until the Renaissance, fourteen centuries after Ptolemy, that Copernicus was to demonstrate that, in astronomy, as elsewhere, there are no "last words"! In fact, one could even add that the "last word" of all Science is that there are no "last words."

is a person. He may be wiser and greater than man, but he is still man-like. He must be able to control and direct natural forces in the interests of man, and it is this power of control which the believer has in mind when he says he believes in miracles. A religion which had a God who never interfered with natural processes, or who merely existed, would be of no use at all. A religion with a God of that sort would soon sink into a mere memory.

—(*Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought.*)

## Wisdom Well

Every pathway of modern science is closed with the sign, "No thoroughfare, by order of Moses."—T. H. HUXLEY.  
We are not born or begotten in a very spiritual fashion.—DESMOND MACCARTHY.

There is no mode of action, no form of emotion, that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only by language that we do rise above them—by language, which is the parent not the child of thought.—OSCAR WILDE.

## Self-epitaph by Andrew Marvell

I wrote that at my back I hear  
"Time's winged chariot hurrying near;"  
Now by this marble vault you see  
Time's chariot has caught up with me.

B. S.

—NEXT WEEK—

### SOME ASPECTS OF ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

By G. I. BENNETT



# Is Reasoning Enough ?

By G. H. TAYLOR

IS reason alone a sufficient guide? Does it fully equip man for forming reliable opinions? Will its application enable him to get an effective purchase on the world? Is the weapon of reason the complete answer to religious dogma?

To such questions I do not hesitate to give a categorical No. The trained reasoner may be likened to a sharpened knife ready to cut the bread of fact. And if there is nothing to cut, the knife cannot operate. Such a situation exists at the making of the gods.

Not a single sound astronomical fact is at the disposal of the primitive god-maker. The moon and stars seem almost within throwing distance. Not one datum of meteorology is at his service. The appearances and disappearances of the sun and clouds are at the whim of spirits. The wind that blows is but a magnified version of the breath he can make from his own lungs. His botanical experiences are riddled with illusion. The woods and the waters, the marshes and meres, forests and fields, flora and fauna alike, the very air itself, are peopled with spiritual entities which for his own safety he must control or propitiate. To avert their malice or gain their goodwill are matters of life and death. His physiological knowledge is confined to the ritualistic dissection of bodies. Death itself is only the escape of the imprisoned *mana*. Nothing of the psychology is known to him. He and his fellows are at the mercy of the mass suggestion attendant on ritual.

But one thing he *does* have in this turmoil of delusion and darkness: he has the power of reasoning. Without it he could not survive—could not come to terms with the practical affairs of everyday living. His reason sufficed for the making of tools and weapons equal to the task of winning his daily food. In the simple, near-to-hand matters, with easy access to facts, he can reason with success. In matters of astronomy, medicine, biology and so on he can only reason in the dark.

Note the result. He is confronted with the mighty phenomena of nature. He interprets them on the analogy of the only type of causation he knows. The only causal agency of which he has first-hand knowledge is that of himself acting as a cause producing effects. Causation therefore implies personal agency akin to his own. He and his fellows act in accordance with known motives. And so he projects his own feelings, thoughts and purposes into the external world, and proceeds to build up a pantheon of supernatural agents. The great movements and changes of nature are, for him, the working of unseen beings. Their appetites and passions are his own on a larger scale.

Only the unseen presence of powerful personal and super-personal agencies, malignant or benevolent, can explain for him the sun, the harvests, the storms and the floods. For him there can be no thunder without a Thunderer. In all this he uses reason. The belief in gods and demons becomes a necessity of thought. No other hypotheses are for him possible. Supernaturalism is the very basis of his thinking. And the whole history of man's intellectual progress is the story of his struggle to emancipate his mind from the deceptive appearances of nature.

Every natural phenomenon that met man's eyes awakened his curiosity only to lure him into error. The moon and stars seem designed to light up his path by night. With some tribes the sun is interpreted as a vast eye roving across the land. False interpretations are endless, and varied according to climatic and other definable conditions. The extra fertility of the fields adjacent to burial grounds means that the souls of departed ancestors are bestowing their favours; ancestor worship follows. Insofar

as the wind exceeds his own breath, it becomes, for the primitive reasoner, the breath of a mighty god. What is death itself but the flight of the breath from the body. The corpse is inspected and is found still to have all its parts, but no breath. The breath is therefore the soul which animates the body, and what can the wind be but the soul of a much mightier being than himself. Thunder is an angry noise. Who can its author be but a god whose voice indicates a being more powerful than himself, a dangerous god to be placated. Shadows, dreams, reflections, epilepsy, disease—all are pressing for explanation, and the result is a state of mind adequately fitted for belief in the supernatural. Ignorance of causes is the environment in which such beliefs are born. What is unknown is suspected. Primitive wonderment is the embryo of God.

