

# The Freethinker

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FROM a very early stage in human evolution the great majority, at least, of mankind have believed in the actual existence of supernatural beings, gods, spirits, and devils, good or bad, as the case may be. From what theologians describe as the "universal consent" of mankind, the defenders of Theism have sought to establish its concrete reality. Other, more critical, minds have described the undeniably extensive belief in gods to primitive psychological, or political stages in mankind's long history. It cannot, however, be said that the problem of divine origins, of how, assuming that gods do not exist, mankind came to believe in them, has as yet received any absolutely final and definite answer. Several theories, have, of course, been propounded by critical thinkers, which appear to contain much truth, but it would, in the present writer's opinion, be difficult to nail down what Grant Allen has described as, *The evolution of the idea of god to a single fundamental cause.*

## Natural Anthropomorphism

The anthropological theories advanced *inter alia*, by *The Golden Bough*, undoubtedly explain a great deal. Amongst primitive races—as, also, amongst races who would not be flattered to be described as primitive!—the objective forces of nature are conceived in anthropomorphic forms as gods, goddesses, as individual supernatural figures, the elemental forces of nature, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes, are interpreted as the authentic voice of the divine powers venting their displeasure on their human worshippers. Similarly, the sun, moon, and stars, "The Host of Heaven," present themselves as natural objects of adoration. As Ernest Renan once noted, solar theology, the adoration of the life giving sun, represents the most natural and comprehensible of all religious cults!

## "Euhemerism"

Alongside of, and, sometimes in opposition to, the idea of gods as the more or less human personification of the natural forces, we find another explanation of the origin of gods put forward: "euhemerism," as antiquity termed it, after the Greek philosopher Euhemerus, who described the origin of gods to the posthumous deification of eminent men, who had led, or benefited, their fellows during their earthly life and whom a grateful Humanity raised to its altars after their decease. In modern times, a variation of this theory, the belief that gods originated from ghosts, was advanced by Herbert Spencer, and was brilliantly popularised and defended by Grant Allen in his remarkable book, *The Evolution of the Idea of God.*

## The God-King

Both the aforementioned theories undoubtedly contain a great deal of truth. The part played by the personification of natural forces in the evolution of theology constitutes a commonplace of the essentially modern science of compara-

tive religion, so obvious is it in fact, that only the grossest "Fundamentalist" would nowadays deny that *some* gods have originated in this manner. Similarly the posthumous deification of human leaders in religious history is equally obvious; the Founder of Christianity, assuming that there was such a character, would represent a relevant example of "euhemerism" in practice, as would Buddha or the Roman Caesars, who automatically became objects of worship the moment that they had shuffled off this mortal coil. However, we can be more precise, for, just as the "ghost theory" of Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen represented one variation of the ancient "euhemerism" in modern

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## God and the State

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

times; so, another modern variation is to be found in the theory of *god and the state* first advanced in the 19th century by the famous Russian anarchist, Michael Bakunin, a theory which in, at least, the opinion of the present writer, contains a great deal of truth, and has never had its proper due in freethinking circles, perhaps, on account of the unorthodox political outlook of its author, which so shocked the bourgeois respectability of Victorian times. Bakunin, in brief, applied his anarchistic concept of the political tyranny of the state to the sphere of religion; the church was the *anti-type* of the state and god was the celestial projection of the King!

## Voltaire and Bakunin

Unlike his historic predecessors, the pioneer thinkers of the French Revolution Voltaire and Rousseau, Bakunin was not a deist but an outright atheist. In this capacity the Russian rebel against church and state went a stage further than Voltaire had done in the preceding century. Voltaire has gone on record with the historic affirmation that, "if god did not exist it would be necessary to invent him." Voltaire, it would appear, regarded some kind of god as necessary on moral grounds; Bakunin felt no such necessity; he amended Voltaire's famous dictum so as to read, "if God existed, it would be necessary to abolish him"! From an atheistic point of view, a much more satisfactory definition than that of Voltaire, again one may suggest that it is *political* prejudice which as prevented this apt *bon mot* from being more widely known.

## Which Came First?

Which came first, state or church? Bakunin had no difficulty in answering this "leading question," it was the state which first enslaved mankind, the church came later as its celestial projection. Similarly there were Kings reigning concretely on this terrestrial earth before there were gods reigning abstractedly over the celestial realm, its celestial counterpart. "In the beginning," says Goethe's *Faust* "was the Act." Bakunin agreed with Faust. As a disciple of the eminent (though often unintelligible!) German philosopher, Hegel, Bakunin no doubt knew the famous dictum of the master "the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the lengthening shadows." As in less "philo-

sophical" language mankind acts *first* and speculates on his actions; only *later* on theological reflection "translated" them to an abstract existence in the sky—and in the human imagination!

### The First Gods?

Here Bakunin has certainly, as the saying goes, "got something there." For historically it seems to be indisputable that religion, at least in its more advanced forms, originated under the rule of the divine god—Kings of the ancient East, who reigned at the dawn of civilisation in what Karl Marx, Bakunin's great rival in the *First International* (1864–76), described as the "Asiatic" phase of human society. The first gods were, in all probability, the divine Pharaohs of Egypt, whose majestic tombs, the pyramids, still tower by the banks of the Nile. It was the Pharaohs and their Mesopotamian and Persian successors who were the *first* human gods, the objects of the *first* religious devotion, whom theological fantasy later promoted to an eternal existence in the sky. Nor, despite the long "evolution of the Idea of God," has the deity ever shaken off his original kingship. God is still King! Even in America,

he has never been worshipped under the title of President! In Westminster Abbey only two years ago, the English High Priest, the Archbishop of Canterbury, like his remote Egyptian predecessors, sought by means of Holy oil to transform a mortal woman into a Goddess with, what were, in effect, magical rites!

