

# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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WHAT the late Joseph McCabe once termed, "the tremendous drama of Christian origins," had its historic roots in several spheres of human existence. The *theological* origins of Christianity have been exhaustively elaborated by such eminent Freethinking scholars as, to name only a few English ones, Walter Cassels, John M. Robertson, Joseph McCabe, and Gordon Rylands. However, the Christian religion, like other historical phenomena, did not arise miraculously in a vacuum. It also was deeply rooted in the social sphere. This aspect of Christian origin, one of at least equal importance with its purely theological origins has been, by comparison, very much neglected by rationalistic critics. As might be expected, the Marxist school has done valuable work in this field of study, to be sure, Karl Kautsky's monumental work, *The Foundations of Christianity*, is still the outstanding contribution to the still imperfectly explored problem of the social, as distinct from the theological, origins of Christianity. Unfortunately, though the English translation is, we believe, still extant, Kautsky's *magnum opus* has never been very well known in this country.

### Three Christian Sources

Our French contemporary, *La Raison Militante*, the militant organ of French Freethought and its scholarly interpreter, recently made the interesting suggestion that Christianity originally arose from the confluence of three currents of social and religious activity in the ancient world. These were, respectively, the Sybilline Books, the apocalyptic visions of the Jews, and the slave revolts of the Roman world, which culminated in the great slave-insurrection of Spartacus in the first century prior to the Christian era—73-71 B.C. Whilst this list of Christian sources is not exhaustive, there is, no doubt, a good deal of truth in it, and one might do worse than consider briefly its probable implications.

### Christian "Gnosticism"

As the late Mr. L. Gordon Rylands demonstrated in his book, *The Beginnings of Gnostic Christianity*, Christian theology began amongst the gnostic sects on the fringe of orthodox Christianity. The Pauline writer (or writers) and, in particular, the author of the gospel "according to John," were fully-fledged Gnostics, who taught a "mystery of redemption" at which the outside world could only dimly guess.

The first three Gospels represented, it seems, the popular teaching about Jesus intended for the uninitiated crowd of rank and file believers. If one agrees with John M. Robertson, or Gordon Rylands himself, that there was no historical Jesus, this must have been so—the Gnostics put out our synoptic gospels as *conscious* popular fiction. However, it was only with the passing of time, and with the subsequent growth of Christianity, that the Gnostic books in the New Testament became widely influential at the pre-

cise era in which the Christian Church first emerged from the Jewish Synagogue, the really influential gnostic books which circulated, not only amongst the Jews, but, equally, well known all over the Pagan world as well, were the now imperfectly known "Sybilline Oracles." It is this mystical hotch-potch of prophecies of impending doom, composed by unknown authors, some of them probably composed by gnostic heretics on the fringe of the Church, that our French contemporary considers to have been an important source of Christianity.

During the precise period in which Christianity emerged and took shape, a whole mystical and prophetic literature, ascribed to

the Pagan prophetesses, the Sybils, was in active circulation throughout both the Jewish and the Pagan worlds. This literary sub-species can be approximately dated from a little before the Christian era, until a little later than the Fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). It represented a mystical undercurrent of threats, denunciations, and prophecies of redemption, of which direct echoes appear to be found in our New Testament, actually written about the same time. This prophetic literature, ascribed to the authorship of half supernatural prophetesses, had, undoubtedly, considerable influence in Christian circles, who ascribed its prophecies of redemption and judgment, to their own creed. The anonymous "Sybilline" oracles represented a Pagan gnosticism, which was closely allied with, and, perhaps, to some extent, actually inspired by, Christian gnosticism, the original form of Christian theology and the Christian creeds.

### The Apocalypse

Another contemporary literature, of which we know much more, and of which actual representatives are to be found in both our Old and New Testaments, is represented by the strictly Jewish Apocalyptic, or Messianic literature. The belief in a Messiah, a national redeemer of Israel, was widely current amongst the Jews during the period when Christianity first saw the light, and it is still, to-day, a dogma of Judaism that Messiah will eventually arrive. The early Christian Scriptures are full of the conception, which undoubtedly played an important, perhaps even a decisive, part in the origins of Christianity. Two actual Apocalypses are to be found within the covers of our Old and New Testaments; in the Old Testament we have the *Book of Daniel*, which the French freethinking scholar, M. Louis Couchoud, has indicated as the first Apocalypse, and the prototype of all the others; which first proclaimed the future coming of the Messiah. Whilst in our New Testament, we have our *Book of Revelation*, sometimes actually called *The Apocalypse*, which vividly describes in language of always intricate and often terrifying symbolism, the coming of the Messiah, his destruction of the Roman Empire, and the coming of the millenium for Israel. It should be pointed out in this connection, that the Messiah in "*John's nightmare*"—as the "*Revelation*" was once

VIEWS and OPINIONS

## Some Christian Origins

By F. A. RIDLEY

described by a bewildered reader—has got absolutely nothing in common with the Jesus of the Gospels, except his name; whatever may be the case with regard to the Gospel Christ, the "Christ" of the Apocalypse is a pure myth; perhaps we should rather say, a *composite* figure; Mr. Archibald Robertson has aptly described the Heavenly Warrior who leads his celestial cavalry to the destruction of Israel's then oppressor, Rome, as a kind of amalgam of all the previous leaders of revolt against the great slave empire of Rome, and such may very well be the case. The belief in the coming of the Messiah, be that is it may, certainly played an important part in the tangled story of Christian origins.