Everything is shot through and through with purpose. Incalculable mishaps mean the presence of demon spirits, happy contingencies the action of friendly ones. And the purpose of the gods may be influenced by prayer, sacrifice and ritual. Even here the primitive uses his reason, because the gods themselves have to fight for survival in his esteem. Of two rival gods propitiated for the same purpose, the one that appears to grant his wishes is the survivor, and the other will be discarded. If the priests have converted the failing god into a material idol, he will often be smashed up by the disappointed supplicants.

In primitive languages the words for soul are the words for breath or shadow. Where we say "it" is thundering or "it" is raining they would say He thunders or He rains. The primitive does not say "I dreamt I saw my dead father," but "I saw my father in a dream." Examples of such usages are to be found in the Christian Bible.

The superstitions thus generated have deluged the world with blood. Through the long dark centuries of superstition and ignorance millions of prayers have been breathed out to the unalterable laws of nature. Millions of knees have bent in supplication to adamant material forces. Millions of human and animal blood sacrifices have been offered to the non-existent creatures of the imagination. Millions of lives have been spent in wars motivated by the grossest errors and fought in the interests of rival gods.

Man has been impelled, fatally and inescapably impelled, through lack of knowledge, into superstition, despair and darkness, for long ages punctuated here and there with the light of some unknown, unsung and unhonoured lone freethinker or independent fact-collector. Only after ages of toil and trial does the mind of man free itself from those deadly burdens to which, by his mistaken reading of nature he has been committed.

Gods and demons, the creations of *uninformed* reason, cannot therefore be abolished by reason alone, but by reason operating on knowledge. The scientist or philosopher to-day can reason to better effect, not necessarily because he is a better reasoner than his counterpart a thousand or ten thousand years ago, but because he is better informed. Similarly, we see farther than primitive man, not because we are necessarily better reasoners, but because we stand on his shoulders.

Without reason, progress is impossible. Without facts, valid reasoning is impossible. Religion is the product of reasoning in the darkness of ignorance. Freethought is the product of reason in the light of knowledge.

The process of mental liberation is still going on. Without its continuance man cannot emerge from the superstition and ignorance to which the long infancy of humanity has been universally doomed.



## This Believing World

Whatever else may rule TV performances—one thing stands out prominently. It is that, under no circumstances, must a show go on at a time which will keep people from church or children from Sunday school. That has been settled by the Church no matter what one thinks, and there is nothing can be done about it—except, of course, the almost still and rather small voice of Free-thought. Even poor Wilfred Pickles, whose very human “Ask Pickles” programme is shown on a Friday, will not be allowed to appear on Good Friday. Instead, viewers will have that Great Evangelist, Billy Graham, pleading for a complete return to the most primitive Fundamentalism ever preached in this country. Even “General” William Booth at his silliest rarely reached such ignorant and dismal depths.

Some enterprising impresario should get the Rev. B. Graham and the Rev. R. C. Gaul, rector of Rand in Lincolnshire, on the same platform to argue out the Church of Christ—whatever that is. According to the *Sunday Pictorial*, Mr. Gaul is a “rebel” lashing out at the Church and bishops and non-churchgoers and even the Lord’s Day Observance Society. He certainly says what he thinks, but—and there is a big but—are not some of the things he does believe in, like those of Billy Graham, just as silly? Are not the Virgin Birth, the wholesale resurrection of Jewish saints, the aerial flight of Jesus, solo and with a Devil, the idiotic miracles in the Gospels, even more stupid than many of the “evils” he tilts at?

To prove that “Divine” healing can do anything that “spiritual” healing can do, the Rev. A. Holmes has been demonstrating in the Cavendish Chapel, Manchester, how splendidly he can cure incurable cases. He dismisses with contempt all spirit doctors and similar spooks. He insists that “it is God who does the healing. All you need is the belief that you can heal and anyone can do it.” And here we have our National Health Service spending hundreds of millions of pounds to cure sick people when it could all be done for nix if we followed Mr. Holmes’ God-like advice. It seems incredible. And not only that. “Jesus Christ,” adds Mr. Holmes, “can bring us into at-one-ment with God and the peace that passeth all understanding.” This drivel comes up for human consumption over and over again—but what does it mean?

