

# The Freethinker

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PERIODS of social and of economic crisis, such as the present age, have always been favourable to the growth, or to the revival, of religion. It was precisely because the subject peoples, the slaves and the depressed classes of the Roman world and empire were unable to solve their current social crisis in *this* world, that they turned in despair to the *next* world, and created Christianity. The 19th century was an era of rapid social progress in which a rationalist philosophy was on the upgrade and in which the old religious appeal seemed destined to disappear. In the present century, however, a century of permanent political, economic and social crisis, we have observed Religions making a remarkable comeback. As a Bishop of the Church of England remarked rather indiscreetly some little time ago, "ages of fear are ages of religion." Both ancient and modern history appear to bear out this contention.

## The Hellish Twins

As we have noted in a previous article published in this journal, there are to-day, two religions permanently, in West and East, respectively, which are, at present, busily engaged in making such a comeback, Catholicism, in the West, and Islam in the East. We have denominated these two totalitarian creeds as "The Hellish Twins," for both creeds have, as noted, already certain generic characteristics in common; both are dogmatic and exclusive creeds; both possess a jealous god and both are international creeds which aim at world-wide domination and to attain this last end, employ political and even on occasions, military means; the "Christian Crusade," the "Muslim Jihad" or "Holy War." At present, taking full political and psychological advantage of the impact of Communism in the political, and of the atomic age in the physical, spheres; both these ancient international creeds are staging a remarkable recovery, one quite unforeseen in the 19th century, with its generally rationalist outlook and its widely held belief in the "inevitability" of progress—with a capital "P." In the sphere of power politics, the cultivation of which is so necessary to the eventual acquisition of world-power, the Vatican uses political Catholicism as its instrument, whilst Islam relies on the Pan-Islamic movements.

## The Evolution of Islam

It is generally known under what dramatic circumstances, so unlike the gradual growth of its older rival, Christianity, the creed of Muhammed and the Koran originated and made its startling conquests. From the year 632, when Muhammed "shuffled off this mortal coil," down to 1258 when the Abbassid Khalifat was destroyed by the Tartar "hordes," Islam enjoyed its golden age. It is also well-known how, since the 13th century, the power of the international commonwealth of Islam has slowly declined, whilst, as late as the 17th century, Islam still boasted the Moghul Empire of Delhi and the Turkish Empire of Istanbul, as front rank world-powers; by the time that the 19th century had arrived, the world of Islam lay flat at

the feet of the Christian and industrialised West. By the opening of the present century, with the doubtful and diminishing exception of Turkey, "The Sick Man of Europe," no Muslim nation cut any appreciable figure in its contemporary world. In the adjacent field of culture, the stagnant feudal traditions of Islam, hopelessly circumscribed by the outmoded letter of the infallible Koran, also lagged far behind the scientific and progressive West. The 19th century represented the nadir of Islam. The scholastic Muslim theology like that its Catholic opposite number in the West, appeared to be destined to rust ignominiously away.

## The Muslim Renaissance

In Society, as well as in Nature, it is often true that, "the darkest hour precedes the Dawn." In the later decades of the 19th century, when Islam appeared definitely to be on the way out, a group of remarkable propagandists laid the foundations of the Pan-Islamic revival, using this last term in its broad non-technical sense, as elsewhere in this article. The most notable of these pioneers of Pan-Islamism appears to have been "Jemal-ud-din el Afghani," who is usually regarded as the ultimate Founder of the present Pan-Islamic revival. "The Afghan" (El-afghani) spent his life as an itinerant preacher and propagandist of Islamic greatness and unity all over the Muslim world. He was in particular, closely associated with the Turkish Pan-Islamic movement of Sultan Abdul Hamid, and with the unsuccessful military revolt in Egypt under Arabi Pasha, the forerunner of Colonel Nasser, which was crushed by British military intervention in 1882. Of El Afghani, the eminent Orientalist and historian, Hans Kohn, writes:

"We may regard the great Jemal-ud-din el Afghani (1838-1897) as the originator of this movement, the awakener of all modern political consciousness in Islam, who has left traces of his influence in almost all eastern countries." It is, in fact, rather surprising to find an Afghan, a member of what is still one of the most backward and feudal of Asiatic nations, as the originator of the Muslim Renaissance. The influence of this greatest of modern Afghans was first chiefly visible in Egypt. The famous Muslim University of El Azhar took up his teachings, and his most influential pupil was the great theologian, Mohammed Abdu who ended his career as Grand Mufti of Egypt and as the leading theologian in the Muslim world. Abdu began a synthesis between Muslim Theology founded like that of Catholic scholastic Theology, on Aristotelian logic, and Western scientific culture; he was a student of Herbert Spencer and engaged in controversy with Ernest Renan, then, probably, the two leading European thinkers. The Muslim Renaissance was under way.

## 20th Century Pan-Islamism

As far as the present writer is aware, Muslim theology has not so far experienced any startling renaissance as a

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Pan-Islamism

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

result of its recent contacts with the West, nor, in the secular sphere, has any great Muslim state made its appearance at all comparable to the medieval Abbassid Khalifat of Bagdad or to the more recent Turkish and Moghul empires. To-day, the world powers are either still Christian or else adhere to the new creed—one might perhaps call it, a *political religion of Communism*? Neither in the political world nor in the cultural field has Islam yet succeeded in recovering its old supremacy; yet, as and when compared with its depressed position during recent centuries, it has, undeniably made considerable progress throughout the first half of this century and in particular, during the past decade since the end of World War II.

