

# The Freethinker

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THE streets and underground stations of London are nowadays adorned, if that is the right expression, with placards announcing that Commercial TV is in the offing, and that before very long the sacrosanct monopoly of the B.B.C. will be a thing of the past, at least in the sphere of television. It would clearly be *ultra vires* to discuss either the social ethics or the social utility of this momentous change here. Whatever may be the merits of free enterprise or public ownership in relation to mankind's newest dimension, the air, certain facts would appear to render the coming of commercial TV a matter of concern to thinking people.

In the nineteenth century most social moralists held that the main dangers to social ethics came from individualism run mad, typified in the current slogan, "Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost." Today the major threat to the integrity of the individual comes from the opposite quarter, the increasing subordination of individual to collective values, and the consequent dying out of the individual and, along with him, of independent thought. This universal prevalence of *collective* values is nowadays virtually inseparable from the startling technical transformations which the present century and, in particular, the present decade, have witnessed. The effect of this technical revolution on the human mentality has been far-reaching and profound. Already, a generation ago, the Czech dramatist Karel Kapek had summarised that new "mass-man" of our era in the famous phrase, "Rossum's universal robots." One might also add that the term "robot" is the key expression to a whole chapter in human evolution. It is one that has a very direct bearing on the present and future prospects of any thought that aspires to be really free.

## Science and Progress

The present writer does not hold the somewhat naive view formerly held by some of those people whom it is now the fashion to describe as eminent Victorians, that science is at all times and places automatically on the side of progress. Science has never had any such automatically progressive character. Contrarily science is a social tool, an immensely and increasingly powerful one. But whether this tool is progressive or reactionary in its effects does not depend on science, and still less on the individual scientist, but on the current nature and outlook of the social unit that controls it. It is the recurring weakness of philosophy to pose questions that are *ipso facto* unanswerable, and which ought never to be asked. The question as to whether science is, or is not, progressive belongs to this category. All that one can properly ask is whether at a *particular* time or place, and under a *particular* set of circumstances, man uses his knowledge to progressive purposes. The answer would not *invariably* be in the affirmative. Both H-bombs and the gas-chambers of the Nazi regime were highly scientific productions, but no one would call them progressive. Similarly, without the recent startling developments of radio and TV,

we should not now have religion in its most obscurantist forms seeping through the air into the homes of our people. Whether the *net* effect of these inventions has, to date, been progressive or the reverse, would be an interesting but too complex question to discuss here. However, it can hardly be disputed that *some*, at least, of its results have been the reverse of progressive. Once, the Churches called to Heaven for aid; now it comes to them from the B.B.C. As Mr. H. Cutner has aptly phrased it, the radio has given religious Fundamentalism a new lease of life. Neither Westminster nor Canterbury, but Broadcasting House, is, nowadays, the effective headquarters of English Christianity.

## Official Taboos

Taboos are not confined to Polynesia, where the word originated. They exist also on the air. There are certain subjects which have always been sacrosanct on the State-sponsored radio. In the political sphere the Monarchy is an obvious example. Not only Her present Majesty but her relations "to the third and fourth generation" are equally sacrosanct. Much water has flowed under London Bridge since *The Times* commented on the then deceased monarchs, George IV and William IV, in terms that nowadays would never be set up in print by any "respectable" newspaper. In religion, only "apologetics," usually of the crudest kind, come over the air. Mrs. Knight, like her predecessor Fred Hoyle, has spoken for the first, and probably the last, time. So far, at least, the technical mastery of the air has been a veritable godsend to the Churches.

## Commercial TV and Religion

The B.B.C. represents, of course, a State monopoly, state socialism, and, as such, it is susceptible to "pressure-groups," but not to the lure of commercial profit-making and advertising. Commercial TV, on the other hand, will, presumably, attach great, and probably supreme, importance to these features. How will ideas, independent thinking, and, more specifically, advanced ideas in the religious and social spheres, fare at the hands of Mr. Norman Collins and his colleagues? Not, it is to be feared, very well. When this precise subject was recently discussed at a meeting of the Humanist Council, a speaker expressed the view that Commercial TV would be even more afraid of encouraging minority advanced opinions than was the B.B.C. of unhallowed memory. The present writer confesses to the same fear. Money is proverbially timid. A recently constituted profit-making body is likely to be ultra-cautious in its handling of unpopular minority opinions, especially in the sphere of religion; for, apart from the traditional taboos on free discussion of such subjects, it must not be forgotten that Christianity is Big Business. Gone are the now remote days when the followers of the Son of Man had nowhere to lay their heads. Moreover the Roman Catholic Church, at least, has its own special technique for putting pressure on advertisers. So one can-

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Manufacturing Robots

By F. A. RIDLEY

not, unfortunately, take a very rosy view of the prospects of minority opinion in religion, or, for that matter, in anything else, when the new organisation starts its profit-making activities on the air.

#### Towards 1984 ?

It is, unfortunately, indisputable that "free"; that is, independent; thought is becoming increasingly difficult in our age of what the Russian sociologist, Dr. Serge Chakotin, has aptly termed, "The Rape of the Masses." The facilities at the disposal of governments and Churches for moulding and conditioning public opinion, are today

immeasurably greater than at any previous time in the world's history, in which respect the recent startling transformations of scientific technique have proved to be a double-edged weapon. So far, in fact, has the tendency towards uniformity gone, that we have alarmed Jeremiahs, like the late George Orwell, warning us of the shape of things to come, when human beings shall have become "universal robots." Perhaps things will never get quite as bad as in that nightmare, but the price of liberty is still eternal vigilance and it is unlikely that we shall get much help from Commercial TV. Who knows?—we may even live to regret the B.B.C.