### Servile Insurrections

The belief in a social revolution, sponsored by the coming Messiah, may be described as a local Jewish variation, under religious trappings, of a whole series of social revolutions which had successively eventuated in the Roman Empire during the centuries immediately prior to the rise of Christianity. These servile insurrections, several of which attained formidable proportions, which taxed the resources even of the military empire of Rome to suppress, had been closely associated with an equalitarian cult of the Sun, the symbol of equality in classical antiquity. There are, perhaps, as the present writer has suggested elsewhere, traces of these religiously-inspired servile revolts in our New Testament, viz., "the sun which shines on both the unjust and the just," sounds like an authentic echo of this old Utopian literature, most of which has long since disappeared.

[cf.—F. A. Ridley—*Spartacus*.]

### The Revolt of Spartacus

This series of servile insurrections culminated in the first century B.C. in a most formidable social war, known after its leader, the Thracian gladiator Spartacus. Spartacus, a military genius, beat the Roman armies repeatedly with his horde of ill-trained slaves, and undoubtedly brought the

## News and Comments

(From *Progressive World*)

### Anti-Climax

"Ike's pastor says America is undergoing greatest religious awakening in history."

National Council of Churches says: "We believe God is giving a united Christian enterprise the greatest opportunity it has ever had."

Gallup poll reports: "Big U.S. majority believes in God."

"J. Edgar Hoover warned to-day that 1954 threatens to be the worst year in criminal history."

"The Justice Department reported to-day that the biggest influx of new prisoners on record pushed the average number of inmates in the federal prisons to 19,500 during the past year."

That correlation looks a little queer but everything seems to be on the up and up.

### Editor Fired for Criticising Franco

For criticising Franco's suppression of free speech, the editor of a Spanish Catholic Magazine, *Ecclesia*, was fired from his post by Spain's R.C. Bishops.

### God Took a Shot at Her

Down in Alabama a small meteorite crashed through the roof of a house and grazed the tenant, Mrs. Hewlett Hodges. Now the owner of the building is suing her for possession of the stone, for which it is reported Mrs. Hodges has been offered \$5,000. "I feel like the meteorite is

Roman Empire to the verge of destruction; though, as always in such wars, all our extant information comes from hostile sources. The mass executions by crucifixion which followed his final defeat in 71 B.C., were long remembered with horror in the ancient world, and seem to have finally broken the spirit of the ancient slaves; at any rate, there were no more slave risings.

### Without Hope in this World

A very interesting passage in the Pauline Epistles describes the men of this time as being "without hope in this world." A very apt description of the psychological state of the Roman slaves after the failure of their last champions. As we have elsewhere expressed it, "Beaten on earth, the slaves took refuge in heaven." They cashed their account with history in another world, with a post-dated—and post-mortem!—cheque endorsed by the Christian Church, which first recruited its converts amongst the disillusioned slaves!

### The Symbolism of the Cross

A very important link between the slave-wars and the origins of Christianity is, in the present writer's opinion, to be found in the adoption of the Cross as the Christian symbol. It represented a stroke of propaganda genius which, in our submission, has never been sufficiently appreciated by the historians of Christian origins. For the Cross, on which the survivors of the Spartacus insurrection had gasped out their lives, was the form of death by torture reserved for the slave class; the Roman equivalent of the Tsarist knout. To turn it into the instrument of salvation was, we repeat, a stroke of genius on the part of Paul, or whoever it was! It made the fortune of the new cult. (Again, if no Jesus existed, the Cross, like the Gospels, must be regarded as pure fiction.)

The definitive history of the origin and rise of Christianity has never yet been written—whoever eventually makes this memorable contribution to literature, will, we think, find the above lines of inquiry indicated by our French contemporary as profitable lines to pursue.

mine," said the good woman. "I think God intended it for me." Fancy little performance on the part of the Almighty, but not a very good shot.

### Rome's Way With Protestants

Police again tore down the sign over the headquarters of a Protestant church in Rome recently. After it had been removed by the police the first time, the church had replaced the sign on the assumption that a recent action by an Italian court permitted the church to maintain the sign over the entrance. The Protestant church will take the matter again to the courts. The minister in charge said that local priests had urged the police to remove the sign.

### Protestant Sect Wins in Italy

After a long and bitter opposition to Protestant Church activity in Italy, the Italian Council of State has consented to permit the American Pentacostal sect to operate legally in that country. Commenting on this action, the *New York Times* says: "There cannot be a true separation of Church and State if the latter commits itself to using the Government's executive powers to enforce the exclusion of all but one branch of the world's religions even though in this case more than 99 per cent. Italians are born Catholics."

—NEXT WEEK—

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE U.S.S.R.

# Followers of the Prophet

By LEONARD MARTIN (S. Africa)

THERE is a Mohammedan mosque at Woking, and there may be others in Britain; but in general few people know anything of the Muslim religion, which is one of the great religions of the world, and whose adherents number hundreds of millions.

I have for many years resided in a city which counts several thousands of Muslims among its polyglot population, and I have therefore been able to observe their conduct and their peculiar religious customs, which make quite an interesting study.

How, it may be asked, does the general behaviour of typical Muslims differ from the rest of the civilised community? The obvious reply is, "Not at all." They have their good, bad and indifferent citizens, just like the rest.

The Muslim religion is a truly prohibitionist one, alcohol being forbidden. The great majority is, in practice, truly teetotal, and this means an absence of the many crimes and offences which are a result of the excessive drinking of spiritous liquors—no little gain to any community, especially when it is remembered that learned judges often declare from the bench that most crime is a direct result of over-indulgence in our old pal, Al Cohol—a name with quite an Islamic flavour!