#### Recent Muslim Activities

Notwithstanding, the 20th century, as and when compared with its immediate predecessors, has witnessed a considerable revival in the Muslim world, certainly in political power and, probably in intellectual activity. In the former sphere, we note the operation of new extensive Muslim states in Pakistan—an old aspiration of Islam now translated into political fact—and in Indonesia. In the West, we have the Arab League—partly offset, it is true, by the loss of Palestine to Israel; perhaps, however, only a *temporary loss*? In North Africa, the political revival and reinvigoration of Muslim communities is, at present, particularly noticeable: the recent military revolution in Egypt, and the increasing, and increasingly successful

movement towards political independence amongst the North African Muslim peoples still under French control: we are informed that the present struggles for political independence in Morocco, Tunis and Algiers, are watched with passionate interest by the whole Muslim world. The new Muslim states of the Sudan and Libya may also be noted in this connection.

#### The Crisis of Muslim Theology

One of the chief results of scientific and technical expansion in the 20th century has been the world-wide creation of new forms of industry in formerly "backward"—that is, pre-industrial lands. The world of Islam is now beginning to experience the problems created by the appearance of an industrial civilization founded on empirical lines. Muslim Theology and the traditional creed of the Koran upon which it is based, is now finding itself confronted with problems now only too painfully familiar to the conservative theologians of the Christian West, according to an English scholar resident in Pakistan; the Muslim reactions are very similar to those of its opposite numbers in the Christian West; schools of "modernist" Theology are beginning to make their appearance in the more advanced Muslim lands (cf. Wilfred Cantwell Smith—*Modern Islam in India*—1946). A further headache to the Muslim thinker is provided by the startling growth of Communism with its anti-theistic philosophy of Dialectical materialism.

## Mencken on Man

AS animals go . . . man is botched and ridiculous. Few other animals are so stupid or so cowardly. The commonest dog has far sharper senses and is infinitely more courageous, not to say more honest and dependable. The ants and the bees are, in many ways, far more intelligent and ingenious; they manage their government with vastly less quarrelling, wastefulness and imbecility. The lion is more beautiful, more dignified, more majestic. The antelope is swifter and more graceful. The ordinary house cat is cleaner. The horse, foamed by labour, has a better smell. The gorilla is kinder to his children and more faithful to his wife. The ox and the ass are more industrious and serene. But most of all, man is deficient in courage, perhaps the noblest quality of them all. He is not only mortally afraid of all other animals of his own weight, or half his weight, save a few that he has debased by artificial inbreeding—he is even mortally afraid of his own kind, and not only of their fists and hooves, but even of their laugh.

No other animal is so defectively adapted to its environment. The human infant, as it comes into the world, is so puny that if it were neglected for two days running it would infallibly perish; and this congenital infirmity, though more or less concealed later on, persists until death. Man is ill far more than any other animal, both in his savage state and under civilization. He has more different diseases and he suffers from them oftener. . . . He is more easily exhausted and injured. He dies more horribly. . . . Practically all the other higher vertebrates, at least in their wild state . . . retain their faculties to a greater age. An orang-outang marries at the age of seven or eight, raises a family of 70 or 80 children and it still as hale and hearty at 80 as a European at 45.

All the errors and incompetences of the Creator reach their climax in man. As a piece of mechanism he is the worst of them all. Put beside man, even a salmon or a staphylococcus is a sound and efficient machine. He has the worst kidneys known to comparative zoology, and the

worst lungs and the worst heart. His eye, considering the work it is called upon to do, is less efficient than the eye of an earthworm; an optical instrument maker who made an instrument so clumsy would be mobbed by his customers. Alone of all animals; terrestrial, celestial or marine; man is unfit by nature to go abroad in the world he inhabits. He must clothe himself, protect himself, swathe himself, armour himself. . . . Lacking his heavy and cumbersome trappings, he is defenceless even against flies. . . .

If we assume that man actually does resemble God then we are forced into the impossible theory that God is a coward, an idiot and a bounder. . . . The only practical effect of having a soul is that it fills man with anthropomorphic and anthropocentric vanities—in brief, with cocky and preposterous superstitions. He struts and plumes himself because he has this soul, and overlooks the fact that it doesn't work. Thus he is the supreme clown of creation, the *reductio ad absurdum* of animated nature. He is like a cow who believed that she could jump over the moon and ordered her whole life upon that theory. . . .

And yet this is the poor brute we are asked to venerate as a gem in the forehead of the Cosmos. This is the worm we are asked to defend as God's favourite on earth, with its millions of braver, nobler, decenter quadrupeds, its superb lions, its lithe and gallant leopards, its imperial elephants, its honest dogs, its courageous rats. This is the insect we are besought, at infinite trouble, labour and expense, to reproduce.

To sum up:

1. The cosmos is a gigantic fly-wheel making 10,000 revolutions a minute.
2. Man is a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on it.
3. Religion is the theory that the wheel was designed and set spinning to give him the ride.

(H. L. MENCKEN, *Selected Prejudices*.)

*Grammar of Freethought.* An outline of the philosophy of Freethought. By Chapman Cohen. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 4d.