### "Your Lord Comes"

From Barcelona, where in pre-Franco days, the anarchist, Bakunin, had many followers, came recently a striking confirmation of the truth of the *political* origins of Deity. Speaking on the B.B.C. after the eucharistic congress held in Barcelona, a few years back, an English Catholic described how the sacred Host was carried in solemn procession through the streets, adored by the Pope's Legate, and preceded by a loud-speaker proclaiming to the kneeling multitudes: "Your Lord comes!" In this scene only the radio belongs to the *modern* world—science, prostituted in the service of superstition! All the rest belongs to ancient Egypt, where, by the banks of the Nile, the Pharaohs, the *first human* gods, were carried in state, before ascending to the sky to reign for ever and ever.

## Freethought in India

By S. RAMANATHAN

(concluded from page 222)

RATIONALISM is the adoption of the scientific method in solving all human problems. Science has already conquered our physical environment and has given us control over Nature and has enabled us to increase the level of our living. But religion claims as its own certain aspects of life like our ethical conduct, our social institutions, family ties between men and women, parents and children, relationships between different communal groups, between peoples occupying different territories and different countries, between the races and so on. These are supposed to belong to a so called "spiritual" sphere which science is said to be not competent to tackle and must be dealt with according to the laws laid down by the traditional religions. Our reasoning faculty is presumed to be unable to deal with moral values which are claimed to be fixed and immutable and created by God in Heaven whose will is revealed to us by His chosen prophets who established the churches and the temples. To have knowledge of the moral law you should have *bhakti*, devotion to the supernatural, which should be expressed in prayer and in abasement of yourselves before the Unknown. It is this attitude of cringing, falling on one's knees and grovelling that the rationalist movement fights against. Rationalism is a call to mankind to have self-respect, self-confidence, to stand erect on one's feet and fight life's battles with courage and without fear. The rationalist attitude is the very opposite of the cringing attitude of the *bhakti* cult which leads to religion. Religion relies upon the fiction of the spiritual world which is supposed to encompass morality. People who indulge in talks about spirituality commit a deliberate fraud. Even some scientists have been beguiled by the theory that there can be a world of spirit which they cannot explore and which will forever be the close preserve of the priests.

These scientists forget that the sphere of morals is as much a subject matter for scientific investigation as any other. Morality is not a revelation but an evolution. It is a historical growth. It has taken various forms in

various ages. Originally it was moral for a man to offer human sacrifice for his gods. Later the sacrifice was of other animals and then the offerings were merely vegetarian food, flowers, music, etc. Worship of the deity is a growth from brutal murder to innocent flower offerings. Even so in the region of family relationship. Primitive man lived herded together as tribes who fought with each other not only for territory but for wives who were shared in common. Sexual life was led in public, in temples where the gods were phallic idols. Sexual morality has grown in refinement through history. Communal marriages gave place to polygamous and polyandrous marriages and now, in the civilised countries, it has taken the shape of monogamy. *Sati*, the practice of burning the wife with the dead body of the husband, is now prohibited by law but still the word survives and is used as indicating the height of womanly virtue. The right to divorce has gained a tardy recognition in theory but is still denied in practice. Moral values change from time to time, they are subject to the inexorable process of evolution. Nothing ever endures in the so-called spiritual world of moral values. Morality does not flow from a supernatural Being in a spiritual world but is rooted in human nature and is subject to laws discoverable by science. Hence morality and ethical values are legitimate subjects for scientific investigation and there is no need for abandoning this sphere for mystification by religion.

### Herbert Spencer

The tremendous intellectual labours which Spencer carried on brought him neither wealth nor comfort. He was unable to find a publisher for his *Social Statics* in 1850, and he had to print and sell it on commission. A small edition took over fourteen years to sell, and the *Principles of Psychology* sold almost as slowly. Again and again he found he was losing money by his writings. Once he would have had to stop his great work but for a timely legacy. After a quarter of a century's work, the sales of his works just paid the publishing expenses. All his labour had gone for nothing, and his health had broken down from the constant strain of his studies. We can but admire the singular devotion, completeness, and dignity of the philosopher's life. Seeking no honour nor applause, he made an imperishable name.

—Mimnermus.

## Bible Numerology

By H. CUTNER

THROUGH the kindness of Mr. John Bowden, that distinguished Australian Freethinker, whose contributions to Evolution have been such a feature of the *New Zealand Rationalist*, I have had a copy of a book by Mr. W. E. Filmer, B.A., sent me, entitled *God Counts*. On its own subject, which is an exposition of Bible Numerology, it is an excellent little work, and I heartily recommend it as an exhibition of sheer credulity.