Here let me say that sometimes you do hear it said that, when a Muslim does want to patronise a bar, he just leaves his tarboosh off and puts on European headgear. Most Muslims in our community wear a tarboosh or fez, of a brilliant scarlet colour, and this is the most obvious way of identifying one; but of late years many leave it off except on State occasions, and when they go to work, so there is then no quick means of identifying them from the rest of the population.

There was a yarn once current in the East that Mohammed turns in his grave every time one of his followers takes an alcoholic drink; so, to make matters right, they always take another on top of it, or even multiples of two, so that everything remains *in statu quo*!

Another good feature of the Muslim religion is its insistence on scrupulous bodily cleanliness and hygiene, which is particularly beneficial in the warm climates in which most Muslims appear to live, for it does not seem to be a religion of cold or arctic climate. In our community many of the males wear linen undergarments; they are supposed to wash before and after every meal, including teeth, and to obey many other intricate ceremonials with an eye to bodily purity.

The well-off women dress much like everyone else, and have a penchant for the latest fashions, except that on Friday, their Sabbath, some may go about veiled, and they also do this on other special occasions. This custom, it should be emphasised, is a comparatively modern one in our community, and was introduced by certain of the priests, who, like priests in general, are known better for their ultra-conservative attitudes than for any modernisations. Irreverent boys call these veiled women "ghosts," which is quite apt.

Polygamy is theoretically still possible; but the high cost of living, and even the expense of keeping one wife in clothes and the best in shoes, has made the Muslim husband much like the rest of us—compulsorily monogamic. This polygamy is, of course, not recognised by the law, which allows one wife only, and consider the rest of the "wives" as concubines; these plural marriages, if any, are performed by the priest; not by an official of the State, as all our marriage officers must be, whether they are also ministers of religion, or just plain civil servants.

Now, for the religious aspect. In one sense the Muslim has, in theory, the simplest religion of all; nothing more than: "There is no god but God, and Mohammed is his prophet." But in practice this austere simplicity gives way to much greater complexity. There are many sects; some, as in other religions, at bitter enmity with each other; there are many peculiar practices, sacred burial places, pilgrimages; different minor prophets, and all the paraphernalia of any ancient religion with its impedimenta gathered in the course of centuries.

An outsider like the writer observes many resemblances between the Muslim and the Hebraic religions—both being monotheistic, both observing a Sabbath which is not the usual Christian one, both forbidding the flesh of swine and other *tabu* animals, and making compulsory the ritual killing of animals for human consumption by a special officer; both insisting on the circumcision of all males; both having a holy city, such as Jerusalem for the Jews and Mecca for the Muslims; both insisting on the head being kept covered in a place of worship, and for the most orthodox, also in the home; and so forth.

One would naturally conclude that, with this affinity between the two religions, they would be particularly cordial towards each other; yet in one's conversations with Muslims one has not found that to be the case; but rather, hatred of the Jew, or a greater dislike of the Jew even than of the polytheistic Christian, strange as that may seem, and however specifically that may be "officially" denied. Between Israel and the Arab States not much love is lost either!

Just as the Christian religion was originally an offshoot of the Hebraic, so Mohammedanism may roughly, and not quite accurately, be summed up as a more modernised version of the same. Muslims honour Abraham and Moses as great prophets, just as the Jews do; and also honour Jesus as a prophet, which the Jews certainly won't. Strangely, there is a belief among several, if not all, Muslims that Jesus was never crucified; but went to India, and died there. Even his tombstone, they say, you can find there!

One can say of the members of our particular Muslim community that they are well-behaved, generally law-abiding, and that the men make excellent tailors, builders and general workers, largely because of their sober habits; but, so far, they have not produced any geniuses, or really outstanding, brainy men. It has always been a puzzle why the Muslim community, which produced such able scientists, architects, surgeons and mathematicians during the Moorish regime in Spain, for instance, has apparently slid into nothing better than mediocrity and done little or nothing memorable since.

## Secularism in Dagenham

On Saturday, April 2, the Secretary of the National Secular Society visited Dagenham, Essex, to give a talk on "The Necessity of Secularism," at the home of a member of the parent branch. Seventeen sympathisers and Christians were present, and representatives of both points of view took part in the questions and the lively discussion that followed Mr. Morris's talk.

The success of the meeting was proved by the decision to form a Dagenham Branch of the N.S.S., and nine of those present applied to join. The undersigned (whose address is 214, Fitzstephen Road, Dagenham) was appointed Honorary Branch Secretary, and will be pleased to hear from other interested local residents. It was decided to start a plan of local press propaganda by means of news paragraphs and letters.

G. W. WARNER.

## This Believing World

As usual, the B.B.C. churned out a regular Feast of Religion during Lenten week with Jesus as the Greatest Hero that ever lived. We began on Sunday with two poems on Palm Sunday, then the Morning Service, the People's Service, and any number of similar Services in special programmes for the provinces. The children were specially catered for, of course—they are never allowed to forget how Jesus died for them. A "Triumphal Entry" an Epilogue, a Sunday Half Hour, a Late Sunday Special, and the Word of God—with another Epilogue for TV, formed the fare for one day.