## The Soul

By WILLIAM McCARTHY

(Concluded from page 255)

Each male sperm is composed of 24 genes. The female ovum is also composed of 24 genes. When the 24 male genes unite with the 24 female genes, they combine and create a living cell, and a human being is on its way. A living cell must have 48 genes. If the soul begins with the body, does it have one forty-eighth of a soul? If so, what becomes of each of the 24 male genes and each of the 24 female genes, the thousands of billions of parts of souls that are in the billion of male sperms and female ova that die because the one fails to contact the other? Do these soul parts revel in heaven or writhe in hell?<sup>8</sup>

We know that there can be no life without matter, and the priest tells us the human body (matter) either sends its soul to heaven or hell. Then, at what stage of man's development, from a single cell to mature man, can man decide his soul's fate? Tell us, you priests and preachers, whether the first cell of man in the womb has a mature soul. Or does the soul grow as the child grows?

As to the second theory. If the soul is "created," who creates it? When and how does it get into the body? Is a particular soul created for a particular body? Or is it a hit-and-miss manufacturing process, and does the creator keep a stock of souls on hand and distribute them as a merchant does his wares? And what would happen should the soul distributors fail to give a soul to a body? Also, is there only one creator of souls or are there many? In what manner and by whom are these soul creators created or selected? Does a bad creator create bad souls for bad bodies, and a good creator create good souls for good bodies? Certainly, a good creator would not want its created souls go to hell.

But if we rely upon the third theory (that souls have existed forever) we get into more serious trouble—a maze of bewilderment. If all souls existed before Elohim (many gods) and Yahweh (the Lord) completed their creation, where were the souls during the billions and billions of years from the beginning of time to the creation of man? Did they, during all that time, float about with the gods in nothingness, waiting for something to turn up—for some body to imprison them? But if the flesh is only the prison of souls, why do they enter the flesh? Do souls have no say in the matter? If they had, they surely would all rush to enter good bodies; bad bodies would not get souls and hell would be empty. Only the physical man knows right or wrong, and no soul would willingly enter a bad body with hell in the offing. So there must be some power that selects souls for bad men, and another that selects for good men. The bad power, so the Church holds, is constantly working to change the good bodies into bad bodies. No soul can have the say as to the body it enters; had it, all souls might want some particular body, a good sanctimonious body, sure to die soon, with heaven assured, thus causing confusion, maybe a soul war, and that might disturb the golden harp players. So, whether a soul enters a good body or a bad body depends upon the whim of its master. The soul is as helpless as an oyster. It knows nothing of right or wrong, only the body knows that. The body only decides the fate of its soul.

<sup>8</sup>—At each sexual discharge of a healthy male, thousands of these sperms are ejected. Each sperm would fertilize a female ovum were the two to contact each other, and thus each discharge would develop into thousands of human beings. The female ovum, unless fertilized, dies within twenty to thirty-six hours after its maturity, the male sperm within eighteen to thirty hours after leaving the male body.

Hence going to heaven or hell is a lottery. If a soul is lucky and draws one of God's tickets, it goes to heaven, but if unlucky it draws one from the devil and goes to hell. How we pity the poor souls, quaking in their fright, waiting to see whether they draw a heaven or a hell ticket! But under this last theory, who selects the souls the gods distribute, and how did the devil get his? We do not know; so, preachers, please explain. That is what you are paid for.

But we are further puzzled. If the soul has existed forever and never dies, why should it enter a body at all? Why should it be forced to take a chance of going to hell? And suppose a god put a soul in a good body and the devil got control and dooms the soul to hell, then what? Certainly a soul would not like that. Better that the gods had left that soul to float in space, free from human entanglements.

Now let us look at this soul from another angle. If a soul is free before it enters the body, and free after death, what can it gain by entering the body? Why do not the gods send the souls allotted to them, directly to heaven, and the devil send those allotted to him to hell, and be through with it? Why force souls to take risks? Do not tell men of reason that the soul does the selecting and controls its destiny. Do not tell men of common sense that a soul would willingly shun a good body and enter a bad one. No soul would voluntarily go to hell. In fact, if a soul were free to act, it probably would not enter a body at all. It would not take a chance on smelling brimstone.

Now let us be honest with ourselves; let us be guided by reason and common sense. We know all life, plant and animal, comes into being similarly through sex; we know that all life is a cycle, has a beginning, develops, matures, declines, decays and dies; we know we are unable to tell where plant life ends and animal life begins, and we know that most intelligent animals are mentally equal, or superior, to the lowest form of man. If we give man a soul, we must also give souls to all other living things. If man has a soul, so must all life. But as only man knows good and evil, and only the good walk the "golden streets," where do the other souls go? Where does the soul of the unborn infant—the souls of the many unborn infants that die by abortions—go? What becomes of the souls of the insane, those who are born idiots? None of them can "believe," or "desire" "to be baptised," or ask to be "saved." Have they souls? If the gods take care of the souls of the irrational, disorganized, or diseased bodies, were it not better for all of us to be so?

No, under the Church definition, there is no soul. There is no need for one. Neither the body, nor life itself has any use for one. Nature, by the combination of matter, created life; sex perpetuated it; the elements, through matter, guide it along its highway of development, growth, maturity, decay and death. Death is the end of life—the body and all its attributes. Reason permits no other conclusion, and the Bible agrees (Eccles. 9:5): "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything."

—NEXT WEEK—

ZEN

By the Rev. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

The Bible Handbook (10th Edition). By G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. Price 4s. 6d.; postage 3d.