## The Basis of Morality

By W. EDWARD MEADS

THE question is often asked, "If one does not believe in the Christian God or Immortality, what basis is there for Morality?" One can define Morals as the principles of good living; Morality as these principles put into practice and Ethics as a study of both and the history of the evolution of world ideas upon them. The question stated above generally indicates a greater or lesser ignorance of all these three branches of this subject, which has been discussed for thousands of years. What is noticeable in this story is that there is a fairly general agreement among all peoples and in all religions as to major moral principles; where they mostly disagree is, as the question above infers, as to what makes these principles valid.

It is not surprising that in the earlier stages of the evolution of human thought the basis of these morals and their validity should be anthropomorphic and anthropopathic. They were thought to be the mandates of a Father—God, one who was very similar to a human father and who visited on his children the pains and penalties which follow our Transgression of his arbitrary commands. What is interesting, even if not surprising, is that these crude primitive ideas are retained by those to whom modern thought should have brought enlightenment. The fact of a general coincidence of Morals through most of the great religions of the world might have indicated to these thinkers that there was a basis for morals outside all of them. Morals are principles which are integral rules of life, bound up with the fact of our living together in a society and arising out of that factor. Once the real bases of Morals are understood it will be seen that they are universal, integral and inevitable and are disregarded only at a risk both to individuals and society and this is so whether one believes in them or does not.

Christians appear to maintain that morals are good principles which have been given to us, either directly or vicariously, by a good God. "But to say that something is good because it is in accordance with the will of an all good God is to reason in a circle; if goodness means anything, it must have a meaning which is independent of his will." Would murder and adultery, lying and deceit, theft and dishonesty have been moral if the precepts of the Father-God had advocated them? If it is replied they would not, it proves that the criteria of what is moral are something other than the precepts given by God and that they are something integral in the social life itself. "The two statements that objective morality presupposes the belief in God and that the belief in God presupposes objective morality, lead combined to the logical conclusion that there is no valid evidence either for the existence of God or for

the objectivity of moral judgements." "Whoever thinks there is a God and pretends formally to believe that he is just and good, must suppose that there is independently such a thing as justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, right and wrong; according to which he pronounces that God is just, righteous and true" (see 'Christianity and Morals' by Edward Westermarck').

As previously noted, what may be termed major immoralities are generally agreed among civilised people whatever their religion but there is not the same unanimity as one comes down the scale. One curious and limited example of the inevitability of morality can be given as an example. On the London Stock Exchange (as on others) contracts involving large sums of money are entered into between 'jobbers' with a minimum of formality; just a note in note books and initialled by the other party, or not even that. Yet these bargains are so rarely repudiated, whatever the consequences, that if this occurs the member is forthwith expelled from the Stock Exchange. Why this very high standard of integrity in this particular and limited sphere? Are members of these Stock Exchanges on a generally higher moral plane than other people? Not at all. The reason is that this is the only basis on which the Stock Exchange can work as it does; it has not time for elaborate contracts in these rapid transactions. This method is highly moral, but it is not the result of a Father-God's dogmas and neither needs nor gets prayers and hymns or revival services. It exists because it is the only way.

It is maintained that the only basis for obeying moral principles is a belief in extra-natural dogmas and a post-mortem Teleological reward or retribution for obeying or disobeying them. Both history and psychology show how ineffectual and ephemeral such emotional appeals are in maintaining Morality in the majority of people. Ultimately the only permanent basis for morals and morality is for individuals, and thus for society, to realise that optimum conditions of life necessitate living in accordance with moral principles and that unless this is done chaos is inevitable. What those principles are Society has to decide for itself as the price of survival.

Lord Shaftesbury said in 1678: "Popery and slavery, like two sisters, go hand in hand; and sometimes one goes first and sometimes the other; but wheresoever the one enters, the other is following close behind."

NEXT WEEK

DO WE ACKNOWLEDGE MYSTERY ?

Aff.: Rev. J. Rowland. Neg.: G. H. Taylor.

## Reflections on Human Conflict

By GEORGE MILLER

IT was a beautiful, fresh Spring morning, on a day so wondrous, sufficient to make unbelievers flush with happiness and invent God to please the shade of Voltaire. Birds twittered and whistled on every branch for sheer joy. Then in a book on radio writing, by C. Whitaker Wilson, I chanced undeservedly to alight upon the following succinct, shocking and disturbing sentences :

Human conflict is fascinating. The best drama has been built upon it. Therefore it must continue.

The best wars have been built upon it, too, and most reported proposals that warfare should continue in an atomic sort of way have come, not from the godless Russian, but from ours, the Christian side. No doubt a few hefty explosions will speedily levitate the faithful to Heaven and simultaneously create a Hell for their enemies here below. Conflict has always been fierce between Christ and anti-Christ, and let Mr. Wilson construct an interesting play out of it, if he can. From the passage quoted, we have to decide whether in fact the main ingredient of the best drama is human conflict and whether Mr. Wilson is morally right to say it *must* continue.

Human conflict began in the Garden of Eden, even before God's bright idea about Eve. For God, whom we submit is nothing if not human in origin, must have been at loggerheads with Adam if he had first to administer a soporific (slipped in his coffee, I assume) before making choice of a rib. This rib gave Eve a start in life, and the thought that the lady throve on something that once was his must have been perpetually exasperating to Adam. Mutual co-existence was, then, *ipso facto*, impossible. *Ultra vires!* This is all supposition, but shows how easy it is to create legends.