Bible numerics have long been known to the initiated—in fact, juggling with numbers in some shape or form must be at least as ancient as astrology. It would have been quite impossible for the old, almost pre-history, astronomers to have made their calculations without a very good understanding of numbers in general. The builders of the Egyptian pyramids must have been fine mathematicians, and it certainly took thousands of years to reach such knowledge. The system of the great Greek philosopher, Pythagoras, was built almost altogether on numbers. Everything that is intelligible, he contended, is based on them, and without number we get only chaos. In fact, the "order" in the Universe is literally numerical, said Pythagoras, and there is little doubt that he had great influence on ancient Greek speculation in astronomy and mathematics. That the priests of religions, anxious to create "mysteries," used numerics is undeniable.

Let the reader look up the number "forty" in Cruden or "seven" and he will see how these numbers occur in the Bible. It is no coincidence to find them associated so often with Bible heroes. Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah; Esau was forty when he married Judith (how did she come to be there?); the children of Israel were forty years in the wilderness; the land of Israel was quiet for forty years; David reigned for forty years, so did Solomon and Jehoash and Joash—and so one could go on. As for "seven," Cruden has a long note on it as a number of perfection, for the Bible is packed with it just as it is with the number three. Seven plus three make 10 which is certainly a magic number. And so, if one counts the words and letters of some of the special sentences in both the Old and New Testaments, it will be found that they are written in combinations of these numbers. This was recognised by the great Church Father Origen who was, in consequence, suspected of heresy—and with reason. Origen rightly contended that, except for the "vulgar," that is, except for the people not in the know, the Bible had marvellous hidden meanings. For the people, it had to be interpreted literally—hence our Billy Grahams and their numerous followers. And the Roman Church insists to this day that the people must not read the Bible except by special permission, for they are sure to misunderstand it. That is why the Church was so strongly opposed to printing the Bible—it meant, in the ultimate, indiscriminate Bible reading which was a dangerous heresy.

In his book, *God Counts*, Mr. Filmer brings together a large number of beautifully composed words and sentences and has no difficulty in showing the very clever numerical patterns in them. Who was responsible for all this is quite unknown except to people like him who all roundly declare that only God Almighty could have written them. But for me, and for some of us who have made a little study of Numerology in general and numerics in the Bible in particular, they prove beyond all question that except for a few people in Kings almost everything in the Bible is pure fiction. The more I read of the Rev. E. W. Bullinger and

Ivan Panin and other specialists in Bible numerics, the more I was convinced of this.

I do not, of course, accept their conclusions. By careful juggling you can take a sentence from Robinson Crusoe and prove in the same way that the Lord, not Daniel Defoe, wrote the book. If any reader does not want to go to the trouble of counting up sentences from this immortal work let him make a study of Baconian cyphers in the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. A number of Baconians have published their incredibly ingenious results, and they are quite as remarkable as anything in God's Precious Word. If Mr. Filmer denies this, I will gladly prove my contention.

The two genealogies in the Gospels have the number seven worked in them, for Jesus, as a God, had to have this "divine" number. But according to Mr. Filmer, the titles given to him—Christ, Messiah, Saviour, etc., in Greek all figure the number "eight." If the Gospel writers had made the number 9 or 5 it would have been all the same for our Bible numerologists. And it would not have made the slightest difference to the fiction of Jesus. But why is Jesus associated with the number 8? The Gospel writers no doubt noticed that David was supposed to be an eighth son and, as the Jews insisted that the Messiah had to be descended from David, the number 8 was worked into the title.

Not that Jesus really was descended from David—his Father was a God, and Mary really belonged to the tribe of Levi; but no Christian ever had difficulty in swallowing the most ignorant rubbish when it was a question of Faith. According to Mr. Filmer, the numeric value of the word Messiah is 656—that is,  $8 \times 82$ . Here is, as he says, God's handiwork indeed; for how can an unblushing infidel explain such marvellous numerics? Not only do we get the number 8, but (he does not mention this) we get 82 which gives us  $8 + 2 = 10$ , the wonderful number which "controls or directs the order of all other numbers." Did not God issue 10 commands "in the course of Creation"? How can any unhappy Atheist explain this marvellous number 10, now adopted as the basis of the metric system? Even though it was first adopted by an unbelieving France, can we not see the handiwork of God in the metric system?

In actual fact, I tried out a lot of numbers in purely secular writings, and found you can juggle with them just as easily; but before giving some of them, I want our Filmers and Panins to explain the truly awful contradictions in numbers throughout the Bible. There is no need to bother with counting Greek and Hebrew consonants and vowels. All one has to do is to look up the numbers, for example, given in Kings and Chronicles describing the same event, or in Ezra and Nehemiah.

For example, I said above that David was the eighth son of his father, but was he? According to Chronicles he was, but what about the account given in Samuel? Was he there meant to be the seventh? Or, how many horsemen did David take from Hadadezer? According to Samuel, he took seven hundred; according to Chronicles, he took seven thousand. How did the Lord, divinely responsible for every word and comma in the Bible, make such a mistake?

Or will Mr. Filmer tell us why nobody appears to have got the date of the Creation quite right? The Hebrew date is 4,004 B.C., the Samaritan 4,700 B.C., the Septuagint 5,872 B.C. Surely God Almighty would have made no error here? Even the Talmud differs from the lot as does Josephus. The former gives 5,344 B.C., Josephus, 4,658 B.C. Perhaps the Hebrew must be right for it is  $7 \times 572$  and  $572 = 14$  which is  $2 \times 7$ . Wonderful!