## This Believing World

The Lutheran Pastor in America, the Rev. George G. Crist—who found he was quite unable to believe in the tall stories and fantastic miracles which make up Christianity has, of course, been found guilty of heresy and has been merely suspended. If it had not been for Freethought and Freethinkers, Mr. Crist might have tasted the sweets of boiling oil—one of the favourite methods the pious old Church had when dealing with heretics. In any case, three other Lutheran pastors are, we understand, faced with the same charges; and no doubt whatever they are, lots more from other Christian denominations who would like to take their stand as heretics as well. Perhaps a course of Billy Graham would stop the rot—or perhaps not.

Although it is nearly 70 years since Bradlaugh shocked Christian England by having it made legal to affirm instead of taking the oath, there appear to be still magistrates who pretend to be horrified—or are really horrified—at anyone refusing to take the oath. Called to give evidence in a court case the other day, Dr. Longfield of London Hospital refused to take the oath. He claimed that in his interpretation of the New Testament, oaths were not needed. The magistrate: "I trust your medicine is not as muddled as your religion."

No doubt this caused the usual laughter in court but readers should make a note that it is not necessary to give any reasons why they refuse to take the oath. They are by law permitted to affirm, and magistrates are exceeding their duty in making comments. But no Christian can stand Bradlaugh's Oath's Act, and we must be prepared to see them still very angry about it.

Even Christian Spiritualists hate the idea that there will be neither marriage nor giving in marriage (as Jesus said) in the after-life they are going to enjoy in Summerland; so it is not surprising that Mr. Shaw Desmond, who knows its geography better than anybody living, tells us in the *Sunday Sun* that "husbands and wives can be reunited—if they wish." What that means is not at all clear, for he adds, "The sex life of the astral seemed to be complicated yet with the red line of love and passion running through it as on earth."

If this means anything it means that love is much the same "over there" as when here alive—but the "complication" appears to be that "loving is a melting together not only of the etheric body but of spirit"—and we doubt whether even Mr. Desmond knows what this hopeless rigmarole means. Perhaps it's a sop to the many Spiritualistic spinsters who enthuse in the Movement.

In an interesting "profile" in the *Observer* on Sir A. Carr-Saunders, the Director of the London School of Economics, it is said that the L.S.E., when the late Harold Laski was teaching there, was known "as an Academy of Left-wing Atheists." This has now been quite changed under Sir Alexander who is himself an Anglican. He has given the School "a maturity, a variety, and a community life, that it previously lacked." This may be so—but under Laski people did talk about the L.S.E., it was always "news," and it certainly had some influence. Has it any now? Has Carr-Saunders brought his students back to Christ or what? It is a pity that the writer of this "profile" did not make it quite clear exactly what has happened to religion in the London School of Economics.

The resignation of Bishop Blunt of Bradford recalls that it was he who "bluntly" told King Edward VIII that he would "abundantly need God's Grace" at his Coronation, and he didn't seem to know it. "Some of us wish," he piously added, "that he gave more positive signs of awareness" of this need. And he insisted that all he meant was King Edward's "indifference to Church-going."

In other words, the King had realised that there was nothing in the "Divine Right of Kings"; and he was obviously bored stiff with humbly following Bishops and their like to church "reading the Lesson," and acting with all humility to the various representatives of God Almighty on earth. So he was promptly sacked. If he had only fought back (as was his right) it might have been the Bishops who were sacked, and we might have had a monarch untrammelled by an outworn Church.

GEORGE MILLER'S

### Newcastle Notebook

BEHOLD!—in Newcastle, a demonstration of what not to read; to wit, an Exhibition of Horror Comics lurid and gory, impossible and silly. The display was opened by the Rev. C. E. Marvin, who (laughingly?) remarked that it will "remind us of the work that has been done by the N.U.T., certain sections of the Press and public opinion," and thus, with laudable self-effacement, disclaiming that the Church added a note, syllable or squeak to the outcry. But what a situation—the part taken by some varieties of the journalistic species was praising the Church for its apparently solitary fight against the evil.

In the Newcastle area there is always some church undergoing rejuvenation, the latest being Brunswick Methodist, 130 years old and surely no guarantee of 100 per cent. safety for the pates of the Geordies who attend every Sunday. £10,000 was still needed prior to the Rev. R. J. Pearce's "two day vigil for gifts" outside the church. Wouldn't it be far cheaper to purchase crash helmets, using an odd one as a collection plate?

The Rev. E. Harriot announces that, contrary to the false notions of some people, sport as a pastime, like every human activity, must have a moral aspect and therefore comes under the "laws of religion." We should have thought that it didn't, just because it is a pastime, unless we infer that sport as a money making racket must not be subject to laws or restraint. Fighting down the temptation to guess at his comments on such human activity as Free-thought, we offer Mr. Harriot's excogitated verdict on the human body. Condemning the savagery that boxing frequently becomes, he declares: "Man has been given a body by God to use in a rational way." Between chuckles (at the thought of our appearance if God had omitted to give us bodies) we retort that such a remark sounds odd coming from a minister of a religion whose members, on their grand occasions, ritually and irrationally munch wafer-like biscuits which, as all good Catholics believe, really is the body of Jesus Christ.

As relief from praising God and Jesus (God for having such a son, Jesus for having such a father) the Rev. C. Haig "turns it up" occasionally and praises others for praising this ancient pair. His latest kindness is a review of Christopher Mayhew's *Men Seeking God*. Mr. Haig gushed

(Concluded on next page)

# THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

## 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.

Mrs. Molly Roche. See next "Facts for Freethinkers."