This kind of thing was repeated very nearly every day until on Good Friday we had at least *fourteen* items all devoted to the most primitive Fundamentalism, to say nothing of those other ones which provincial directors felt were necessary for the uplift of the nation. As it is difficult to find anyone good enough to portray Jesus, he was left out of the plays—but we had Mary, Joseph, Peter—and naturally, the villain Judas, ready to sell his Divine Master for gold. It is all historical, and not a whiff of heresy would be allowed to uncover its ugly head in these Holy Messages for the People. Yet the more intellectual clergy know perfectly well that New Testament "history" has not a leg to stand on—that there is no evidence that any of the Bible heroes existed at all, and this includes Jesus and Mary. As for miracles . . . !

Champions of the Design Argument just hate to deal with the terrible death roll which follows earthquakes (like the one recently in the Philippines) or the beautiful way in which God designed tapeworms with hooks so that the lovely creatures could properly fix themselves in our insides most difficult to dislodge, or epidemics, killing off thousands of people, like small pox or the Black Plague. But in particular, they hate to deal with what is now called astro-physics. For example, the furthest point in the Universe as seen through the 200in. telescope on Mount Palomar is, we are told, "probably three times further away than was thought only a few years ago." Or, to put it in another way—the age of the Universe, that is, "when all matter was at one place in space," is nearer to 6,000,000,000 years than 2,000,000,000 years, as once was thought.

But any believer in the Bible would uproariously laugh this off. In that work, the Universe was created at one go in the year 4004 B.C. and, as the Rev. B. Graham would say, God's Glorious Words never change. There they are for ever and ever. But absurd Science, that sink of stupidity, is ever changing. Unlike God, it never knows its own beliefs. One day it will talk about two billions, and another day it will insist that it ought to be six billions. What is a billion more or less to science? How simple and beautiful is God's date, 4004 B.C., compared with 6,000,000,000 years as given by science. And remember, God *never* makes a mistake. You have Billy Graham's word for that.

No fewer than two million people have had their lives changed through reading an American book called the *Power of Positive Thinking*. Indeed, it impressed the *Daily Express* so much that we had chapters proudly produced for us to have our lives also changed. Alas, we found it telling the same old tale, the same pathetic appeal to put all our troubles on God, and that would ensure positive thinking. The Rev. Mr. Peale, its celebrated author, has found how an expanded sermon full of Faith will not only assure positive thinking but the positive pleasure of a

hearty bank balance. It is ever thus. Call it Moral Re-  
armament, Faith in Christ, Christian Science, or even  
Jehovah's Witnesses, and money from believers pours in.  
What a grand source of income has the fable of Jesus  
Christ produced!

## Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

FROM a young student at Oldham comes the following question extracted from his letter:

"Although my examination is some weeks ahead I am already feeling nervous about it and losing sleep. I don't want your sympathy, but what I do want is an answer to a question. How does your theory of materialism face up to this phenomenon? Here is a case of an event which has not yet taken place having a bodily effect at the present time. According to Cohen, my state now should be an exact consequence of what has preceded it. What has not happened should therefore not affect it. Yet the future event—the examination—is playing a most decisive part in conditioning my present state of being. . . ."

The case in point can of course be matched by many common experiences. A batsman waiting for his innings in an important match may get the "butterflies." A debate tomorrow may cause the participator to sweat with apprehension to-day; alternatively, if he relishes the prospect, he may glow with anticipatory delight. Examples are endless, and not one of them vitiates the materialist position.

The fear of the examination, the pent-up agitation of the batsman, the worry over the debate, are all determined, not by something in the future, but by something in the past.

The debater sweats because he is aware of his shortcomings in that field, because he knows the quality of his opponent, the weaknesses in his own case, his lack of experience and so on. The batsman is in a flutter because of previous failures, or the state of the wicket, or the consequences of his failure on the state of the match, or the knowledge of his fallibility to spin bowling. And the examinee is aware of the traditional difficulty of the examination, of his being unprepared for it, of his own habit of being off-form on examination days. In every case the bodily reactions are the result of past experiences, not of future ones.

Now it may be objected that such future events will turn out to be easily negotiable when they come, and in no way calculated to cause such alarm. The batsman may make a century, the debater thoroughly enjoy himself, and the student pass with Honours. All this may be so, but the argument is unaltered. For obviously it is not the future event itself, but our attitude towards it, which is the conditioning factor.

Cases of worry are well known to affect digestion. Many digestive disorders occur from lack of emotional balance. Fear wastes energy by setting muscle against muscle; the liberated energy opposes itself and has a paralyzing effect, and so we speak of "rooted" terror. To the anti-materialist this shows the action of mind on body. He overlooks the fact that the mind has itself already been conditioned by the body and by past events. The brain, as part of the body, is certainly to be included in the general give and take.

"It is doubtless true," writes Prof. Morris R. Cohen (*Contemporary American Philosophy*), "that worry and other bodily emotions will have serious bodily effects. But the cause of these bodily effects can be found in the bodily accompaniments of the emotions. It is, therefore, only in a popular and practical, but not in a scientifically accurate, sense that we can speak of the mind as exerting efficient causality."

# THE FREETHINKER

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## 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.

S. WILSON.—See article on Burns in the next issue. The writer, despite his name, is "a mere Sassenach."

SPIRITUALIST MYSTIC.—Verses received. We note you "have been writing poetry in a trance for 30 years." It's a long time to be in a trance, but when you come out of it send us the poetry.

## 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 17, 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 Cafe, 40, Cannon Street, off New Street), Sunday, April 17, 7 p.m.: C. H. SMITH, "Slavery."

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—Sunday, April 17, 6-6.45 p.m.: G. LIGHT, "A Socialist Looks on Many Lands."