## This Believing World

Apart from the name of Jesus all Christians use the word "unity" perhaps more than any other word, meaning of course that Christians are united, or ought to be. The truth is that no religion is or has ever been so hopelessly divided as Christianity. From the time—according to Church history—Peter, Paul, and Barnabas all violently quarrelled, Christians have constantly rowed and squabbled with each other. They are still doing it. It is not only the Church of Rome which contemptuously rejects our Protestant Churches. Anglo-Catholicism is just as violently opposed to "Prots" as it scathingly calls them.

In a recent leader the "Observer" calls attention to all this and asks—has the Church of England accepted the Reformation on which it is historically based? Well—as Prof. Joad used to say—it all depends on what you mean by the Church of England. What is it? Is it the small minority of Anglos? Is it the followers of such bishops as the late Dr. Barnes? Is it the High or the Low Church? Must you believe in the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection to be a member of the Church of England?

The inescapable truth is that for at least some members of the Church of England the Reformation was a huge blunder. The Church of Rome's mistakes and abuses could have been put right without separation and England could have reposed safely in the arms of the Pope as Christ Jesus obviously intended. And if Newman and Pusey and Keble failed to get England back to Rome, their failure need not necessarily be repeated. Bluntly put therefore, there must always be disunity in the Christian Church. England at least will never accept Rome.

Although everybody, black or white, Greek or Jew, is at one with Christ, so far the Church of England won't admit the Church of South India to communion with it. All sorts of theological mummery is at stake, none of which matters two hoots—except to Anglo-Catholics who want nothing so much as complete submission to everything Popery stands for except—perhaps—the Pope; and some even want the Pope. Still one can always mouth that blessed word "unity" and swear by Christ\* Jesus, and all will be—or should be—well.

According to Dr. W. E. Sangster writing in the *Sunday Times* "no theory of human origin can make a man indifferent to guilt". This is a new Christian way of talking about the old, old, standby of Fundamentalists, the Sense of Sin, which only getting washed in the blood of Jesus Christ can clean away. In fact, he insists that "sin is more serious than cancer". Dr. Sangster is shrewd enough to see that Christianity would be (metaphorically speaking) quite headless without sin and he gloats on it. Unfortunately for him, the attitude of most sinners is that it may be naughty but it is certainly nice.

It was Macaulay, we think who said that the Puritans objected to bear-baiting not because it was wrong, but because it gave pleasure to the onlookers. And we cannot help thinking that the objection of the Rev. B. Parkin to an outing of 150 children on a Sunday is because the kiddies would be actually enjoying themselves on the Sabbath Day. It's a day when everybody should think of the Lord only, and be thoroughly miserable. Mr. Parkin protests he is not a spoil-sport but, fortunately for sanity,

the organisers are going on with their plans to give the children a thoroughly good time—and on a Sunday too!

## Ask at Your Library

*Rheumatism for You*. The New Approach, by Dr. Louis Moss. Published by Cresset Press, London, 9/6.

IN the Scriptures we are told that the Lord causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. He evidently has no favourites. And the same attitude is displayed by Him towards rheumatism. The godly and the ungodly both suffer equally from this complaint when it attacks them; which is why the review of the book *Rheumatism and You* will appeal to so many of our readers and will be ready with interest and advantage because it brings a message of hope to those who suffer from the crippling and painful disease of rheumatism.

Dr. Moss gives, in simple language that any lay man can understand practical advice on how to eliminate rheumatism. It does not necessitate visits to hospital, not long continuous treatment by injection; No—this doctor pins his faith on the results that can be obtained from using adrenaline cream applied to what he calls the 'trigger spots' the source of the trouble.

The case results he quotes are amazing—that is the only word for them; and he also tells the story of his own suffering and the results he achieved by this treatment.

Lord Russell, of Liverpool, who writes the foreword, says—"The author of this book, in 1939, was himself an invalid with chronic rheumatism. For two years he was in great pain which all known treatments failed to alleviate. It was thus, and we should be grateful for it, that Dr. Louis Moss was attracted to the study of rheumatism. He discovered that the application of small quantities of adrenaline by massage or injection, to the sources of rheumatism, at once relieves the pain and relaxes the muscles.

The technique of this treatment has been continuously improved and developed by the author during recent years, and he has benefited many thousands of sufferers from rheumatism, both in this county and abroad, all of which is described in this book. I know personally of many such cures which it is not extravagant to say, are little short of miraculous.

In addition to the treatment by adrenaline, Dr. Moss shows the necessity of keeping to a sensible diet; but the sample diet sheets found in his book are neither cranky nor expensive. On the subject of diet he has this to say—"We can see here that in the writer's experience faulty diet is at the root of much soft tissue rheumatism. Attacks of 'fibrositis' and 'lumbago' among the writer's patients have commonly been accompanied by digestive disturbances such as flatulence, heartburn, nausea and vomiting."

A whole chapter is devoted to the importance of correct posture. Dr. Moss points out that many pains thought to be due to lumbago, slipped disc or fibrositis, are really caused by faulty posture.

There are many illustrations in the book to show how adrenaline cream should be applied.

Ask for this book at your library—better still, buy a copy for yourself and keep it for reference.

F. A. HORNIBROOK.

—NEXT WEEK—

DEBUNKING THE BRONZE LILIES

By MALCOLM STUBBS

# THE FREETHINKER

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Telephone: Holborn 2601.

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.