This leads to the suggestion that Shakespeare's plays, taking these to exemplify the best, are after all just legends, i.e., fiction. Apart from the historical opuses, nothing that occurs in the plays could possibly have taken place in reality. No Jew, greedy and bloodthirsty (and persecuted) ever grovelled and negotiated for his pound of flesh; no twin noblemen and twin servants were ever involved in such a series of errors; no enchanted island such as Prospero's ever existed . . . etc, etc. There is just enough Actuality in Shakespeare's fairy tales to serve as a starting point.

A clash of personalities certainly rouses our morbid curiosity, but neither of the personalities has to be one's own, otherwise we are not interested spectators. A play without people being unthinkable, their differences must obviously be the motive force behind the action. But if human conflict is found in the best drama, it is also present in productions with an ephemeral value; therefore the former's superiority must be due to some other quality. In American crime films conflict between the Underworld and what we are required to suppose is Law and Order is considerably more violent, not to say cruel, than between Good and Evil as it is presented in the dramas of classical playwrights ancient and modern. Now if a dramatic work is great in proportion to the amount of human conflict in it, almost any American film is superior to the whole output of Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen, etc. It is a point of view, and we fear that the view of theatregoers will be entirely obscured by milling hordes of square-eyed cinema addicts.

The materials is almost unimportant when it is handled by a writer of the highest abilities. Goethe makes more of the Faust legend than Marlowe; and, as is well known, Shakespeare's plots, and even scenes, are seldom original.

Many pirate stories had been written before Stevenson's, but only his is remembered. So, in music, Robert Haven Schauflier says of Beethoven (a dramatic composer) that he could "squeeze blood out of bricks, make rubies of the blood and platinum out of the residue of the bricks," and elsewhere that "Beethoven packs more drama in the first four notes of the 5th symphony than Lord Tennyson could in a prologue and five acts." An ordinary composer could not hold the bricks in his pigmy paws, let alone squeeze them!

In considering the total ingredients which go to make up a play we must not overlook the novel methods playwrights experiment with to present the old situations. There are tricks of construction which are masters of the situation and dialogue. And in J. B. Priestley's "Time Plays," for example, each piece is constructed round a different theory of Time, to which the conflict of the characters with each other is entirely secondary. Whether the theories of "split Time," Dunne's "serial Time," or Ouspensky's "circular Time" are tenable or not is irrelevant and beside the point. Indeed, the more ridiculous the theory the more the dramatic possibilities! Those who are familiar with *Dangerous Corner* will know that this play could only have been written in an age of wireless, proving that dramatists must seize upon the new fangled and not depend entirely upon an old-fashioned thing like human conflict.

Drama apparently is not confined to stage works, but may be found in the novel and other literary forms. The novel has been called "a mirror held up to life," and the novelist has more opportunity of being true to life, but the more realism the less art. Dickens, for instance, is so vivid and minutely exact that we forget his works are fiction and feel we are moving in a world which has real existence, despite the grotesque characters. There is plenty of real life conflict between these unreal people and this possibly helps to create the impression that Dickens is not so sincere after all and must not be rated too high.

While human conflict is real enough, and involves us all never so much as when we try to avoid it, it is not nevertheless the main ingredient in the best drama. There is as much attraction as repulsion between characters, and, in the case of screen or television plays, purely technical tricks contribute considerably to the total effect. In a stage, TV or screen play we demand a happy or at least logical denouement, and our bullying usually has the desired result. In life, however, there is no ending, and from repeated experience we know that a settlement between two conflicting personalities is fictional.

Life has priority over literature, nor is the latter so much a reflection of the former as an attempt to escape from its ugliness, squalidities and cruelties. Man's religions have done little to eliminate these things, probably because they are too busy causing them, and which dramatist of note ever found anything interesting in the bloody "dust-ups" they have had occasionally? Of such squabbles even Shakespeare would be unable to say anything worthwhile, except to dismiss them as much ado about nothing.

It is astonishing how little of the world's great literature has been inspired by world shaking events, or matters of reputed vital concern to us all. Most of it has a humble origin, and those who are rather more concerned about the simple things of life assist in a practical way towards clearing up the mess caused by God and his emissaries on earth.

## This Believing World

A writer in a Leicester journal had the audacity to claim that "few people take the story of Noah quite literally." We are aghast at such blasphemy. If true, we have come to a pretty pass, and there's no doubt Almighty God would have to prove to a wicked world that the Deluge stands unequalled in history by sending another one, perhaps worse than Noah's. That would show 'em!

But, thank Heaven, it's not true. The Deluge took place exactly as God describes it in His Precious Word. Millions of fine Christians believe every comma in the wonderful story. Even Jehovah's Witnesses—and they ought to know—would fight to the death for its literal interpretation. Besides, all Jews, all Roman and other Catholics and all members of the Church of England believe it. It is easily the best authenticated fact in history surpassing the beautiful and touching story of crowds of Jewish Saints springing alive and kicking from their graves. Heaven be praised for such belief.

Of course our Lord believed the story—as indeed he should, considering he must have helped his merciful Father in drowning millions of wicked people. How thankful we ought to be that such a gracious act should be immortalised for ever in the Holy Book.