Edited by a Roman Catholic, that much read American weekly, *Time*, recently told its readers that 96 per cent. of U.S. citizens, polled by a Gallup survey, all believed in the existence of God. Their reasons are interesting. 1. The order and majesty of the world around us. 2. There must be a Creator to explain the origin of man and the world. 3. There is proof in the Bible or in other Church authority. 4. Past experiences of life give faith that there is a God. 5. Believing in God brings comfort. All these naive reasons can be classed under the heading of the Design Argument.

It need hardly be said to Freethinkers that the Design Argument has been pulverised even by all-believing Theists like the late W. H. Gillespie—the Scotch metaphysician who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, crossed swords with Bradlaugh—no mean opponent. In any case, George Jacob Holyoake made mincemeat of the above five arguments in his *Trial of Theism*—now unfortunately no longer read, not even by Freethinkers.

In the Dark and Middle Ages, the only things Christians wanted of Jews was to imprison them in ghettos, pinch

their money, and steal their Bible which, with many in-human massacres, they did pretty thoroughly. Nowadays, there is a special “Council” of Jews and Christians which was even joined by Roman Catholics. Not for long however. That fine Christian institution, the Vatican, has decreed that Roman Catholics must quit the body forthwith—which they have done with almost indecent haste, in spite of the fact that the Queen is the Council’s patron. Nobody really knows why—and even the Catholic *Tablet* protests that “the reasons should have been stated carefully and fully.”

But why should anybody be surprised? Catholics do as they are told. Look at the riots in Belgium where gangs of Catholic roughs are causing immense riots and damage in protest against the Belgian government’s decision not to subsidise Catholic schools as heavily as before. These pious bullies are doing their utmost to put the fear of the Lord and the Vatican into the Government which must do as the Vatican dictates. We hope that this impudent threat will be vigorously combatted and defeated.

## SCIENCE FRONT

### “Piltdown Man”

THE debunking of the Piltdown Man (*Eoanthropus dawsonii*) has been of immeasurable relief to scientists. Previously they were at a loss to fit the specimen into any proper place in man’s lineage. And in case you imagine that science innocently duped the world for thirty years you should know that the Piltdown man was the most controversial specimen of recent times. Indeed, the late Franz Weidenreich, distinguished German paleontologist, openly scorned the idea that it had anything to do with man’s origin and stubbornly maintained that the jaw of the specimen was that of an orang-utang—an unusually baffling assertion since the apes have always been unknown to Britain where it was found, though time has, needless to say, proven him correct.

The fact that the skull and jaw of Piltdown were disharmonious and inconsistent was the common objection to its authenticity by at least a dozen distinguished scholars years ago. Its elimination from the picture of evolution as drawn by modern science does not in any way injure the truth of evolution, and assumptions to that effect are vapid and dishonest.

But when the discovery of its fraudulency was first made known, several clergymen lost no time in using it as an instrument of ridicule against natural science. I immediately set about vindicating the wholly scientific procedure followed by the Museum of Natural History in London and I cited the sceptical opinions of such leading experts as Sir A. Keith and others in contrast to the narrow and foolish conception of some clergymen who were talking very loud but who obviously knew very little. Naturally my effrontery in criticizing a clergyman precluded the possibility of my message reaching the public. And not a single scientific periodical in America made the slightest effort to show that the majority of experts were sceptical of Piltdown, and that his refutation was of no disappointment to anthropologists. The sole exception was, I believe, the *Scientific American*, which devoted only a few grudging columns to the subject.—(Frank Volkmann, *Progressive World*, March, 1955.)

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# 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.

MR. A. McELVAIN (U.S.A.) writes: "Atheism should be made to mean a dogmatic denial of all super-naturalism only, and a neutral position on the point of natural religion. It is not altogether superstitious to trust the god of nature who raised a jungle beast up to the modern man." What is your "natural religion" and your "god of nature"? *The Freethinker* is against all religions and every sort of god. Man must save himself.

MR. K. LIDAKS writes: "The happiest hunting grounds for the Christian priesthood are badly-fed, poor, partly over-populated, uneducated, superstitious and crime-ridden countries where the inhabitants are mentally and physically tired, or sick people."