## 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.

- J. C. SUTHERLAND.—Thanks for appreciation. As regards Swedenborg, Mr. Cutner has dealt with his fallacies in these columns.
- W. E. HOLT.—We cannot give you Sir J. Jeans's address, and doubt whether he has one. He died some years ago.
- F. BROWELL.—We hope to have a review of *Belief and Unbelief since 1850*.
- AGNES H. STACEY.—We find it difficult to sympathise with Spiritualists who "don't get enough time on the B.B.C.," because if all their claims are true, the spirits should be able to break this barrier and broadcast as ghost voices any time that suits them.
- H. F. HAAS (Orangeburg, U.S.A.).—Thanks for letter, interesting enclosures and appreciation of H. Day's open letter.
- R. L. HUMPHRIS.—Mr. Clarke advocated that the East should practice limitation of population, not that the West should give up the practice. We cannot see anything sinister here.
- F. J. DECOURT.—An commencement, vous trouverez *Essays in Free-thinking* de Chapman Cohen très lisible.
- C. MCD. (Glasgow).—We have never refused any challenge from Mr. Aldred to debate the Myth Theory. But who will sponsor it? It is a long way to London and very expensive.
- W. BOLTON.—We much appreciate your practice of buying three copies a week for distribution.
- S. W. BROOKS.—No doubt Christians would like to claim the term Freethought, but it has definable connections in relation to religious controversy. It is easy to play fast and loose with terms.
- W. J. PYE.—Many thanks for your proofs that Thomas Paine never "repented."

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.
- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street).—Every Sunday at 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, 3 p.m., Platt Fields: 7-30 p.m., St. Mary's Blitzed Site: Speakers, Messrs. McCALL, MILLS, or WOODCOCK. Every weekday, Deansgate Blitzed Site, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.
- Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Every Wednesday and Sunday at 8 p.m. Messrs. PARRY, THOMPSON, and other speakers.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. RIDLEY, EBURY, O'NEILL and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

### INDOOR

- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Thursday, July 21, 7.30 a.m.: A. HEWITT, "What is Determinism?"
- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Cafe, 40 Cannon Street, off New Street).—Sunday, July 24, 7 p.m.: Open Discussion: "Are We Sinners?"

## Innocents at Home

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE Scripture lesson was in progress when the inspector entered.

Without claiming to know a great deal about the subject, but finding Religious Knowledge now added to the things he was paid to inspect, he had conscientiously brushed up

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £890 12s. 2d.; R. Aksed, £1; Wm. Kirkwood, 5s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; H. Strange, 2s. 6d.; R. Gerrard, 4s.; A. Hancock, 1s. Total to date, £892 7s. 2d. Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

his facts, and felt competent, if not to display erudition, at least to escape detection of ignorance.

Having made the acquaintance of the teacher and passed the usual civilities, he turned to the class. "Who was it," he asked, "that knocked down the Wall of Jericho?"

The youth on whom his eye had fallen, perhaps a little accusingly, was seen to exhibit symptoms of confusion. Shuffling awkwardly to his feet, he protested with some show of injured righteousness, "Not me, sir! I didn't."

"A peculiar answer," commented the inspector, cocking an eye to the teacher, half surprised, half amused. "We shall have to probe a little further."

"It puzzles me," said the teacher, knitting her brows and regarding the boy with only the mildest suspicion. "I know this boy's parents and I know his background, and I cannot connect him with hooliganism of that kind. If he can tell me on his word of honour that he is not responsible I shall be inclined to take his word and believe him."

Recoiling a little, the inspector made a successful effort to recover his composure, and beat a dignified retreat to the headmaster's study, where he gave a calm, patient and balanced account of what had taken place. "I should be interested to hear any comment you have to make," he concluded.

The headmaster tapped his fingers on the desk in thought.

"An ugly business," he commended. "Very ugly indeed. I am glad to see you take a serious view of it." The head completed his tapping. "I cannot claim," he said, "to know this boy as well as Miss Jones does. But in deference to her opinion I would prefer to regard him as innocent in the absence of any strong evidence to the contrary which you may have come by."

With eyes closed, the inspector battled with his emotions. He was not a vindictive man but there was only one thing to do, and it was his duty to do it. Unpleasant it might be, but it had to be done. He must write a report for the Ministry.

"I will say no more about the matter for the time being," he said, "but I shall hope to investigate further. Good day."

Nor did he lose time. That very night he reported the affair in all its naked absurdity, omitting nothing, adding nothing. He posted it sadly.

Whitehall received. They noted, they referenced, they marked for investigation, they filed, they shelved. Three months elapsed. He was not unduly worried. Six months. He would not admit to himself that he was impatient for the outcome. Seven months, and he had developed a twitch and begun to smoke. Eight months, and he was in the throes of an extended quarrel with his wife. His now rapidly thinning hair caused him to reflect gloomily on the disrespect shown to the prophet in the Old Testament by small children: "Go forth, thou bald pate."

And then, in the fulness of time, Whitehall delivered:

"In reply to your representations re damage to wall, it has been decided to take no further action in the matter. We have been in communication with the Ministry of Works, who at our request are arranging to have the wall restored."

## Two Nature Poets

By COLIN McCALL

A FRIENDLY critic has asked me to amplify my remarks on the relative merits of Burns and Wordsworth as nature poets. I stated that the former had "an affinity with nature that was free from the sentimentality of a Wordsworth" and instanced his poems *To a Mountain Daisy* and *To a Mouse*. I think it is of interest to investigate this matter a little more closely, for it raises certain points that concern us as Freethinkers. Industrialised city-dwellers we may be, but we aspire to some sort of philosophy of life involving a view of nature and our relationship to it. And it is important that our view of nature should conform with the facts.