We must all be pleased to note that the Church of Rome has no monopoly whatever in its deservedly fierce denunciation of women's clothes. The Greek Synod also has begun a terrific campaign against strapless gowns. We can well understand that no celibate priest, be he Greek or Roman, could face the disaster with courage of such a gown slipping and remain unscathed. Why will these shameless women put such temptation before God's elect? We give it up.

Following in the wake of so many previous Professors—Lodge, Barrett, and many others—it is most interesting to note that Prof. H. H. Price proclaimed his belief in haunted houses before a gathering of Modern Churchmen at Oxford. But as he is a Christian it is no wonder that he believes in spooks, either in haunted houses, or in Heaven and Hell, or in them all. "Faith" was, however, the magic word both for spooks and psychical research, he averred—for if you have "faith" you can believe in the results of psychical research though "hope and charity" are needed too. Just like Christianity!

In any case, it is most interesting to find that just as there are fully believing Christian Spiritualists so there are orthodox Hindu Spiritualists. There is nothing in Spiritualism, decrees Mr. V. D. Rishi of the Indian Spiritualist Society, "inconsistent with or contrary to the teachings of orthodox Hindu religion." This is as it should be. Whatever else religions all over the world may teach or may not teach, the one thing they all agree about is the objective reality of spooks. No religion can afford to give them up.

Oh dear—the way our Canons and Deans and even our Bishops steal our thunder! For centuries Freethinkers have poured good, wholesome fun at these venerated Christian Institutions, Heaven and Hell, and often were repaid by imprisonment, torture, or death at the hands of

the gentle followers of their meek and mild Jesus. And now comes Canon Bezzant, the Dean of St. John's College, Cambridge, telling us that "Heaven is a bore"!

But he goes still further. "Language once used," he scathingly insists, "about Heaven and Hell would not be tolerated by an intelligent congregation." And he has a smack at Rome's great Hell Hero—the Rev. J. Furniss—whose lurid pictures of the Infernal Regions, particularly those representing babies frizzling in the Heavenly Fire, once formed so great an asset of the Roman Catholic religion. Canon Bezzant says, "Walking nightmares which produce hideous pictures of Hell can only be regarded as issuing from diseased minds," and what can Rome reply to that?

## CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

The influence of Christianity on the Western World has been to make the impersonal detachment of science repugnant to most people. We are taught that knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. This of course, in its own language, expresses the ecclesiastical conviction that human nature is fundamentally sinful. Whatever we choose to regard as good or bad, from the biological standpoint human nature is neither the one nor the other. Man is a very teachable animal. For that reason it is through intelligent understanding of the springs of human action that the elimination of social discord is most likely to proceed. Those who advocate the religious appeal as the basis of social education have to provide us with an explanation of why the practical implications of revealed dogma rarely receive any recognition before the exigencies of economic necessity compel people to act in conformity to them. No one would deny that religious leaders took a prominent part in the movement for the abolition of chattel slavery. It is also a singular fact that the Protestant Churches entered no protest against the slave-trading activities of Frobisher, Drake and their fellow-heroes of sea warfare. Nor did they disturb themselves with the problem until the rise of the factory system had created conditions which promoted the growth of a different form of labour contract. If war as a means of settling international disputes is abolished in our generation, it is not unlikely that religious apologists will be telling our grandchildren about the prominent part which churchmen took in founding Peace Societies. They will probably be right. War as an institution is becoming so menacing a scourge to civilization that even religious bodies are making themselves active in denouncing it. But if war is to be denounced on the basis of some revealed and final view of human conduct, how are we to explain the fact that a negligible minority of esoteric sects have discovered so significant a conclusion during the past two thousand years of church history? Should we not rather say that the urgency of the modern problem has created a new rationalization? Must we believe that war exists because by nature human beings are sinful and delight in slaughtering one another? Can we believe that men are so constructed that they can be induced by religious conviction to love their neighbours as themselves? Is it not a fact that men are on the whole stupid or indifferent, and that thoughtful people regard war as an intolerable nuisance, but are not as yet clear about how it can be avoided? Is it not to patient study of the ways and means of organising international government rather than to ethical dogma or religious fervour that we must look for the creation of permanent peace?

(Prof. Lancelot Hogben : *The Publicist Standpoint*).

# THE FREETHINKER

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## To Correspondents

W. FYSCH.—We cannot be sure that the ordinary newspaper writers have opinions. What they have is a vocabulary.

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Broadway Car Park).—Every Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, WHARRAD, NEWTON, SHEPPARD and MURPHY.

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. Sunday, September 11. 6.30 p.m.: Messrs. MORRELL, ELSMERE and 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. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. *The Freethinker* on sale at Marble Arch.

### INDOOR

Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, September 11. 7 p.m.: Dr. R. CLARKE, "The Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy."

Dagenham Branch N.S.S. (214 Fitzstephen Road).—Saturday, September 17. 7 p.m.: P. VICTOR MORRIS "Secularism and Capital Punishment."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.).—Sunday, September 11. 11 a.m.: Dr. SWINTON, Ph.D., "In the Beginning."

## Notes and News

READERS will be interested to know that Mr. F. A. Hornibrook, co-editor of *The Freethinker* and President of the West London Branch of the N.S.S., is to appear in commercial television. An authority on health, Mr. Hornibrook's works on that subject have been translated into several European languages. He writes with equal forcefulness on freethought subjects and his latest book, *Without Fear or Favour*, will shortly be published by the Cresset Press. In it readers will find some hard-hitting comments on a variety of subjects.