## 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, April 10, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

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

## Notes and News

We are asked to note the following Resolution accepted by the General Conference of U.N.E.S.C.O. in Montevideo in December last.

The General Conference, having discussed the Report of the Director-General on the International Petition in favour of Esperanto:—

(1) Takes note of the results attained by Esperanto in international relations and in the rapprochement of the peoples of the world; (2) recognises that these results correspond with the ideals of U.N.E.S.C.O.; takes note that several Member States have announced their readiness to introduce the teaching of Esperanto in their schools.

We are pleased to learn from Mr. B. J. Edcombe, one of our enthusiastic readers, that a translation of Chapman Cohen's pamphlet "The Meaning and Value of Free-thought," appears as an article in this month's *Sennaciulo*, an international Esperanto journal. The translation is by British Freethinker, "Verdiro."

This should prove of interest to all our Esperantist readers.

A reader of *The Freethinker*, Mr. Peter E. J. Jordan, would be glad to hear from other readers in Bristol and district who, like him, would like to see an N.S.S. branch established in that historic city. Those who in that city of adventurers would like to aid Mr. Jordan help him and their fellow Bristolians in the discovery of the Truth about the Gods can communicate with Mr. Jordan at his address, 18, Pembroke Road, Southville, Bristol, 3.

Our distinguished subscriber, Mrs. Margaret Knight, in

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £820 14s. 4d; Mrs. Margaret Knight (Aberdeenshire), £3 3s.; J. P. Tuck, 13s.; T. Brooks, 2s. 6d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; W. D. H., 2s. 6d.; G. L. Dickinson, 10s.; Total to date, £825 6s. 4d.

Will subscribers please indicate "second contribution," "third," "weekly," etc., and it will then be acknowledged as such. The purpose of the Fund is to keep "The Freethinker" in existence.

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

sending her donation to the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund, writes appreciatively of *The Freethinker*, which has her best wishes. Letters concerning her broadcasts are still reaching her, and have now exceeded 1,700. The first 1,150 were classed by her as follows: 58 per cent. favourable, 33 per cent. unfavourable, and the rest mixed. Mrs. Knight's book, *Morals Without Religion*, published by Dennis Dobson, will be out soon, and will be reviewed in these columns.

Mr. G. H. Taylor's book, *Can Materialism Explain Mind?* has been selected by the international Institute of Philosophy for a summary in their bibliographical service. The book is obtainable from the Pioneer Press, 41, Grays Inn Road, W.C.1, at 4s. (postage 3d.).

## NOTTINGHAM DEBATE

About 50 young people, mostly from Grammar Schools, attended, in connection with a Youth Fellowship, a debate at Woodthorpe Church Hall on the proposition "That this House agrees with Mrs. Margaret Knight that ethics should be taught independently of religion."

Mr. T. M. Mosley, of the N.S.S., taking the affirmative, said that ethics had arisen out of man's social experience and had nothing to do with gods, ghosts and spirits. Ethics were concerned only with human relationships, Christian ethics were founded on fears and bribes. The welfare of man was a criterion we could understand, but the "Will of God" was quite unintelligible, and disputes about it had led to bloodshed and persecution.

Opposing the motion, the Rev. J. C. Weller accepted his opponent's definition of religion as the belief in, and worship of, supernatural or spiritual beings, but contended it was wrong to base ethics on merely human considerations. Man needed a higher authority, which, for Christians, meant Jesus Christ, who gave ethical behaviour a religious sanction.

Mr. Mosley pointed out that Christ's ethics were not original, and in any case a reward in Heaven was an unethical reason for doing good.

The questions were mostly put to the Rev. J. C. Weller by his own flock, and the chairman himself vacated the chair to oppose the Christian view.

## Ruskin

Ruskin was not exactly a great thinker. He was rather a man with great thoughts. He was sometimes splendid, frequently beautiful, and occasionally whimsical. The sovereign mind of Shakespeare—so sane as well as colossal—could think of "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come." Mr. Ruskin was always apt to revert his gaze towards the past, to dwell upon the world as it was in the days of his youth. Hence he hated railways, and cursed the modern development of machinery. He forgot, as William Morris forgot, that the stream of time cannot be stopped, much less turned back. All of us, both small and great, have to go with it. The utmost that anyone can do is to modify things a little from day to day, and from year to year. We may steer our course a little with the stream; we can do nothing against it.—G. W. FOOTE.