Broadly speaking, there are two opposing attitudes to nature: the scientific and the religious; the one seeking for the explanations of natural phenomena inside nature itself, the other referring them to an outside or supernatural agency. Wordsworth's approach was essentially religious; I do not mean to suggest that Burns's was scientific in any modern sense; but it was the pragmatism of the land-dweller and workman. And, I contend, it was truer.

Wordsworth, of course, is held up to us in childhood as "the poet of nature" and I suppose we have all wandered with him "lonely as a cloud." Certainly he wrote a great deal about nature and no doubt he loved the English countryside. Equally certainly, he never understood it. Nobody who did could have written *Tintern Abbey*. Whatever the merits of this poem may be, it is puerile in its treatment of nature. It is a nature that "never did betray/The heart that loved her"; that leads "from joy to joy"; and that can

. . . . . so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings.

It is, in fact, a nature that does not exist.

Mr. Aldous Huxley (in his pre-mescaline period) devoted an essay to the consideration of *Wordsworth in the Tropics*, wherein he showed that a few weeks in Malaya or Borneo would have undeceived the poet. "Wandering in the hot-house darkness of the jungle," wrote Mr. Huxley, Wordsworth "would not have felt so serenely certain of those 'Presences of Nature,' those 'Souls of Lonely Places,' that he was in the habit of worshipping on the shores of Windermere and Rydal. . . . The jungle is marvellous, fantastic, beautiful; but it is also terrifying, it is also profoundly sinister." True, but everything is not always so serene in the Lake District or, indeed, anywhere else, as every countryman well knows. This seems generally to have escaped Wordsworth's notice. Let us take a few examples.

His eagle strikes "with awe/Man, bird, and beast" but then flies "high above Atlantic waves, to draw/Light from the fountain of the setting sun." He sees it as a symbol of freedom and majesty, not of predatoriness. This is quite legitimate in a poet, but it is inadequate in a nature poet. The sight of *The Redbreast chasing the Butterfly* would surely bring realisation that nature is not "full of blessings" for all. Not to Wordsworth, however. He addresses the bird as he might a naughty boy.

What ailed thee, Robin, that thou couldst pursue  
A beautiful creature,  
That is gentle by nature?

Beneath the summer sky  
From flower to flower let him fly;  
'Tis all he wishes to do.

And the poem ends with the plaintive plea:  
O pious Bird! whom man loves best,  
Love him, or leave him alone!

Words fail me when I read that. It is as maudlin as it is possible to be.

Admittedly these are not examples of Wordsworth at his best, but they represent Wordsworth "on nature." Still, it is only fitting to refer to some of his better works. *The Prelude* hails "O Soul of Nature! excellent and fair!" sustained and governed "by laws divine" and is filled with references to her harmoniousness and her calmness, to which he pays reverence and in which he delights. Her serenity is slightly disturbed in Book VIII by winter storms but the shepherd is "sagacious" of their approach, there are "sheltering coves" for his flock and he deals out "their regular nourishment." There is no hint of possible suffering and death, and spring is soon upon us "and all the pastures dance with lambs." There is a period of despondency in Book III of *The Excursion* but it is "corrected" in Book IV.

. . . For, the Man—  
Who, in this spirit, communes with the Forms  
of nature. . . .

. . . needs must feel  
The joy of that pure principle of love. . . .

And the *Immortality Ode*, sighing for the poet's curious childhood days when everything was "apparelled in celestial light," contains little more ominous than the "clouds that gather round the setting sun."

Such examples could be multiplied but it is time to make the comparison with Burns. Both poets have lines to daisies, and Wordsworth's seem to owe something to the earlier poem. Both read a lesson for man from the flower; but whereas Wordsworth's daisy would teach man

. . . how to find  
A shelter under every wind,  
A hope for times that are unkind. . . .

Burns's has survived the "bitter-biting" north wind only to be crushed by the plough.

There, in thy scanty mantle clad,  
Thy snawie bosom sun-ward spread,  
Thou lifts thy unassuming head  
In humble guise;  
But now the share utters thy bed,  
And low thou lies!

The lesson that Burns draws is that man will share the same fate: a melancholy lesson but true. Likewise in his lines *To a Mouse*, cognizance is taken of the winds and frost of winter.

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley,  
may sound a little trite now, but it remains true. And Wordsworth never equalled:

I doubt na, whyles but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' request;  
I'll get a blessing wi' the lave,  
An' never miss't!

However he tried, Wordsworth never seemed to achieve the affinity with nature that Burns got from his country upbringing and farming days. He was always "gazing" at nature as though from the outside. Burns was less self-conscious, well and truly a part of nature, revelling in the pleasures that it offered but fully aware of the pains, too: pains that he shared with the other creatures of the wild. In a word, the difference between the poets on the theme of

nature is one of authenticity. The same may be said of their relationship to country folk. Wordsworth saw the Highland Reaper and asked: "Will no one tell me what she sings?" As Mr. J. F. Hendry has remarked, Burns had already done so.