D. Raeside. The Secretary of our Glasgow Branch is Mr. J. Barrowman, 53 Rampart Avenue, W.3. Thanks for suggestions, though not entirely new.

Menzie MacTavish. Very good but cannot infringe copyright.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

- Blackburn Branch N.S.S. (Market Place).—Every Sunday, 7 p.m.: F. ROTHWELL.  
Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m. Sunday, August 7: HAROLD DAY and other speakers.  
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.

## Notes and News

In our Statement of Policy (6/5/54) we said that a limited amount of space in *The Freethinker* would from time to time be available for any representative Christian to state his case. It is not often that this offer is taken up, but in the present issue the Rev. John Rowland, B.Sc., is speaking from the Unitarian standpoint. Mr. Rowland was one of Chapman Cohen's most courteous opponents in these columns, as may be remembered. He is now the Unitarian minister at Brighton, and also, it is interesting to note, has charge of the old Meeting House at Ditchling, whose pulpit was at one time Mark Rutherford's.

The Rev. John L. Broom, M.A., who refers to *The Freethinker* as "my favourite weekly," thanks all those who have expressed appreciation of his articles. We are hoping to publish from his pen a series of critical reviews of some of the "bastion books" of orthodoxy, including works by those ardent Catholic converts, C. S. Lewis and Sir Arnold Lunn.

Mr. Lewis (author of *Screwtape Letters* and *The Problem of Pain*) is the latest to be received into the bosom of the Vatican, having been heading that way for some time. Mr. (now Sir) Arnold Lunn's conversion was proclaimed in *Now I See*, following his discussion with Fr. D'Arcy. His fondness for controversy brought him into contact with *The Freethinker*, in which he had several long epistolary

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £909 2s. 6d.; Messrs. Mackey & Trendell, 10s.; C. McRobert, £1 16s.; Anon., £3; H. E. D. Ward, 5s.; Wm. Mawhinney, 3s. 9d.; A. Gregory, 7s. 2d.; J. F. Kirkham (Canada), £3 10s. 10d.; A. Hancock, 1s.; W.H.D., 2s. 6d.; E. J. Hughes, 5s. Total to date: £919 3s. 9d.

exchanges with the late Chapman Cohen and with Mr. G. H. Taylor. We recall that he subsequently advised Beverley Nicholls to get to grips with some real Atheists instead of hitting sham ones of his own invention.

This is the time of the year when N.S.S. Branch Secretaries are thinking about the arrangements for indoor meetings in the autumn and winter. Interested readers who are not branch members but who are within access of meetings, may obtain a syllabus, when available, through *The Freethinker*.

## CYCLING ON THE SABBATH

(An open letter to the Editor of *Cycling*.)

Referring to the letters in your issue of the 20th inst., I am surprised in these enlightened days to find such expressions of religious prejudice and an attack on cyclists which I much resent.

I have been cycling for nearly 60 years and a member for the greater portion of that time of the Cycling Club founded by Robert Blatchford who, among other works wrote *God and my Neighbour*.

If your religious correspondents prefer their own peculiar religious atmosphere I have no objection to their belief but I do object to them classing all other Sunday cyclists as irreligious backsliders because we do not see eye to eye with them. It is probable that the reason for Sunday cycling runs (which started about 1919) was the fact that during the first German war the antagonists did not refrain from killing one another on the Sabbath!

People of their particular temperament have always been strongly opposed to all pleasures and they delight in thinking of themselves as "miserable sinners." They might, once in a while, go to the hills and the sea on a Sunday and ask themselves whether nature makes any difference on this particular day. Sunday is "man-made" and I congratulate the cyclists whom they condemn with "Bell, Book and Candle" on taking advantage of their brief liberty and returning to their many vocations with memories of a day well spent in the open air.

The suggestion of one writer that "Christianity is a Way of Life" may well suit their peculiar mentality; to them this world is a "Vale of Tears" but I prefer the attitude of Mrs. Knight of B.B.C. fame that morality is a social function and history proves that as religions fade and the social conscience grows, so the world gets better. The "Dark Ages" are not so distant but these "peculiar people" would like to resurrect them and clothe all of us in "Sackcloth and Ashes." Here's good luck, from an old cyclist, to all those who choose to travel in suitable costume and confusion to their enemies.

Finally, have these particular people "Had a Go" at the innumerable people who travel about the country on Sundays in a car?

T. D. SMITH,

National Clarion Cycling Club and National Secular Society.

## NEWCASTLE NOTE-BOOK

(Concluded from page 260)

much circumspect praise, but the general impression created is, while it must be fun being a Mohammedan, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or Orthodox Jew, or Catholic, nevertheless being actually a Protestant is just the very peak of human happiness. Sound health, good looks, a pension for life and a love letter every day is a state of bliss not to be compared with it. Mr. Haig tolerantly allows a place in the world for every religious denomination, but for the rationalist and freethinker (whom he despises) he can see no place in the present scheme of things at all. No wonder: freethinkers have always belonged to the future, and will continue to do so even when men study religion—and possibly rationalism, too—in the way that we now study prehistoric skulls and tools.