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# Some Notes on a New Gospel—1

By H. CUTNER

EVERY now and then we are favoured with a new "Life" of Jesus, or the announcement that a new Gospel has been written, or fragments of a very old one have been discovered. They are all (or nearly all) "factual," that is, they all insist that Jesus Christ—who was not only the Son of God but God himself—really lived in Palestine at the period assigned to him in the Authorised Version, even if scholarship can now show that the A.V. is packed with a lot of nonsense, too much even for our Bishops.

The absurd thesis (as we are told) that there never was a Jesus Christ is so silly that no self-respecting Christian or even a reverent Rationalist will these days deign to discuss it. And if it is submitted that such things as Devils and Miracles are impossible, and that without them Christianity would lose its most important props—the answer is dead easy. Impossible or not, the events in which Devils and Miracles took part really happened, and that's that. Day in and day out, the B.B.C. fiercely blares in many of its religious programmes, the Christian Message that everything in the A.V. literally took place.

But not everybody, not even full believers in Jesus Christ as the Despised and Rejected of Men as well as King Jesus can accept our famous Authorised Version. Two of these are Messrs. Robert Graves and Joshua Podro, and they have produced a big book entitled *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* of nearly 1,000 pages, in which, with great detail, and a scholarship few of us can hope to equal in this field, have done their best to knock out part of the Precious Word of God known in this country since 1611, and have produced the "original" Gospel as it was first written—or as they say it was first written. The Greek Gospels, from which our A.V. was translated, they tell us "judged by Greek literary standards, are poor; by historical standards, unreliable; and their doctrine is confused and contradictory. The late Victorian Atheist (was it Bradlaugh?) may be excused for remarking that they read as though 'concocted by illiterate, half-starved visionaries in some dark corner of a Græco-Syrian slum.'"

Freethought critics have, for nearly two centuries, shown that the Gospels were certainly "confused and contradictory"; and they have long pointed out that, as we have them, they have been edited and re-edited. In fact, nobody knows who wrote them or when or where they were written. Messrs. G. and P. tell us that the "original" was "terse, factually accurate and intellectually satisfying"—to us? Well, not exactly. Only "to those chosen students of the Law and prophets for whom it was primarily intended."

And what happened to this precious "original"? "Gentile heretics pirated it, mistranslated it into pedestrian Greek, recast it, and then subjected it to a century-long process of emandation and manipulation."

This is a very subtle way of disposing of W. R. Cassels' great book, *Supernatural Religion*. In that work, the author proved that the Gospels we have were unknown before the year A.D. 150—though, of course, dozens of Gospels and Acts and Epistles were constantly being produced both before and after. There may have been an "original"—but it is quite unknown. A "primitive" document named "Q" was suggested as a probable "original" but, as nobody has ever seen it, is now almost completely given up; and other suggestions crop up every now and then, including new Gospels—like this *Nazarene Gospel Restored*, which does not appear to be very enthusiastically received.

To attempt to deal with all the statements made by our two authors would be a herculean task. One would

require a work as big as theirs to examine the hundreds of dubious arguments with which they try to justify their rejection of the received text of the New Testament and to supplant it with their own "reconstruction."

In passing, for example, let us take the statement made in the *Literary Guide*, November, 1954—"The earliest surviving Gospel manuscript, the Syriac *Codex Sinaiticus*—now in the British Museum—states downrightedly: Joseph to whom was espoused the Virgin Mary, begat Jesus, who is called the Christ." I took the trouble to look this up in *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* where I found, on page 68, "the Syriac *Codex Sinaiticus*" was called the "Sinaitic Syriac text."

Now, the famous *Codex Sinaiticus* discovered by Dr. Tischendorf, and which is in the British Museum, does not say "downrightedly" that Joseph "begat" Jesus, but that he married Mary "of whom was born Jesus." But Messrs. G. and P. use the words "*Codex Sinaiticus*" as a description of the Syriac MS, no doubt for the benefit of the "lay" readers of the *Literary Guide*, few of whom, if any any at all, would take the trouble to look up the reference.