Yet the notion persists that Wordsworth is the supreme nature poet in our language, presumably because he wrote a large number of poems about nature. His sentimental and unrealistic—in short, religious—view of nature still persists to some extent. How often we have been told that one can "commune" with God through nature—a typically Wordsworthian idea. And how often we must have longed for the sanity and understanding of Burns's *The Banks o' Doon* where nature's indifference to the sorrows of man is so superbly expressed in song. This is the first important lesson that man has to learn in framing a philosophy or in growing up. We may learn it direct from nature or from a poet like Burns. We cannot learn it from Wordsworth, whose ideal philosopher was the child and whose view of nature was essentially childish.

## Akbar

By G. I. BENNETT

THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY years have passed since the death of the greatest of the Mogul emperors of India. Akbar was a mighty conqueror but, as we shall see, an even mightier ruler. The justice and wisdom of his 45 years as sole director and administrator of his empire won him the title "Guardian of Mankind."

He was the grandson of Babur—"that joyous and superb adventurer," as Laurence Binyon describes him\*—who, inheriting the crown of a small country in the middle of Asia, devoted his life to fighting to extend his dominion, finally making himself master of Hindustan. His son, Humayun, was driven out of Hindustan by rival rulers from Afganistan, and only after years of exile did he regain it, just before his death.

Akbar, although then a mere boy of 14 years, had to fight to retain and consolidate his inheritance. His subsequent years were spent in a long series of wars, annexing surrounding territories one by one until, finally, his domain extended from sea to sea, and he was in possession of the whole of India north of the Deccan.

As a conqueror Akbar's achievements were spectacular. He was a born campaigner, a clear-sighted and altogether fearless leader of men, full of astonishing energy, and capable of swift and unerring decision. Yet, outstanding as was his military genius, he proved himself a wise, just, and beneficent sovereign. Those whom he conquered did not suffer the indignities of a suppressed and vanquished people. They became his subjects and were accepted by him, a foreigner in their midst, as his own kinsfolk.

To assist him in his vast administrative work he had a close friend and confidant in Abul Fazl, his chief minister, a gentle scholarly man to whom we are indebted for a detailed and valuable biography of Akbar.

Together they purged the empire of a number of long-standing injustices, inequalities, and corruptive influences. Non-Moslems were given the same rights and privileges as Moslems; enslavement in war was forbidden; the custom of demanding contributions from Hindu pilgrims to sacred places was abolished; and (of even larger significance) in 1564 an iniquitous poll-tax levy on non-Moslems, which had been a source of substantial income to Mohammedan princes, was swept away, and thenceforth Hindus were

admitted to some of the most important situations in the Mogul empire.

Under Akbar accurate surveys were undertaken, bold schemes of road-making were implemented, and industry and commerce were given every help. And that was not all. Artistic activity of every sort received the Great Mogul's fullest encouragement. He established schools throughout his empire where, without discrimination, Moslems, Hindus, and Parsees could study together. During his reign both Persian and Hindu literature flourished. Music had his patronage. And there arose a new style of architecture in which Islamic and Hindu characteristics were exquisitely fused.

All this is wonderful when we learn that Akbar could neither read nor write. It was his habit at court to listen to readings of Persian literature, prose and poetry, and he had apparently a phenomenal memory—especially for Sufi poetry.

But "even if he had been less remarkable in other respects," writes Emmy Wellesz in *Akbar's Religious Thought Reflected in Mogul Painting*,\*\* "he would, by his tolerance, stand out as an exceptional figure at a time when religious strife was raging all over the most civilised countries of Europe."

Born into the narrow and fanatical faith of Islam, Akbar drifted far from orthodoxy, and even in early manhood he "became convinced of the omnipresence of God under the varying garments of differing creeds." Much to the acute annoyance and resentment of good Mohammedans, he exhibited an insatiable curiosity in religious questions. "Discourses on philosophy," Akbar is recorder as saying, "have such a charm for me that they distract me from all else and I forcibly restrain myself from listening to them lest necessary duties should be neglected."

He authorised the building of a great hall, which became known as the House of Worship, where issues of religious philosophy could be debated and doctrinal differences could be expounded and considered. The emperor, it is said, moved freely about the large assembly, hearing what exponents of each of the religious faiths had to say. These sittings would often carry on far into the night. Akbar's thirst for ultimate truth was unquenchable.

Yet in spite of his extraordinary achievements and the prodigious power he wielded, there was profound dissatisfaction and disquietude in his heart. "Since true greatness consists in doing the will of God," he said, "my mind is not at ease in the diversity of sects and creeds; and apart from that outward pomp of circumstance, with what satisfaction in my despondency can I undertake the sway of empire? I await the coming of some discreet man of principle who will resolve the difficulties of my conscience."

In 1578, at his invitation, two Jesuit Fathers from Portuguese Goa came to his court to give him an account of the Christian faith. These priests were at first full of hope that they would convert this powerful potentate to Christianity, and his very friendly welcome certainly gave them encouragement. He told the priests that, could he be persuaded of the truth of their religion, he would willingly embrace it and, if necessary, abjure his empire for it. But there were stumbling-blocks. Akbar's religious outlook was a sort of unitarian mysticism, and to him the doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Birth were altogether incomprehensible.\*\*\* Nor could he, having many wives,

\*\* Published 1952 by Alen & Unwin.

\*\*\* In his exhaustive study, *Akbar: The Great Mogul*, Vincent Smith wrote: "He seems always to have cherished the mystic's ideal of close and direct union with God, unobscured by priestly intervention or disputable dogmas."