Mr. Hornibrook has been the means of strengthening the contacts of *The Freethinker* with freethought and rationalist journals overseas, and our steady rise in circulation over the past year has notably included sales in U.S.A., due in some measure to Mr. Hornibrook's personal contacts there. He was, of course, in practice in New Zealand for some time. It may also be mentioned that our occasional feature, *New Zealand Calling*, by the President of the N.Z. Rationalist Association, Mr. Arthur O'Halloran (until recently also

## The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged, £928 6s.; P. Foster, 15s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; G. H. Hood, Canada, £1 12s. 6d.; Otto Meine, U.S.A., 11s. 4d.; Miss D. G. Davies, £1; Thomas Roberts, 5s. Total to date: £932 10s. 10d.

editor of the *N.Z. Rationalist*) is a reciprocal arrangement in respect of Mr. Hornibrook's *London Calling* in the *N.Z. Rationalist*. In addition to these activities Mr. Hornibrook will also be lecturing to several N.S.S. branches during the indoor season. For one climbing towards the octogenarian class we think this is not a bad record, and as those who know him will know that modesty is added to his other characteristics, we hasten to add that these items were written without his knowledge.

It now seems likely that a new branch of the National Secular Society may be formed in the Lockerbie-Dumfries-Carlisle area, where Mr. G. L. Colebrooke has already held a meeting, and we expect more information will be available in due course. There is also reason to hope that Swansea will again become a centre of N.S.S. propagandist activity.

Mr. C. McCall, a vice-president of the N.S.S., while on a visit to the Edinburgh Festival, again addressed a meeting organised by the Edinburgh branch on Sunday, August 28th, on the Mound. It would be a good thing if this famous old speaking site could be used for regular direct freethought propaganda. Recruitments to the local branch from freethinkers in the area might bring this project a step nearer.

Following an injury sustained some weeks ago, the General Secretary of the N.S.S., Mr. D. Francis, is still under medical and hospital attention. We must ask the indulgence of correspondents whose communications are not getting immediate attention. They will, we are sure, understand that in the circumstances priority is being given only to the most urgent matters.

The Rev. J. L. Broom's articles on Billy Graham were reprinted in the August issue of *The Age of Reason* (U.S.A.), and Mr. H. Cutner's *Freethinker* article of June 3, on Atheism, reappeared also in this number. Various minor *Freethinker* features and articles continue to find new nests in our contemporaries abroad. An examination of the freethought press of the world over the past year shows that *The Freethinker* is the widest-quoted freethought journal in the freethought world, and so far as reprints from Britain alone are concerned, *The Freethinker* is virtually the only "exporter."

The Dagenham Branch, N.S.S. has arranged an outing to Kew Gardens on Sunday, 11th September. Other members and readers of the paper will be most welcome, and should meet the party at Kew Gardens Station at 11 a.m. bringing packed lunches; tea arrangements will be made accordingly on the day.

Here is proof of the existence of the Devil. The *Daily Mail* (August 12th) announces: "Vicar lost as he hunts for cockles." The method of his departure was sinister in the extreme. Apparently he vanished after a trip to the beach on the North Wales coast at a spot known as Hell's Mouth. His clothes were later found on the beach.

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

## Archæology Used as "Proving" the Bible

By MERRILL R. HOLSTE

(revised for *The Freethinker* by the author from his original in *Progressive World*.)

Seventh-Day Adventism is one of the more barbaric effervescences of Christianity among the 265-plus sects of that religion in America. An article entitled "Archæology and Prophecy" appeared in *These Times*, a Seventh-Day Adventist magazine published in Tennessee (November, 1954). This article is a remarkable illustration of the lengths to which Christian apologists are now being driven by advancing scientific knowledge in their effort to "prove" the truth of their outdated religion and the inspired origin of their bible.

The first paragraph of the article contains an implied fallacy, a most obvious "*non sequitur*." We quote in full: "One of the most fascinating fulfilments of the prophecies concerning the last days is the fast growing list of archæological discoveries—all of which have given archæology a place in the world of science and *verified the Bible's historical and geographical data*." The implication here is that the discovery of the facts of the history of the Hebrew nation through archæological search proves and confirms the truth of the history recorded in the Hebrew bible, and therefore the god and religion of the Hebrew bible are also true.

But proving the historical records of a nation to be true does not prove the truth of the myths, fables and folklore the people believed in. Nor does it prove their religion to be the true one, inspired by a supernatural deity. Certain Hebrew prophets at one time uttered prophecies, ranted and railed at the sceptics of the time, but it does not follow that the Hebrew god created the universe in 4004 B.C. Likewise, because it is a fact that we have recovered Greek history and the myths the Greeks believed in, it does not follow that Greek Zeus created the world and is its supreme deity. The discovery of the historical facts regarding the early Hindus does not prove their religion to be true. The same holds true for the early Egyptian Paganism, for Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Shintoism, etc. If the *non-sequitur* logic of the Christian apologist is good logic, all these other religions would be proved equally true with Seventh-Day Adventism, merely by uncovering the facts of the history of the people who were their followers. When a system of logic proves a number of mutually exclusive propositions to be equally true, we are justified in concluding that the system of logic is false. Religious apologists are so fond of using the *non sequitur* because it can be used to "prove" any false idea they may want.