The "Sinaitic Syriac" text is the proper description, and in their book there is nothing said about it being "the earliest surviving Gospel manuscript." (At least, if the book does say so, I have not come across the passage. There is no Index, and it is very difficult to retrace many passages.) But what is not told the reader is that the quoted text, "if it denies the divine birth, cannot be original, may easily be shown. . . ." Sir F. Kenyon, in his *Textual Criticism of the New Testament* deals exhaustively, not only with the discovery of this Syriac manuscript, but also shows that the writer knew all about the orthodox Virgin Birth, and that therefore the text, hurled at their readers so confidently by Messrs. G. and P. "is not the true form of the text." It took me no little time to track down all the information I could about the Sinaitic Syriac text—and I give this as an example of the immense difficulty one must face when examining the thousands of statements with which their book is packed.

Yet after thus quoting the "Sinaiticus" that Joseph "espoused" Mary and "begat Jesus," do they believe that Mary was the Mother of Jesus? Not a bit of it—Joseph was his father, but Mary was definitely *not* his Mother. There was no Virgin Birth as understood by the Church. The mother of Jesus was Joseph's first wife "of respectable Davidic parentage"—it had to be "respectable," of course—and nothing more is meant by "virgin birth" than that Jesus was "born again," in fact, became the "new Adam." This theory is put forward quite solemnly and is, no doubt whatever, as good as any other. So long as we can keep Jesus Christ going, any theory will do. The important thing is to smash those damnable heretics who believe that Jesus is a myth.

## Defender of the Faith

Henry VIII maintained the laws against heresy with equal vigour both before and after his quarrel with God's vicar. After the Six Articles—the whip with six strings, as it was called—were promulgated, there might be seen the spectacle of Lutheran deniers of transubstantiation and Catholic deniers of the king's supremacy dragged together for execution, with the nice distinction that Protestants were to be burnt and Catholics hung. For Henry remained a Catholic.

**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.



# The Unbelief of Christians

By E. H. GROUT

IT is well-known that the Bible abounds in illogicalities, inconsistencies, and contradictions. Foote and Ball neatly grouped them in the *Bible Handbook*. The text of ii Timothy 3: 16 ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God") is discredited by honest students of the Bible. The Archbishops' Report on "*Doctrine in the Church of England*" (published in 1938 by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge) contains this significant admission:

The tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible commonly held in the Church until the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal. (p. 27.)

For eighteen centuries or so the Church has been claiming that the Bible is God's own word: it has taken a long time to acknowledge this error. But the Roman Catholic Church did not join in this acknowledgment, and I doubt whether the Anglican Church or the Nonconformist "bodies" make this acknowledgment in their preaching in general. As recently as 1863, Dr. E. B. Pusey, that saintly man with the famous stoop of humility, drew up a declaration of belief in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and in everlasting torments. This was sent to every clergyman in England, and obtained 11,000 signatures. (see H. B. Bonner: *The Christian Hell*, p.89).

Actions speak louder than words. Never at any time has the Church believed in the Scriptures as having been revealed by God. The nearer to the origins of the Church, the less likely such a belief, for the writers of the books were known. And there were not lacking other writers who refuted the statements of the Christian propagandists. What has become of these opposition writings? Destroyed by Christians and known to us only (as in Origen: *Contra Celsum*) by Christian attempts at rebuttal. This destruction of documents has occasioned much vexation and frustration to research students. In his book, *Possession*, Prof. T. K. Oesterreich refers to it more in anger than in sorrow:—

How few fragments of the copious Hellenic literature have come down to us! With what difficulty do we reconstruct the richly developed religious life of Hellas! and how often we have nothing but the information involuntarily preserved in the polemical works of the Christians to serve as a basis for conclusions *à posteriori* on lost writings! The invasion of the barbarians who conquered the Roman Empire has destroyed infinitely less than did the Christian hatred and persecution of the heathen.

This destruction of opponents' books reveals a profound distrust in one's ability to answer them satisfactorily. More, it shows an utter disbelief that God inspired the Scriptures. If the omnipotent God were really on one's side, what need to fear opposition? But the Christians were (and are) very much afraid of opposition, precisely because they knew (and know) that their claims were trumped up. The Bible is no more sacred than the *Vedas* of India or the *Analects* of China. No infinite God incarnated himself in finite man. The people who were nearest to the alleged events—the Jews—have repudiated them.

This destruction of anti-Christian books has continued. In his *Life of Charles Bradlaugh*, John M. Robertson mentions that Bradlaugh's book, *The Bible, What It Is*, had become so scarce that Robertson himself had been unable to get a copy. He adds in a footnote:

There is some reason to suspect that there has happened in this country what Bibliophile Jacob, in his preface to his edition of Cyrano de Bergerac, declares to have happened on a large scale in France—a zealous destruction of Free-thinking works by pious purchasers.