\* In his short biography *Akbar*, first published in 1932.

readily accept the principle of monogamy.

Although the Mogul emperor extended a cordial invitation to Christians to come and build their churches within his dominion, the Jesuits could not but notice with sorrow that he continued, as was his wont, to take an eager interest in the tenets of Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Parseism, even performing their symbolic acts along with the Great Mogul, returned home, much against his wishes. Those of the Christian faith. And so in 1582 these pious souls despaired of ever converting him. Two other Jesuit missions were to follow Akbar's personal request; and the third mission, which came in 1594, was still in India at the time of his death.

But before the first Jesuit mission left India the emperor cast around for a faith that would embody the essential truths of all the jarring creeds, and finally he proclaimed a curiously eclectic religion, "Divine Monotheism," of which he assumed spiritual headship. But that religion, which was to have united the Mogul empire in common belief and worship, was a dismal failure. It was, as Emmy Wellesz puts it, "an experiment which expired with its author and left no trace."

Towards the close of 1605, Akbar, afflicted with a fatal malady, lay dying in Agra, the Mogul capital. It is recorded that the Jesuit priests of the third mission sought access to the sick-room, but without success. Only a few faithful friends were permitted to be present. They earnestly and repeatedly reminded the expiring monarch of the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, but he did not respond. Yet to the end he was heard trying to pronounce the name of God. . . .

By nature Akbar was a compound of opposites. As a man of action in charge of practical affairs he had the self-assurance of genius; but in matters of thought and speculation he was full of doubts and irresolutions that he never succeeded in overcoming, and, in the words of Mr. Vincent Smith, "he died a baffled and disappointed man." Fundamentally honest and sincere, he could, on occasion, when it suited his purpose, show all the native shrewdness, guile, and lack of scruple of the oriental. In equable frame of mind he would display a kindly, humane spirit; but in anger could be hard and cruel. "He was great with the great and lowly with the lowly, noted Father Jerome Xavier, one of the Jesuit missionaries.

Yet, despite his contrasting qualities, good and bad, Akbar was for the most part a just man, capable of high-minded generosity and forbearance. For an Asiatic and a Mohammedan by birth, he was a ruler of unexampled wisdom and largeness of vision. And his open-mindedness, his pure disdain of narrow tradition, and his undeviating policy of complete religious toleration over the long years of his reign have evoked the wonderment of successive generations.

## Correspondence

### THIS BELIEVING WORLD

You say "Religion is really the source of 'almost all' Dictatorship." I wonder which are the exceptions. If the implication is that the U.S.S.R. is a Secular Dictatorship—then I submit that it is in fact the most genuine of all democracies. All Christians alleged "democracies" are a farce and humbug.

Incidentally—why do you always print the word "god" with a capital letter?

FRANK BURGESS.

[We spell both God and Santa Claus with capitals.—EDITOR.]

### £2-12-6 FOR A RAZOR SHARPENER

In 1902 I worked for a German Jewish firm selling beautifully calf bound and illustrated Bibles at £2-12-6 each. Incidentally it was the finest racket I ever touched, for the commission was 12/6 per sale. One week the firm offered a prize of £5-5-0 for the salesman who sold most during the week, and I, an atheist am not ashamed to admit, won; for I contend that if people read their Bibles there would be many more unbelievers. One Saturday afternoon, after drawing our pay, we salesmen went into the bar of a public house. A big navy approached me and said "Ain't you the chap who sold my old woman a Bible?" I was a bit frightened, for I thought he was going to attack me. But I boldly replied "Yes, I suppose I am. What about it." Then holding out his huge hand, the navy said "Put it there, kid. It was just what I wanted, for I sharpen my razor on the back of it. Now have a drink with me."

PAUL VARNEY.

### BULTMANN'S DEMYTHOLOGISING DID IT

In Western Germany (as the German freethought organ, "Geistesfreiheit," June, 1955, p. 87, informs us) the total number of university students has risen, whereas that of the divinity students, both Catholic and Protestant, has markedly sunk. The percentage of Protestant divinity students of the total number of students was 3.1 in the winter terms of the year (scholastic) 1951-1952 and it shrank to 2.5 per cent. in the winter term of 1953-1954. The percentage of Catholic divinity students was reduced from 3.5 to 3 per cent. at the same period. As reasons for this portentous shrinkage, Prof. Schrey (in "The German Parsons' Gazette") gives the following: An unwillingness for the service, a crisis in the status of the Christian Church in public life, Prof. Bultmann's endeavour to demythologise the whole Christian Gospel story, and the progressing secularization of all life. German Jesuits' monthly, "Stimmen der Zeit" (Feb., 1955) commented thus: "One would not be mistaken, if one would make most of these reasons, some perhaps not in the same, Protestant sense, responsible also for the lack of recruits to the professions of priest and monk."

GREGORY S. SMELTERS.

### RELIGIOUS ENVY

In a long life I've always noticed how the fearless confidence of the atheist provokes envy. The believer can't understand this at all from his own point of view and it makes him "care". Death is what-it's-all-about in religion. The atheist, having understanding has no fear of oblivion, while the poor believer has been taught to dread the unknown "beyond the grave". So the timid world "gangs up" on the offensively easy-going atheist. If people had humour there'd be no religion with the knowledge we have now.

Canada.

J.F.K.

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