Junior Discussion Group (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Friday, April 15: Mrs. V. HAYNES, "Some Origins of Wine."

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (New Millgate Hotel, Long Millgate).—Sunday, April 17, 7 p.m., G. H. TAYLOR, "The Mind of the Ape."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 17, 11 a.m.: Prof. T. H. PEARCE, "The Importance of the Individual."

## Leicester Log

THE battle for Sunday cinemas is raging in the Barrow U.D. area of Leicestershire. Petitions and counter petitions are being organised by the Cinema Exhibitors Association on the one hand, and by church interests on the other. Sunday cinema-goers at Syston, Anstey and other places are objecting to having to pay the fares into Leicester instead of having access to their local cinemas. The Home Secretary is conducting an inquiry.

Swadlincote U.D.C. proposed Sunday opening, but at a public meeting at the Town Hall the voting was 115-84 against. The secretary of the Sunday Cinemas Campaign at once opened a petition demanding a public poll. This showed 1,941-940 in favour of Sunday opening, the poll being much higher than one conducted eight years ago, when the project was lost by 500 votes. Both sides are campaigning vigorously. Sibley Council are against opening; Ashby-de-la-Zouche magistrates granted a Good Friday opening.

Four Billy Graham relays from Glasgow by P.O. card lines are to be heard in Leicester. (There were 405 relays from Harringay, bringing some 400,000 extra listeners.) Billy's methods are not to the liking of the Rev. A. Kirkby, who complains:

"Why is it that this kind of Christian approach to the man-in-the-street seems inevitably to be linked with such tawdry jingles as choruses? Their poetry is nil; their theology is crude or non-existent; and their music is frivolous.

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £825 6s. 4d.; H. T. Derrett, 10s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; Mrs. A. Kean, 1s. 6d.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; Wm. Scarlett, 8s. Total to date: £826 9s. 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.

... Many will seriously wonder whether the association [of the campaign] with vacuous verses and trifling tunes does it any good."

The distinguishing mark of "The Padre" of the *Evening Mail* is to fill its columns with obsolete theology and arguments long since exploded. "Ask the Padre"—and get an answer so stale that any modern philosophical scholar would be ashamed of using it. "Why does God permit tragic accidents?" Because, he says,

"These accidents are invariably the result of human error. I am convinced, however, that they are not the Will of God. We have no experience of God to give us reason for ever thinking otherwise."

He should curtail his last sentence: "We have no experience of God."

"And if a man's or a child's earthly life is cut short through accident or disease or war, God is, in His own Kingdom, able to take them into a yet even fuller life."

A second chance for the Almighty to redeem his blunders?

Oil has been used in magical ceremonies from time immemorial. In his *Golden Bough*, Frazer records that it was used by magicians to make rain, to ensure good harvests and generally to cure all ills. Even to-day there are some who prefer to be anointed with oil which has been mumbled over by a priest, rather than trust in the methods of modern medicine. In his Diocesan Letter for March, the Bishop of Leicester offers to perform the necessary magical rites over any oil which his clergy care to bring during the early part of Holy Week.

The Will of the Right Rev. J. J. Willis, Bishop of Leicester 1935-1949, was published recently. He left £33,643. . . . "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Mark x, v. 25.) Another Pilot who lost the way?

A most extraordinary thing has happened at Market Harborough. The church of St. Mary In Arden, one of the most historic buildings there, has been damaged by vandals. The vandals in this case appear to be the local church council, which some years ago decided that it would be a good idea to remove the roof of St. Mary's, sell the lead and put the money into the parish church funds.

"Since then" says the Leicester *Evening Mail*, "the condition of the church has deteriorated." How strange! who would have thought it? Perhaps if they sold the roof of the parish church they could save this ancient structure.

Canon Collins, in his parish magazine this month belabours the Catholic Church which, he says, "is more concerned with converting other Christians to Romanism, than converting the Heathen." He adds "I'm sorry if I'm wrong . . . He would be if this were a Catholic country!

Commenting on the Vatican belief that the Church of England is about to split in two, the Canon says that he does not wish to discuss it during Lent . . . but apparently it's quite all right to criticise the Catholics (with suitable apologies of course) Lent or not. The Leicester Secular Society think the Canon should know more about Catholics than he does, so we have sent to him an old copy of the *Freethinker* containing relevant articles. FOSSE.

# Some Aspects of Artificial Insemination

By G. I. BENNETT

UNDER the somewhat graphic description, "test-tube babies," the large circulation papers, with an eye ever open for the sensational, have popularised artificial insemination, and—thanks to their efforts—the general public does know something about clinically-induced conceptions. But the prevailing impression is that artificial insemination is quite new, having only been discovered and practised in recent years. Actually it has a longer history than is often supposed.

Approaching 200 years ago an Italian scientist, Lazaro Spallanzani, conducted the first classical experiment in this field. Having isolated a female dog for the purpose, he succeeded in impregnating her with the seminal fluid of a male of the same breed. The result was that she gave birth to a litter which, in form and colour, resembled both her and the male dog concerned.

Since Spallanzani's time artificial insemination has been widely employed on a variety of animals. By this process a great many females have been injected with the spermatozoa of a few carefully chosen males, a large number of conceptions have been obtained, and the genetic attributes of numerous domestic animals improved.