This unwonted scarcity of Freethought literature on the second-hand market quite accords with my own experience. But if the sacred volume were the authentic voice of God, surely it could have stood up to the criticisms of mere man. It is an irrefutable admission of guilt to burn a book because one cannot answer its arguments.

But the Christian Church has not been satisfied with destroying documents: it has destroyed the writers whenever it could do so with impunity. When it suited Christians they declared loudly that "God is Love," but this did not prevent them from killing their opponents—or rather, people that merely differed in some particular. Thus Thomas Badby of Evesham was burnt alive, not because he didn't believe in the Christian God, but because he didn't believe that a priest by muttering a few words could change a wafer into the body of Christ. This incantation business is not religion, but magic. Of all the millions who profess Romanism and Anglicanism, how many do you think really believe in this senseless miracle? How many of those who chew the wafer really believe that they are chewing a bit of body? Most of them would shudder at the idea of eating a bit of horse—the whole idea of God-eating is savage and revolting. The religion was founded in make-believe, and is continued in make-believe.

The motto of the Freethinkers is: *We seek for Truth*. The motto of the Christians is: *Be my brother, or I'll kill you*. The history of Christianity abounds in brutal murders and conversion under intimidation. One instance must suffice for now. In some of the valleys of Piedmont lived a Protestant community of Waldenses. They suffered brutal massacres by Catholics on several occasions. D'Aubigne (*The Protector*, p.238) describes what happened in the massacre of 1655:

15,000 men entered their valleys. It is almost impossible to enumerate the atrocities that were committed. Twenty-two villages were reduced to ashes; aged people of both sexes were burnt in their houses; men were hewn in pieces, women were impaled naked. . . . Women and children were abused; their breasts were cut off, and then fried and eaten by these cannibals. Others had their bodies filled with gunpowder, to which a match was then applied.

The heart-rending account goes on, but I spare the reader. It was this foul crime that evoked Milton's sonnet beginning, "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints."

These persecutions could never have been perpetrated by people who really believed that God was on their side. The hymn says, "If God is for us who can be against us?" In practice that is regarded as a hypothetical proposition with emphasis on the *if*. A Christian who had real belief that his endowment in heaven was fully paid up, would have nothing but tenderness and pity for heretics who had not yet come into benefit. He would wish to "snatch them in pity from sin and the grave," to preach unto them the glad tidings of salvation, to pass on the good news from Aix to Ghent, as it were.

People don't get excited when someone denies a truth of which they are fully assured. If someone denies that twice seven is fourteen, people just say, "Go over it again, my boy, and you'll find that it is." That's the calm method of full assurance.

People get excited when someone denies a statement that they themselves doubt, but have made a profession of believing, and wish very much to believe—but can't. They are looking out for something to bolster up their belief, and then this interloper turns up and knocks another hole in it: human nature finds this hard to tolerate.



# This Billy Graham Business

By P. VICTOR MORRIS

THE great Billy is the figurehead of a business organisation. It is a mistake to regard him as an outstanding personality. Without the organisation he would be nothing.

The business is that of professional promoters of temporary exhibitions of religious fervour. A great part of the activities consists in money-raising schemes, and this is carried on mainly in America. The appeal for funds is based on promises made to the types known in the U.S.A. as "suckers" and "business tycoons." Given the dollars, Billy Graham's "Hour-of-Decision" organisation will rescue "free" Europe for Christ, hold back the "Reds," save American cities from "atomic" annihilation and pay material dividends to supporters. The scale of operations last year in London and this year in Glasgow show how generous has been the response.

On this side of the Atlantic the clergy are promised an advertisement that will bring more worshippers regularly to their churches. Last year many of them believed this and gave help enthusiastically in order to provide Mr. Graham with the large crowds that he could have filmed to show in America and raise still more money. If the Glasgow parsons who are doing likewise this year were to consult London ones who were disappointed twelve months ago they might think twice before co-operating with the go-getters who have brought the dollars to our shores.

I went to Billy Graham's first meeting at Harringay. Did I think, as I looked round the crowded arena, "Sinners in search of God?" No, for most of those I could see were clearly nothing of the kind. They were members of church and chapel parties having a night out, with a sprinkling of others drawn there by curiosity aroused by all the publicity lavished on the great man. I wondered why so many believers had to be present. I should have been more impressed if the place had been filled with non-churchgoers. I could not see how the evangelist could carry out his announced intention of winning sinners back to God when most of the seats had been claimed in advance by the saved.