## On Poltergeists

By H. CUTNER

Some of my most hilarious moments have been listening to very earnest and quite convinced Spiritualists—and, for that matter, to some of the attempts at reply by quite incompetent Rationalists. Like Freethought, Spiritualism cannot just be “mugged” up. One has to live with what Spiritualists say and write for years, to get inside their skins, so to speak, and to know their case as well as they do before it is possible to answer them. And it ought to be made quite clear that whatever else they believe, “survival” is really what they are after.

But if one reads much of Spiritualist literature, “survival” will be found to be just a branch of “psychical research,” and Spiritualists will talk or write about nearly everything else if they can. They are quite satisfied that death does not end all, and that they will awake in Summerland ready to live on for all eternity; but give them a chance to talk about Telepathy or Clairaudience or Apports and they will at once leave the question of survival. That has been proved, they cry—so what about Telepathy or Poltergeists?

An Irish reader has sent me a page from the *Sunday Press* dealing with Poltergeists, and wants me to answer the writer. I suspect the article has been passed by the very religious censors Ireland is cursed with because he quotes the late Father H. Thurston, one of those exceptionally learned Jesuits who manage to combine almost complete scepticism with almost complete submission to his Church. There have always been these learned priests, and they never in consequence (or very rarely) get promotion. One need only recall that it took 34 years before Rome made Newman a Cardinal. By then, no doubt, he was considered no longer dangerous.

Thurston's book, *Ghosts and Poltergeists* came out posthumously in 1953, and it is full of cases which narrate what can be done by evil and malicious spirits. Whether Thurston really believed his own stories, I take leave to doubt; but Mr. D. Hogan, the writer in the *Sunday Press*, appears to believe every word—as indeed he ought to, for the Catholic Kingdom of Heaven presided over by Christ, assisted by Peter and Paul, is taught by all priests as being as real as this earth of ours. Only the other day I heard the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead say to the Rev. Donald Soper that, as he believed in Angels, so he believed in the Devil; and of course this meant that he also believed in a literal Heaven and Hell. In this, at least, he follows the Church founded by Christ Jesus.

What is a Poltergeist? Fr. Thurston says:

A poltergeist is simply a racketing spirit which in almost all cases remains invisible, but which manifests its presence by throwing things about, knocking fire irons together, and creating an uproar, in the course of which the human spectators are occasionally hit by flying objects, but as a rule suffer no serious injury.

Poltergeist accounts abound through the ages and can be found in countries all over the world. As a matter of fact, accounts of marvellous happenings in which magic and spirits prevail would fill many volumes. Religions, folklore, and savage rituals are all packed with the “occult.” What Tylor called “Animism” is by no means stamped out among even advanced Western civilisations—as witness the complete belief among all Roman Catholics that a particular bit of bread—a wafer—contains the whole body of the living Christ.

Some of the stories in which the wicked spirits throw things about are very detailed, and it is not altogether surprising that they are thoroughly believed in by people

who have never investigated them but are always ready to believe in celestial magic. If a Billy Graham and a Leslie Weatherhead believe that Jesus was actually carried about by a Devil—is it surprising that other people are firm believers in Poltergeists?

In two of his books, *Studies in Psychical Research* and *Modern Spiritualism*, the late Frank Podmore (who was Secretary of the Society for Psychical Research) made a very careful analysis of some standard cases—some indeed given him by that distinguished naturalist, Alfred Russell Wallace. And to what conclusions did he come?

We have positive evidence (he writes), by confession or detection, or both, that in some cases tricky little girls or boys have thrown about the crockery and upset the kitchen furniture with their own hands, whilst the onlookers have accepted the portent as a manifestation of supernormal powers. We have, speaking broadly, no good evidence for anything having been done by a girl or boy of slightly more than the average cunning and naughtiness. . . . The author or centre of the disturbances is nearly always a child, generally a young girl; and the outbreak is very often associated with some abnormality or disease on her part.

Podmore found that in the eleven cases which his Society investigated in detail, direct proofs of trickery were obtained in several instances. If examined immediately afterwards by educated persons, the “phenomena” were nearly always found to be easily explained; and he was satisfied that sheer hallucinations accounted for some.

The late G. N. M. Tyrrell, who was President of the S.P.R., wrote quite a number of books on psychical research, but when I heard him lecture I was staggered by his abounding credulity. He believed absolutely in both Telepathy and Poltergeists. In his book, *The Personality of Man*, he gives us the case of a Poltergeist in Austria sent to the S.P.R. by a “reliable observer.” It all happened in a blacksmith's shop, the blacksmith being constantly disturbed “because tools, bits of iron, screws, his pipe and so on were flung about the place.” He had to wear a stiff hat to prevent being hit. The case got about, and eventually the police stepped in as well as newspaper reporters. In the meantime, the “reliable observer,” though he never saw any objects actually fly about, was hit on the back of his neck. The phenomena lasted two months, and then some boys were caught red handed by the police; and though they claimed that they only wanted to see if they could produce similar phenomena, they were fined and eventually were sent away. Then all the phenomena ceased.

All that the egregious Tyrrell could say about this astonishing fraud was “one should not jump too readily to the obvious conclusion”! What can we do with this gullible type of mind?

The truth is that he and his kind are just hopeless when it comes to investigating “supernormal” phenomena; and I have never understood why professors like Lodge or Barrett or Wallace should be held up as “authorities.” But of course we shall have them always with us, and the only thing hardened sceptics like myself can do is patiently to throw a Freethought spanner into their works. It does stop the nonsense sometimes.