The second paragraph reads; "Leading the way was the discovery, in 1798, of the *Rosetta Stone* in Egypt's Nile Delta, which opened the way to an understanding of the Egyptian language and its secrets. The *Rosetta Stone* contained such Bible names as Asenath (the wife of Joseph) and Potiphar (Joseph's master). See Genesis 41:45." We have taken the time to locate a complete translation of the three texts on the *Rosetta Stone*. We have read these through diligently and have found no trace of either Asenath or Potiphar. We can say with positive knowledge that the author of *Archæology and Prophecy* drew entirely from his imagination and not the text of the *Rosetta Stone* when he says it "contained such Bible names as Asenath (the wife of Joseph) and Potiphar (Joseph's master)." The nearest we can find is "Arsinoe," who is described in every instance as the *mother* of king Ptolemy Epiphanes Eucharistus, who lived no less than 1,500 years *after* the supposed date of Joseph and Potiphar. (The margin of our bible gives the

date of the selling of Joseph into Egypt as 1729 B.C. Ptolemy Epiphanes became king of Egypt in 205 B.C.) It is ridiculous to presume that the priests of Egypt under Ptolemy Epiphanes had any interest in confirming a Hebrew legend regarding history already ancient for the convenience of *These Times* magazine to be published more than 2,000 years later!

The above quoted paragraph illustrates the application of two guiding principles of Christian apologetics—(1) Select some obscure subject about which your hearers or readers probably have heard of in a sketchy way, but on which they are uninformed and unable, or unlikely, to check upon for accuracy. Follow this precaution and you may feel free to tell any kind of untruth you like. Tell them anything that will make your case look good and plausible. Do not worry about anyone checking and upsetting the applecart because they won't be able to reach your audience even if they do check. (2) Be sure to make a preliminary introductory statement that the limited information possessed by your audience will permit them to recognize as true. The reasonable statement will serve as the preparatory mental soporific needed to lull the unwary reader or hearer into accepting the absolute falsehood which follows.

Actually, the *Rosetta Stone* is an announcement by contemporary Egyptian priests, long after the time of Joseph, proclaiming the apotheosis of their king Ptolemy, 'The Everliving God Epiphanes Eucharistus, son of king Ptolemy and Arsinoe, who in their own right, were "gods Philopators." The three *Rosetta* texts show that this stone was erected as an act of gratitude on the part of the priests for certain very commercial and unclerical favours, a remission of taxes and elimination of imposts that had been levied upon them in former times. The *Rosetta Stone* records this practical, down-to-earth deal between the young king and his priests. It is as if the young Ptolemy ordered his deification as the final, convincing link to his authority over his subjects and paid for the the favour by granting to his priests surcease from onerous taxes and imposts.

The lesson to be learned from the treatment of the *Rosetta Stone* by the writer of *Archæology and Prophecy* is that the proponents of religion will, whenever they think they can do so undetected, misrepresent, twist and falsify the facts. The attitude of the Christian apologists toward telling falsehoods is the same as Paul the Apostle's when he was caught telling a lie: "For if the truth of God had more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why yet am I also judged as a sinner." (See Paul's letter to the Romans, 3:7.)

The next archæological monument commented upon with clerical dishonesty is the Behistun inscription of Darius, the great Persian king. It is true as the article claims that this inscription furnished the key to unlock more of the languages of antiquity. Every informed person knows that to be true. The reasonable statement once more serves only as a preface for the absolute lie which follows:—"This rock lists eight kings who lived before the Biblical Flood." The treatment of the Behistun monument by the magazine article illustrates again the use of guiding principles of deception: (1) Pick out an obscure, technical subject. (2) Then tell a small truth about it before putting forth the big lie you want to put across. The repetition of the use of this scheme shows that the writer of the article in *These Times* magazine is following a definite plan.

(to be concluded)

## Romanism and History—II

By E. H. GROUT

PEOPLE who think that the world will automatically grow better with the lapse of time might well reflect upon the fact that in the twentieth century grew up the cult of teaching history with a bias. No doubt history had often enough been taught and written with a bias, but it was the Plebs League that sought to claim credit for importing prejudice into teaching. The effect of bringing in new lies to redress the balance of the old is shown in *A Worker Looks at History* by Mark Starr.

On these lines Romanists were in no need of guidance. Their prime method, of course, is to kill off people who show any independence of thought. At the present time they are unable to do this in England, but they are experts in working under the cover of committees, putting a spoke in the wheel of a non-Romanist who is seeking promotion, indulging in whispering campaigns, and inducing big advertisers to threaten to withdraw their advertising if the Editor continues a certain modernist line. They are prepared to spend quite a lot in order to force their point of view, just as they did in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They have their henchmen who are ready at all times to come to the support of their doctrines, however outrageous and illogical. ("The whole Catholic world recognises in Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton the leading champions of the Church in the field of literature"—*Universe*, 25/5/34.)

The Westminster Catholic Federation approached publishing houses to alter statements in School History Books so as to give a more smiling face to Romanists and their deeds. A sub-committee of that Federation examined the whole 28 volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and informed the publishers of the parts that they found objectionable, with reasons for deletion or amendment. The sub-committee reported, "There is every reason to hope that the new edition of the *Britannica* will be found very much more accurate and impartial than its predecessors."