Human artificial insemination goes back to 1785 when it was used by the celebrated English surgeon, John Hunter. It was first employed in the United States in 1866 by Dr. Marion Sims in a New York women's hospital where a patient, who had been unable to conceive, was successfully fertilised with her husband's semen. But only within the last quarter-century has the procedure been used at all extensively in the treatment of childlessness.

It is an ironic fact that, while the human race as a whole is excessively reproductive, and family planning is becoming—as it needs to become—increasingly a feature of modern married life, there are people who yearn for children of their own but cannot have them in the normal way. In childless marriages, where children are desired, adoption offers one solution. But nowadays artificial insemination generally offers another and better.

There are various reasons for apparent infertility in healthy men and women, which artificial insemination with the semen of the husband may cure. On the other hand, if a husband cannot or ought not to become a father of children, either because he is sterile or eugenically unfit, provided his wife is fecund and healthy, artificial insemination can make possible for them an ordinary family life. Only, in this case, in order to start a pregnancy, it will be necessary to use the semen of a donor, whose identity, as a matter of policy, is not usually disclosed, and who, for his part, does not know to whom his semen goes.

Artificial Insemination by Donor (A.I.D.) has an obvious advantage over adoption; for if the resulting child is not biologically part of the husband, it is nevertheless a child of his wife's body, and inherits at least some of her qualities. In the medical clinics every effort is made to select a donor who approximates to the physical and mental characteristics of the husband. "One has to bear in mind," wrote the authors of an article that appeared in the *British Medical Journal* some years ago, "that the legal father may hope for a donated child with whose personality he might be in accord; and it must further be remembered that difficulties in the father-son relationship might be accentuated by the circumstances of A.I.D. Obviously even the most careful choice of the donor could not guarantee the desired characteristics; but it would increase the chances of matching parent and child." The authors add, however, that in this country where the panel of donors so far established is

small, and the demand for A.I.D. slight, "any such selection (is) impossible."

It seems probable that A.I.D. is more extensively practised in the United States—in which it has been estimated more than 10,000 children have been so conceived—than anywhere else. But here as elsewhere there has been enacted, so far as I can trace, no legislation governing A.I.D.; and one legislator who has written informatively on the subject has told me that he thinks legislation would in any case be undesirable, as it would very likely be restrictive.

Few, if any, questions are raised about Artificial Insemination by Husband (A.I.H.). This is commonly considered to be a matter concerning only husband, wife, and medical adviser. But A.I.D. has aroused fierce controversy. Unlike the position in the Scandinavian countries, in which official committees of inquiry have investigated and published their findings on the medical, legal, and ethical aspects of artificial insemination, there has been no Government-sponsored inquiry in this country.

However, a commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury reported in 1948; and on March 16, 1949, there was a debate in the House of Lords on problems of legitimacy and A.I.D. The commission maintained that A.I.D. involves "a breach of the marriage; it violates the exclusive union set up between husband and wife. . . ." The Archbishop pronounced that he and his commission deemed it to be adultery both by the donor and the woman—a point that was countered by the President of the Divorce Division who ruled that sexual intercourse, as normally understood, was necessary to constitute adultery.

This has not silenced ecclesiastical critics, who continue to speak of A.I.D. as "adultery." But, so far as English law is concerned, it does dispose of the question of adultery arising from A.I.D.; and in a court of law a husband would not be able to seek a divorce from his wife on the grounds that she had a child by A.I.D. and was therefore guilty of adultery. On the other hand, if it could be proved (and there would lie the difficulty) that a woman had had a donated child without her husband's prior agreement, that child would, in law, very likely be deemed illegitimate. But the position is clear where he has given his consent: he legally becomes its father with the obligations of a father towards his child and its mother.

It has been held that a marriage can be declared null if there has been a wilful refusal to consummate it, even though the wife may have had a child by A.I.D. Since 1949, however, a child so conceived remains legitimate despite annulment of the marriage.

These are some of the legal issues arising. Others present more difficulty, but they will be clarified as A.I.D. gains ground.

Yet what of the single woman who for one reason or another has been unable or disinclined to marry? She may in her heart wish for a child of her own: must her maternal instinct, her urge to motherhood, be for ever denied? It is to the credit of the Danish committee of inquiry (which put forward its proposals in 1953) that it did recommend, although guardedly, that single women should be entitled to the facility of A.I.D. Traditionalism and social convention will frown upon the very suggestion. Yet what is intrinsically wrong in such a person having a donated child? The fact that she has a longing for children, and is psychologically equipped to be a good mother, is the all-important consideration. Society should not therefore forbid her

(Continued on next page)

# Theistic Vagaries

By Dr. E. L. DWIGHT TURNER

WHAT the churches hate like poison is satire and laughter at their antiquated and pet "beliefs." We are admonished, for Christ's sake, not to laugh at a priest for changing a wafer into God, or to poke fun at the world's Saviour for clinging to the Devil in midair. We are told that it is not nice to mention that Jesus the Christ was and is as mythical as Jupiter or Osiris. Yet ridicule can sometimes cause Christians to laugh at themselves, and that is an important step in their education.

However, We, Us and Company belong to a growing group which advocates and practices freethinking, and we aim to speak the truth.

On July 18, 1870, the first Totalitarian Dictatorship of modern times was created by the Vatican Council, which proclaimed Papal Infallibility. Roman Catholicism, a religion in name, is really a political organisation in its workings, for while the Council declared this Infallibility in "Faith and Morals," the morals of this Church has always included (and how!) the field of world politics.