There is a deadly similarity between many of the works of Jesus and those of certain ancient Hebrew prophets, and this similarity suggests that the later writers, who gave to the world the story of the Nazarene, stole a part of their material from older authors.

—L. K. Washburn.

Theology is nothing more than a science of words, which by dint of repetition, we accustom ourselves to substitute for things.

—D'Holback

## Unitarianism and Freethought

By The Rev. JOHN ROWLAND, B.Sc.

I sometimes wonder if there are not, in the present state of our civilisation, people who seem to be on opposite sides of an ideological fence, but who should, really, be on the same side of it. There are, it is true, some religious people who are completely disgusted at the work of Rationalists and Freethinkers, holding that such opponents of traditional religion are necessarily immoral and anti-ethical. On the other hand, there are some Rationalists and Freethinkers who oppose all supporters of all the Churches, holding that they are necessarily obscurantists and unprogressives.

I say that both these attitudes are wrong. I believe that there are some people on both sides of the argument who merit the criticism; but that there are many who do not. Mr. G. H. Taylor, writing in the columns of the *Freethinker* some months ago, pointed out that the Unitarian attitude to the humanist broadcasts of Mrs. Knight, was very strongly contrasted to the attitude of most of the Non-conformist Churches. On another issue—the campaigns of Dr. Billy Graham—there have been notable differences of opinion, too, and differences of opinion which most Freethinkers appear to have ignored.

The attitude of orthodox churchmen with regard to Billy Graham, indeed, will delight the "die-hard" Freethinkers of an old-fashioned type. The suggestion that the Fundamentalist argument of Dr. Graham—"I'm not telling you what I think; I'm telling you what God thinks"—is the only possible argument in favour of religion will not, of course, bring people back into the Churches; it will drive the more intelligent people out of the Churches. The suggestion that there is a simple old gospel, which is certainly not simple and may not even be old, is a suggestion that few thoughtful people will be able to accept at its surface value. And many who are members of one or other of the Churches—from the Modernist wing of Anglicanism, through the Society of Friends to Unitarianism—will not accept it. The fact that the Billy Graham crusade gets all the Press publicity, whereas the more sane and sensible and rational approach gets none, is, of course, deeply to be regretted. It tends to erect barriers between men where no barriers should exist; it tends to make ideological divisions where there should be none; it tends to suggest that many of us who are fundamentally in general agreement are really deeply severed from each other.

Years ago now, as older readers will recall, I left the Rationalist and Freethought Movement, after a long time spent in its service. I am now on the official roll of ministers of the Unitarian General Assembly, after a period of study at a theological college. But I am convinced as much as I ever was of the value of human reason and human goodwill.

What then, divides us? What divides the average Unitarian from the average humanist? To my mind, there is one thing, and one thing only—and that is the admission that there are mysteries behind creation. Long ago I had an argument in these columns with that great Freethinker of a former generation, Chapman Cohen. Mr. Cohen called himself an Atheist and in those days I called myself an Agnostic. He would have it that there was no real difference; I argued that there was. The point at issue was whether we can say that we *know*; Mr. Cohen *knew* that there was no such Person as God; I said in those days that I did not know.

What divides the Unitarian from the old-fashioned Freethinker is something of that sort, though not quite that issue. We say that there is evidence of some unity behind creation; we say that we can detect traces of a Mind in that creation; some of us, at any rate, say that in religious experience—especially the religious experience of mystics and seers—we can, we think, detect a sign that the religious explanation of things has far more truth than most Freethinkers would be prepared to admit.

That, though, is largely a matter of evidence, and as such it can be argued through. What is not so much a matter of evidence, and more a matter of an attitude of mind, is this problem of mystery. I once lectured to a mixed audience in the North, and among that audience there was a man who had (he said) read many of my articles in the pages of the *Freethinker* and the *Literary Guide*. I was speaking on science and religion, and when question-time came around, my friend said: "But what you are saying destroys all science, and science has given us every fact about the world that we possess." I made what seemed to me to be an obvious retort, and said: "Including the fact that Bach is greater than George Gershwin." He replied: "But those are *values*; I'm talking about *facts*." That values may be facts is what seems to me to be so largely ignored by those who think like my questioner. That the absolutes of truth, beauty, and goodness exist, but that we cannot understand them wholly, that we certainly cannot measure them or weigh them in the scientific way—that seems to me to be the real dividing line between the Freethinker and the believer in Liberal Religion. Twenty years ago Gerald Bullett wrote that to him the great division on the religious issue was not between Theist and Atheist, but between the man who apprehends a universal mystery and the man who denies that any such mystery exists. I think that division still remains—and I think that those of us on both sides of the theological curtain should do our best to break down the barriers between us. I don't know what Freethinkers feel. I know that some of the older ones may feel that this is a slice of special pleading—as in a sense it is. But in a world where divisions are so obvious and so dangerous, it seems to me bad to allow other divisions to exist which are really not so fundamental as we used to think. If Freethinkers would come to Unitarian services, or if Unitarians would go to meetings of Ethical Societies (to take two of the most obviously related groups) I think that they might find themselves in far closer agreement than they have imagined.

It is, I would say in finishing, no reply to what I have here put forward, to say: "You represent a Church; we have no use for Churches." Because that is begging the whole issue. You have finished with the Roman Church and the Anglican Church; you have, no doubt, finished with dogma-ridden Churches of the orthodox kind. But have you ever tried a Church which attempts to face the eternal problems, admit the mysteries, and build up an open-minded religion? I beg leave to doubt it.