Preliminary musical items by the choir and solo performers, and talks and prayers by lesser lights, struck me as a deliberate attempt to build up expectancy for the moment when the chief speaker would take the rostrum. A Heaven-sent messenger ought not, I thought, to need such human aid. However, when Billy's turn came, I realised how necessary it was. He is by no means a spell-binder. His voice has a metallic, rasping quality, and gains nothing from the microphone and amplifiers needed to carry it to everyone in a large gathering.

God has not given him the powers of oratory and persuasiveness, but his monotonous flow of evangelistic verbiage may well have an hypnotic effect on unbalanced and impressionable human material in an uncritical crowd. His matter is both ethically and intellectually deplorable. The Bible says this and the Bible says that, and there is no need to consider much else. Think of all there is to fear in life to-day, all the worries you have, all the awful things that may happen, and do nothing about anything except surrender yourself to Jesus and spend the rest of your life singing doggerel hymns and smiling. And, of course, go to church regularly.

What an opportunity God and Billy Graham missed that night! If only the eloquence of the latter had succeeded in making me feel the saving power of the former, and I had joined the stream of those going forward to seek "counsel" at the end of the meeting, what a scoop it would have been

for the pair of them! A lifelong follower of Bradlaugh, Foote and Cohen, and one who had attained some measure of recognition in the National Secular Society would certainly have been a catch. God and Billy were certainly slow.

Scratch the surface of Billy Graham's "successes" and you find that there is nothing underneath. He gets his crowds by sensational advertising and planned "packing." He gets a temporary emotional response only from those prone to make a display of "conversion" when the occasion arises. They turn out to be church members already, curious youngsters and mentally unstable and retarded subjects, when the results are analysed.

The clergy of London know this from experience, but dare not give the game away. The clergy of every other place selected for a "Crusade" will learn it, if unaware of it already. Billy Graham knows it, but why give up a business that is so easy to run and pays such a good salary and expenses? Meanwhile the press and radio combine to keep the poor British public in ignorance of the truth about this enterprise, as it is about so many other things.

## Correspondence

### THE ONLY FREE VOICE LEFT

I am increasing my subscription to £1 per half year, instead of 12s., as I know that *The Freethinker* must flourish, the only free voice now left in this country.

There must be many who cannot afford to increase their subs.; but those who can should do so.

I leave my copies of *The Freethinker* in the reading rooms of public libraries.—Yours, etc.,

(Mrs.) A. B. MITCHELL.

### "BIBLE OWNERSHIP URGED"

Under the above heading, I read in *The Daily Telegraph* (February 28) that the Minister of Education says, "Every secondary school child should have a bible," because he was shocked by the short supply of bibles. If the Minister had practical experience of pupil's usage and estimate of what they read in the bible, he would be shocked, again. Teachers know that scholars gloat over spicily bits. . . .

The bible should be ousted from all schools, and replaced by elementary and advanced scientific text-books.—Yours, etc.,

WM. AUGUSTUS VAUGHAN.

### DOLLARS FROM THE DEVIL.

Mr. Hector Hawton quotes "General" Booth as saying: "Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?" but the question is much older than Booth, for it was used by the Rev. C. C. Colton in a book entitled "Those who Think," published in 1833.

A book entitled "Darkest England," is also thought to be by Booth. The manuscript of the book was written by Frank Smith, one time member of the London County Council, and sold when Smith was very poor, to Booth for a song. With the exception of the Bishops, Booth was one of the cleverest coin collectors in the Christian racket. In one biography of him I read that after addressing a mass meeting in America, the chairman called for sinners to come forward with their dollars and dimes, nothing too big, nothing too small. A bandit with a face like the back of a smashed bus came forward with the crowd converted to Christ, and taking out a wad of dirty notes dropped them on the table. The chairman, knowing the bandit, placed his hand on the notes, and whispered to the "General": "Do not take these notes General, they are tainted." Booth replied: "Tainted or not, we will put them in the bag and I will cleanse them with the blood of Jesus."

The "Army" prospered on the degradation that poverty had brought to millions. He offered them nothing on earth but blood, sweat and tears, and promised them eternal life in heaven.—Yours, etc.,

PAUL VARNEY.