The death a few months ago of Dr. W. R. Inge, at 93, formerly Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, marks a slight trend towards rationality on the part of some of the older and more progressive preachers of religion. Near the close of his long life, he told a reporter that he knew nothing about an after-life, and that he was no nearer solving the "riddle of the universe" than he was in the years of his youth. He was perhaps the finest maker of epigrams since that master of phrase-making, Oscar Wilde.

In contrast, we have the young Rev. B. Graham (who is paid about £5,000 per year by a group of American business men—who regard this as "good business"), who is a fundamentalist and is advertised as knowing a lot about God and the Devil and the Bible—also about Hell and Heaven. None of these—except the Holy Book of Fables and Myths—has any real existence, but they are nevertheless believed in by millions of orthodox Christians.

Muhammed was probably an epileptic. He had "visions" and he claimed to have talked with the angel Gabriel and with God. He professed to have received his revelations from Allah himself. He spread his religion mainly by use of the sword—which should have been enough to condemn it. It is stated on good authority that he could neither read nor write, but that did not prevent him from becoming the leading "prophet" of Allah. He married a wealthy widow, and that gave him good standing in the Arab business world. He died in 632. There are now more than 350,000,000 followers of this screwy "prophet" of Allah.

Christianity and Muhammedism are mentioned here as two samples of the world's leading religions—both of them mostly nonsense and bunk—for which we secularists have no use. We devote our precious time to worthwhile subjects which have to do with this life and this world.

Some examples of this sacred and inspired bunk are the silly story of the talking snake in the Garden of Eden and the "fall of man," and the crazy story of Noah and his ark and the world deluge, both found in the book of *Genesis*. In the Old Testament we are treated to that biggest of all "fish stories"—Jonah and the whale. As a whopper that yarn has never been equalled by stories of the members of any liars' symposium.

Simple arithmetic and measurements will dispose of the "flood," but some fundamentalists have recently been searching for the remains of Noah's ark monstrosity.

In your reading of the Old Testament you may have noticed that King David was a very wicked man, but in

Acts 13 : 22 we are informed that God himself declared that David was "a man after mine own heart."

But David's record of crimes was surpassed by the wicked acts of Jehovah himself. He had given a commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." But he killed in wholesale fashion. Nevertheless, a bizarre cult has grown up in these benighted states that wants to be known as "Jehovah's Witnesses."

Jehovah (according to the Bible) created the world and everything in it and above it, in six days, out of nothing. And, as Ingersoll observed, having used up all the nothing in making the earth and one man, God decided to take a piece of the man (to wit, a rib) out of which he manufactured the first woman. Here we have an "inspired" lesson in biology! Mr. Darwin surely did better than that.

One of the most bizarre features of early Catholic teaching was the "Cult of Mary." In the earliest form of Christianity the belief in a virgin birth was absent. The story of the virgin birth first appeared in the second century. The earliest editions of Matthew and Luke know nothing about it. Both gospels begin with genealogies which trace the descent of Jesus from David through Joseph. Professor Prosper Alfaric holds that the belief in the virgin birth was adopted by the Church under pressure from Marcion to accept his view that the state of virginity was, *ipso facto*, superior to that of marriage. Such ideas were "in the air" at that time, and the dogma of the Virgin Birth became orthodox in the churches.

By a curious coincidence, the "Cult of Mary" owed most to the monks who were rigidly debarred from any association with women. However, the most active promoters of the "Mother of God" idea were the monks who, beginning in Egypt, have exercised a strong influence in the development of Catholic Christianity. Mary has always been the goddess, *par excellence*, of the monastic orders. Prof. Alfaric explains this on Freudian lines as a psychological "compensation" for social and sexual frustration.

The "Cult of Mary" has passed through several phases: "Perpetual Virginity," her "Immaculate Conception," and recently her bodily "Assumption" into Heaven—to complete this bizarre and impossible, miraculous and mythological example of unmitigated bunk.—From *Liberal*, U.S.A.

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## Some Aspects of Artificial Insemination

(Concluded from page 118)

having children by this means—provided she is financially able to maintain them and give them a good home.

Perhaps it is not too large a claim to make that artificial insemination has a useful contribution (I would even say a great contribution) to render to the happiness of individuals and the well-being of society. A family may give stability and emotional fulfilment to marriage, and the use of A.I.D. is a means of bringing children into a marriage that would otherwise remain childless. If it is wrong to bring into the world children that are unwanted and unprovided for, it is by the same token right to make possible the birth of children that are wanted and will be well cared for. This is the essence of the case for artificial insemination. No more need be said.

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**THE BIBLE HANDBOOK.** By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s.; postage 3d. (Tenth edition.)

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

## Review

*Olive Schreiner, Her Friends and Times*, by D. L. Hobman. Watts & Co. 182 pages. 15s. net.

THE book which made Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) famous, *The Story of an African Farm*, caused a great sensation when it was first published by "Ralph Iron" in 1883, and even more so when Ralph Iron was found to be an almost unknown South African governess, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor in Basutoland. It was one of the first romances to come from South Africa and it certainly is a remarkable production. But then Olive Schreiner was a remarkable woman almost from the outset. She was a strong Feminist, a hater of war, and a courageous fighter for the Rights of Man, if "Man" included "Woman." She fought for Votes for Women, but she wanted black women to have the vote in Africa equally with the white. She had a tremendous love for England but she sided with the Boers during the Boer War. (Incidentally it is interesting to note that George Bernard Shaw, though he was often against anything and everything, was by no means in agreement with her here. He could not stand Kruger's silly obstinacy and religiosity. "I saw" he declared, "that Kruger meant the seventeenth century and Scottish seventeenth century at that; and so to my great embarrassment I found myself on the side of the mob." (G. W. Foote, like Shaw, was also more or less "on the side of the mob.")