### NOTE ON ABOVE

Defining a mystery as an inherently unsolvable problem, to assert that a mystery exists is to lay claim to certain important knowledge data; to wit, (1) one must lay claim to the possession of all possible knowledge of the thing in such a way as to be able to assert that no future available knowledge will bring the problem into the

scientific orbit; and (2) one must lay claim to the possession of an infallible yardstick for judging whether a thing is a mystery or not.

For the Freethinker, who has no use for "mysteries," these difficulties do not exist. Belief in mystery is therefore groundless dogma.

G. H. TAYLOR.

## Hypnotism

WE could never understand the position of the late Woolsey Teller who utterly denied the existence of the phenomena called "Hypnotism." It is possible that the word did not mean the same thing to him as to the generality, which is frequently the case in disputes. He often used the argument that if there was such a thing it would be taught in colleges and he would quote replies which he had received from several of them to the effect that they had no such courses. They did not, however, state that there was no such thing. Recent news from London states that the British Medical Association has approved the use of hypnotism in some cases in medical practice, possibly by anaesthetists and obstetricians. Evidently this means that in cases of childbirth the mother could be rendered insensible to pain through hypnotism rather than anaesthetics. In connection with this report there is a comment by the secretary of the medical information bureau of the N.Y. Academy of Medicine, Dr. Iago Galdston. He says, "The use of hypnosis in painful procedures such as childbirth, tooth extraction and minor operations is thoroughly well known and has been many times demonstrated in the United States." Teller was also vehement in his denial of the possibility of "telepathy" which is still an open question. Whether he thought that such things smacked of the supernatural we do not know. We do not see that there is any connection. If it is possible for one person to influence another by not understood processes, it bears no relation to anything "religious." There are a great many natural phenomena that as yet are obscure and it little behooves a Rationalist to take a position that excludes investigation.

(From the *Liberal*.)

## REFLECTION

Sad thoughts are travelling down the years,  
I watch the moonbeams play,  
Gathering quickly the shadows,  
Sweeping them away,  
Yet life seems but a shadowy past  
That hurried on too soon,  
Our "Sunset" all too quickly comes,  
After a glorious noon.  
The leaves are falling faster now,  
Cut by a chilling blast,  
Nothing can ever with us stay,  
Nothing can ever last,  
Friends we have loved are passing on,  
Their journey almost o'er,  
With faith they hope at last to reach,  
A brighter, happier, shore.  
Shall we foregather one by one,  
And meet beyond the grave,  
There to enjoy eternal life,  
Which many seem to crave?  
Or shall we all as fallen leaves  
Wither and fade away,  
To pass to realms of endless sleep,  
At close of Life's short day?

F.D.

## Correspondence

### FALL AND REDEMPTION

On re-reading *Voltaire*, I came across the following, near the end of Chapter V:—

"A little man in black, who belonged to the Inquisition." . . . took him up very politely and said, "It seems to me, sir, you do not believe in original sin; for if all is for the best, then there has been neither fall nor punishment."

As the result of our knowledge of the age of the earth from the rocks, and the evolution of Man from the works of Darwin and others, plus the devastating works of Fred Hoyle, the original story of the "Fall" is shown as the folk story of an Eastern tribe.

This being so, there is no need for a Saviour and the fable of Jesus Christ becomes hopeless. As the Christian religion is based upon this story, it therefore ceases to have any significance and whatever people may still think of Gentle Jesus, his role of Mediator proves to be just another fairy tale.

T. D. SMITH.

### HOMOSEXUALITY

If, as upholders of the official attitude claim, homosexuality as such is a pernicious abomination that must be "stamped out" at all costs, why is it that only *male* homosexuals are prosecuted? As the law stands at present, lesbians are permitted to behave as they please in private, while their male counterparts are, in impeachment, treated as criminals. The whole question is darkened by the fact that legislation on the matter was first enacted in times when scientific knowledge on the subject was practically non-existent, and the only guide to legislators and moralists was the crazy nonsense contained in the Bible.

Since the "Age of Faith," genuine, healthy knowledge has, in the minds of informed people, replaced the mumbo-jumbo of the Church. But alas, the State is still officially wedded to the Church, and blindly clings to its outworn dogmas, sublimely indifferent to their obvious incompatibility with the "facts of life" unearthed by the researches and experiments of physiologists and psychologists.

S. W. BROOKS.

### DEMOCRACIES

A correspondent in your issue dated July 22nd, suggests that the U.S.S.R. "is in fact the most genuine of all democracies. All Christian alleged democracies are a farce and humbug."

As the late Dr. Joad used to say: "It depends on what you mean by democracy." Chambers 20th-Century Dictionary (1902) defines it as "a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively, and is administered by them or by officers appointed by them."

This seems to require the right of an Opposition party to exist openly, to canvass for support, and to receive votes in a free and secret ballot. Your readers will be able to estimate how far the U.S.S.R. and Britain (whether Christian or not) respectively meet these requirements.

G. W. CLARK.

### A WRITTEN DEBATE

It would be educative and interesting if you would arrange for the Myth Theory to be debated between Mr. Aldred and Mr. Cutner.

Not, however, a spoken debate, but written in the pages of the *Freethinker* and *The Word*, the debate to be printed simultaneously in both journals.

The audience would thus be considerably widened.

ALFRED D. CARRICK.

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