The Romanists always claim accuracy and impartiality, just as they claim truth at the very same time as they take money for saying masses to save imaginary souls time in a supposed purgatory. Their cheek is colossal. This Westminster Catholic Federation had the effrontery to quote William Cobbett's so-called *History of the Protestant Reformation* in substantiation of their claims to have passages altered in history text-books. This blustering work has no authority whatever: Cobbett had had not the slightest training as a historian, and was almost certainly incapable of even reading the manuscript of the period. Neither was there any independence of judgment in it. It was a trick whereby, under cover of Cobbett's name, the Romanist point of view could be put forward. According to C. H. Collette (*Queen Elizabeth and the Penal Laws*), the matter of Cobbett's "History" was supplied by Jesuit Priests, from whom Cobbett "no doubt received" a handsome fee. The work—a goodly-sized volume—was then subsidized so that a small-print edition could be sold at sixpence a copy.

The Romanist minority is so compact, so untiring, so well-organised, and so wealthy that it almost has the effect of a majority; and there are many editors, not only in this country, but also in Canada and America who are mortally afraid of giving it offence. As another writer put it—

Everywhere this awful menace of popery—the bolstering up with lies and fury, the most reactionary religion that ever appeared on this earth—is raising its ugly head. And behind it is a powerful organisation armed to the teeth with the strongest weapons known to mankind—unlimited funds, an appeal to fear, credulity, and superstition, and the sentimental advocacy of women. What are we as practical Freethinkers

to do? First and foremost and always, it is to make Freethinkers. . . . He must know the Roman Catholic case, and he must quote authorities. I say here as clearly as I can, that the Freethought movement, as a movement, is making little headway against Roman Catholicism, and the people who tell us that the fight is won, simply don't understand the question at all.

That bit of straight talk appeared in *The Freethinker* (22/4/1928). The writer?—H. Cutner. The position that he saw so clearly twenty-seven years ago is now very much worse.

Not all those who have contributed to it were Romanists. Mattingly and Maynard, whom I mentioned in the first article, make no avowal of their religion. The fact that a writer expresses views favourable to the Romanist attitude, does not prove that he is himself a Romanist. There are some people more royal than the King himself. Augustus Jessopp, for instance, professed to be an Anglican, but in *One Generation of a Norfolk House* he is so anxious to appear sympathetic to the Jesuit priests, such as John Gerard and Henry Walpole and Robert Southwell, that he fails to do justice to the government of the day.

One common device of the Romanists is to make out that the days when Romanism flourished here were the golden age of merrie England. That sniggering Falstaff, Chesterton, was fond of asserting this. It appeared last year in *Capitalism and the Historians* in an article by Bertrand de Jouvenel. (I don't know that M. de Jouvenel is a Romanist, but it is highly probable.) This is what he says (p. 106):—

The Medieval Church centred its attention and its work on the unfortunate. It was the protector of the poor, and it performed all the functions which have now devolved on the welfare state: feeding the destitute, healing the sick, educating the people. All these services were free, provided out of the wealth shunted to them by church taxes and huge gifts, vigorously pressed for.

Make the lie big enough, and people will believe it, said Hitler, taking the Roman Catholic Church for his exemplar. This medieval church, says this French journalist, performed all the functions of the welfare state—so it had its dental and optical services, its chest clinics and orthopedic centres, its sanatoria, its reformatories, etc., etc.! The statement is ridiculous: the medieval church did not feed the destitute, nor heal the sick (other than their own sick monks), nor educate the people.

The amount of charity given by monasteries has been grossly exaggerated. What do the accounts show? R. H. Snape in *Monastic Finance* says that charity never amounted to 5 per cent. of the expenses, and seldom to more than 2 or 3 per cent. (including presents to the servants of bishops and nobles and to jesters). "At Dover Priory the amount spent on charity was little more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., and included boots for choir boys and Latin grammars for the three novices. [Note—three; that is the extent of educating the people.] Even Dr. Jessop, although a staunch believer in monasteries, could find little trace of monastic charity, in Norwich at any rate." (*Introduction to William Thorne's Chronicle of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury.*) Occasionally at Merton Abbey one reads of the King providing a corrody there for an old servant, i.e. a sort of retirement pension. But the number of people now in receipt of old age pensions exceeds the entire population of the 13th-Century; and it was the freethinking Deist, Thomas Paine, who proposed Old Age Pensions and Universal Education.

## Correspondence

### THE RIGHT TO AFFIRM

There was some correspondence recently in *The Freethinker* on the right to affirm instead of "swearing" in courts of law, etc. . . . I believe the applicant has to state on what grounds he so wishes, and the answer has to be either (a) I have no religious belief or (b) Swearing is against my religious belief. This being done, no further questions may be asked.

In my own case when called on as a juror at the Law Courts, not even this was done. When the jury entered the box the Court Clerk handed them Bibles. I said: "Excuse me, I prefer to affirm." He said: "Very well, stand back a minute or two," and proceeded swearing in the faithful eleven. Then he turned to me and said: "Hold up your right hand, and repeat after me," and gave the affirmation formula. Just that, nothing more.

A. W. DAVIS.

[Incidentally, Mr. Davis, one of our oldest readers, was recently instrumental in getting the Beckenham Public Library to add Margaret Knight's *Morals Without Religion* to its lending department. We hope to hear of other successes in this direction.—Ed.]

### UNITARIANISM AND FREETHOUGHT

May I please assure the Rev. John Rowland that this Freethinker, at least, has tried the Unitarian Church—has read, marked, learned, inwardly digested and thoroughly chewed the cud of its "Statement of Belief."

Alas! alack! it is based, as are all theistic religions, upon the postulate of a good God, a loving Heavenly Father—that is to say, upon *guesswork*.

Therefore, despite its undoubted charm, I was forced in honesty to reject it. (Incidentally, are "Beauty and Goodness" "absolute"?)