*The Story of an African Farm* brought Olive Schreiner many correspondents, among them Havelock Ellis who thought very highly of the book—its "touch of genius, the freshness of its outlook, the firm splendour of its style . . ." Ellis, in fact, looked upon her as "the most wonderful woman of her time." Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—they never became engaged, but remained for many years great friends. One may never know how much of this friendship contributed to her own unhappiness—for no one can read this biography without realising how unhappy she was most of her life.

Miss Hobman's biography does full justice to Olive Schreiner's many activities—including her marriage to Samuel Cronwright, a British South African who took the name of Schreiner, and who was eight years younger. Whether it was the asthma she began to suffer from, or the marriage itself, she produced little literary work at the time though she has left on record accounts of books supposed to have been written and destroyed during the Boer War. But in the end she did write again and many of her books attracted great attention, notably *Woman and Labour* which is a masterpiece in its own line.

Brought up to the orthodox creed, Olive Schreiner appears never to have found any rest in Christianity and was, we are told "eternally preoccupied with the riddle of God." She believed and she did not believe. It is strange, but the Freethought of her day seems to have been unknown to her. Did she never read Ingersoll—or, for that matter, Huxley or Darwin? For the rest, I can warmly recommend Miss Hobman's vividly written work which deals as much with Olive Schreiner's "Times" as with herself.

One criticism. Why are no dates affixed to the books mentioned in the Bibliography. It is an omission which should be put right.

H. CUTNER.

**AGE OF REASON.** By Thomas Paine. With 40 page introduction by Chapman Cohen. Price, cloth 3s. 9d., paper 2s. 6d.; postage 3d.

**MATERIALISM RESTATED.** Fourth edition. By Chapman Cohen. Price 5s. 3d.; postage 3d.

## The Challenge of Atheism

IN consequence of the analysis given in my articles, *A Proposal for a Uniform Definition of Atheism* (*The Freethinker*, August 13, 1954), I invite any and all thinking Christians, particularly the parsons, to *disprove the true conclusion* validly inferred from true *premisses* as follows: (1) *No entities named "gods" exist* (True by the modern definition of "myth" as fiction); (2) *Yahweh is a god of the Old and New Testaments* (True by definition); (3) *Being a translation of the Hebrew generic noun "el," the biblical name "God" is identical with the generic name "god"* (True by definition).—CONCLUSION: *Therefore, neither the god Yahweh nor any biblical entity named "God" exist.*

The meaning of the plural form "*elohim*," in its proper concrete generic sense of "gods," makes no difference to the conclusion. In the *recently* interpreted, second or *abstract* sense, "the deity," in the formula "the deity Yahweh," "*elohim*" retains the singular *generic* meaning and becomes *identical* with "el" in the sense of "the god (Yahweh)." As for that notorious international bogey, the logical fallacy of "the one and only god *God* (correctly written: god *god* of the universe," it is much too obvious a non-entity to deserve an elaboration. The Greek equivalent of "*el*"—"theos"—is, of course, another *generic* noun.

GREGORY S. SMELTERS.

## Correspondence

### A REMINISCENCE

When I was seven years of age my father asked me if I would like to go with him to hear Bradlaugh debate with the Rector of Hanley. It was summer time and I preferred to play in the street with other boys, but I did see something which made an impression I have never forgotten. The debate took place in the Imperial Concert Hall, the entrance to which was about 40 yards from where I lived, and I saw Bradlaugh driven in a hansom, the windows of which, in my presence, were smashed by the Christian mob, who hustled him until he reached the hall. When my father returned I heard him outline the procedure at the debate. When mother asked him how Bradlaugh fared, my father (who rented a pew in the parish church), replied in disgusted tones, "He settled the lot of them!"

W. M.

Chapman Cohen was not a Rationalist; he was a rationalist.

T. WRIGHT.

### SAVED!

I am a poor middle-aged man who wishes to testify that the Lord Jesus saved me. Since I was a piping infant, singing "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," He has influenced me always.

Yes, Jesus saved me—saved me from the wine of love; the thrills of manly sport; from worldly success, married happiness, and family unity; jollity and laughter; the theatre and the dance; the cinema and the football field; and from all pure human joy in the beautiful world His Almighty Father created.

Jesus saved me from youthful dreams, purity and enthusiasm; from happy week-ends and innocent courting.

My youthful hobbies He called "indulgences;" and my happy laughter foolish, and the crackling of thorns burning beneath a pot.

I hope you will print my testimony to my dear Lord Jesus, who has done so much for me. Amen, Amen.—Yours, etc.,

HY. E. WARD.

### REACTIONARY CHURCH LEADERS

A word of thanks to Bayard Simmons for his article on Tom Paine, in which he points out the work of Catholic reaction in preparing the way for Hitler, as it prepared the way for Mussolini. May I point out that he is not quite correct when he says: "None of the political parties here dare look sideways at the Catholic Church. . . ." The Independent Labour Party and its paper the *Socialist Leader* have warned the British workers against the growing infiltration of militant Catholic reactionaries into the Co-operatives, trade unions and Labour Party. Members of the I.L.P. recognise that freethought is an indispensable element of life in a Socialist society, and we are opposed to the mental and moral terrorism of the Vatican and the Kremlin alike.—Yours, etc.,

F. MATTLAND.