MOLLY ROCHE.

One would have expected that, having been in touch with the Freethought movement, Mr. Rowland must have appreciated the force of our replies to the "objections" he raises. Surely Mr. Taylor's note regarding "mystery" is in itself a complete reply to that "problem"—admitting of no other interpretation to anybody who claims, as does Mr. Rowland, that he is as convinced as ever of the value of reason.

If ever there was a case of special pleading, surely his reference to the "old-fashioned Freethinker" is the choice example. One is led to suppose that to be an "up-to-date Freethinker" one is bound to admit "evidence of some unity behind creation," and that "in religious experience we can detect a sign that the religious explanation of things has far more truth than most Freethinkers would be prepared to admit." If he can improve on the garble with which we are all acquainted from the religious mind regarding the "unity behind creation" and the "religious explanation of things," perhaps he will give us his wisdom.

And as for his *pièce de résistance*, the "attitude of mind" towards mystery, Mr. Taylor has dealt in no uncertain manner with that. How on earth Mr. Rowland thinks that the barriers which, as he rightly states, exist between the Theist attitude and the Atheist on this point, can be broken down, I cannot understand. Surely the whole essence is that the barriers are insuperable, and if he wishes to admit a "mystery," or find "evidence of Mind in creation," there can be no breaking down of barriers between his attitude and our materialist, determinist, scientific attitude. The onus is on Mr. Rowland to give us his evidence for "Mind in creation" and his evidence for the "religious explanation of things" (he had better explain this, too!). As Chapman Cohen wrote, a genuine Freethinker does not say, "I am willing to assume the existence of a God, but I am quite agnostical about his nature," he says "I do not believe in the existence of a God, and therefore have nothing in that connection about which to profess Agnosticism."

To say all this is not to say that I disagree entirely with Mr. Rowland. I believe there are very vital issues on which Unitarians and Freethinkers can and must co-operate. But they are certainly not any of the issues raised in his article, and I am sure that for a Freethinker to attend a Unitarian service would make him feel that here, basically, is the same sort of "magic" as one would find in a Catholic service. I have no doubt, however, that I should feel a lot happier, from a social standpoint, at the Unitarian service, and it is here that the issues for co-operation are to be found, namely,

such issues as the freedom of speech, abolition of the Blasphemy laws, improved education, resistance to warmongering, the betterment of social conditions—all or most of which objects receive no support from the general run of organised Christianity. On these points we can, and surely do, welcome his co-operation, but on "mysteries" and "absolutes" and "religious truth" our attitudes of mind are mutually exclusive, and admit of no compromise.

PETER E. J. JORDAN.

### N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

TUESDAY, July 19, the President in the Chair. Present: Mrs. Venton, and Messrs. Griffiths, Taylor, Ebury, Johnson, Tiley and the Secretary. Six new members were admitted to the Parent, Manchester and Nottingham Branches. Correspondence from Lockerbie was dealt with, relating to the possible formation of a new branch, and Mr. Colebrooke had been approached as a speaker for this area. A letter was read from Miss J. B. Warner, secretarial assistant to the N.S.S., stating her reasons for resigning from the post. A letter from the Dagenham Branch was read, copies of which had been sent to other branches, and it was left to Mr. Johnson to frame a suitable letter in reply. The new Secretary, Mr. D. Francis, was appointed to represent the Society on the Humanist Council in place of the late Secretary, Mr. P. V. Morris. Mr. Taylor moved, and Mr. Griffiths seconded, that Mr. J. Gordon be co-opted to the E.C. Mr. Ebury moved, and Mrs. Venton seconded, that Mrs. Grant be also co-opted. Both carried unanimously. It was decided to send a letter of congratulation to the Manchester Branch on the work put in on their periodical Branch Bulletin.

WEDNESDAY, August 17, the President in the Chair. In the absence of Mr. Francis through injury, Mr. Johnson was appointed to act in his place as Secretary. Present: Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton, and Messrs. Hornibrook, Barker, Tiley, Cleaver, Taylor, Ebury, Arthur, Gordon, Shaw and Griffiths. Five new members were admitted to the Manchester, N. London, Kingston and Parent Branches. It was announced that Mr. Colebrook had been engaged to speak at Lockerbie on August 20 preparatory to the formation of a new branch. It was decided, in view of pressure of business, to defer several less urgent matters to a later meeting, including the motions left over from the annual conference. It was reported that there had recently been a vast increase of work at the offices of the N.S.S. and the G. W. Foote Co. with which the present deleted staff was unable to cope. It was decided to advertise for an assistant, the N.S.S. to accept its share of the financial responsibility. It was also decided that the E.C. should meet again in a week's time.

WEDNESDAY, August 24. Owing to the indisposition of the President, the Chair was taken by Mr. Ebury as a Vice-President. Present: Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton and Messrs. Hornibrook, Tiley, Gordon, Griffiths, Barker, Taylor, Cleaver, Arthur and Corstophine. In the absence of the Secretary, Mr. Johnson again acted in that capacity. It was reported that Mr. Colebrooke had addressed a meeting at Lockerbie, and that several members in that area were now grouped for action. Correspondence from Dagenham and Bradford was dealt with, and after a lengthy discussion it was decided that two delegates from each branch of the Society should be invited to meet the Executive at a special meeting to be convened in the autumn, for the purpose of discussing ways and means of making the N.S.S. a stronger and united body working for the Secularist cause.

G.H.T.

### Special Book Offer

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