

# The Freethinker

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THE evolution of astronomy can be divided into two major epochs, marked by fundamentally different characteristics. The first era, in which the Greeks were outstanding, was distinguished pre-eminently by daring and, up to a point, astonishingly accurate speculation; but its technical immaturity limited the human vision to the naked eye, backed, however, by an extraordinary deductive power of brain. Contrarily, the modern era has been marked primarily by an immense, indeed an incredible, technical development. Between the original glasses of Galileo, with a magnifying power of twenty, to the 200 inch telescope on Mt. Palomar, whose range of vision is in the region of a thousand million light years, it is a far cry. Between these two major epochs in astronomical research lay the era of the Renaissance with its Copernican Revolution. For it was a revolution of Galileo's glasses, still faithfully preserved in a museum at Florence. One may truly say that never has so much been seen through so little. Never have so many ancient illusions been shattered by one small instrument.

Since observation has now succeeded speculation as the primary method of astronomical research, the collective character of the science has now been accentuated. Modern astronomy, unlike ancient, is not dominated by a few outstanding names. Of course there have been great modern astronomers such as Herschel, the discoverer of Uranus; Leverrier who discovered (but never actually saw!) Neptune; Schiaparelli, who first noted the "canals" on Mars. However, the main difference between ancient speculative and modern observational astronomy may perhaps be expressed by indicating that without a few individual geniuses in antiquity such as Aristarchus, Hipparchus or Ptolemy, later discoveries might never have taken place. In modern times it is more or less an accident which particular astronomer discovers a particular phenomenon. The role of the individual in modern astronomy is reduced to the common denominator of the means employed. For instance, Leverrier and Adams both discovered the then unknown planet Neptune almost simultaneously, whilst Lowell would have observed the Martian "canals" even if his predecessor had not.

## The Solar System

Because of the enormous distances, now usually computed in terms of light-years, which separate the fixed stars from our own solar system, astronomy during the pre-telescope era was necessarily confined to the solar system. From astronomy's unknown origins right up to the end of the 18th century, the number of the planets, already distinguished from the "fixed" stars, was considered final and unalterable. There were, apart from the sun and the moon, six in all. Telescopic observation soon began to find additions. The initial telescopic researches of Galileo revealed that Jupiter also had moons, satellites encircling it, and a little later

Cassini made a similar discovery with regard to Saturn. Since those days three new planets; Uranus, Neptune and Pluto have been added. In the discovery of Neptune and Pluto mathematical calculation played a part as important as direct observation. Leverrier and Adams calculated, independently, that observed disturbances in the orbit of Uranus indicated the presence of some other planet. The resulting discovery of Neptune (1846) is one of the most striking applications of pure reason to empirical science.

It is possible that the number of our fellow-planets is still incomplete, for Pluto appears too small to have caused the disturbances. Perhaps there may somewhere exist a planet still undiscovered.

## The Solar System and the Milky Way

To the astronomers of the pre-telescopic era the universe was reduced essentially to the then known limits of the solar system. No amount of Greek deductive genius could even approximately measure the fantastic gulfs of space that separate us from the stars in what is now termed our own island universe. With the coming of the telescope and the spectroscope this difficulty has been partly overcome. We now know that our solar system covers a very small area, relatively, in the Milky Way, which itself represents only one of an apparently infinite number of island universes, each containing millions of stars separated from each other by an average distance of some two million light-years. According to a recent estimate there are one hundred thousand million stars in our universe and about a hundred million of such universes have so far been discovered. Nor is there any sign of the "boundaries" of the apparently endless succession of island universes observed by even more powerful telescopes which take hundreds of millions of light-years in their stride with an effortless routine! We have travelled a long way from the diminutive universe of the ancients, when the Earth was the centre of a Lilliputian universe to be calculated in a few million miles.

## Stars and Planets

One of the "daring" heresies which led Giordano Bruno to the stake was his novel assertion that the stars were encircled by viable planets on which lived rational beings who had no need for the Christian scheme of salvation. The Vatican has in recent years tacitly admitted in its infallible wisdom that Bruno may have been right after all. Perhaps the most important astronomical discovery in recent years goes some way towards confirming this intriguing hypothesis. Prof. Abetti tells us that in 1943 the existence of planets not belonging to the solar system was discovered by an investigation of the motion of the stars (suns) which these planets encircle. The size of these hypothetical planets is very much larger than any in our solar system, some ten to twelve times the size of our biggest "fellow-traveller", Jupiter. But the Italian historian of astronomy goes on to add: "Their presence may indicate

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## Modern Astronomy

By F. A. RIDLEY

that others of smaller dimension may exist, which cannot be found because of their slight effect on the motion of their visible component".

### Some Modern Problems

The technical problems of astronomy can be found in the text books. But the universe is the home of life, of ours and perhaps of others. In his *Life in Other Worlds* one of the most eminent of living astronomers, Sir H. S. Jones, the Astronomer Royal, has fully discussed these possibilities, and he concludes that life in the universe is a rare but probably regularly recurring phenomenon. He is infinitely more optimistic, if that is the right word, than was a certain French astronomer who said the mathematical odds against life appearing anywhere else were represented by the unthinkable number of one followed by a thousand million noughts. We hope we adequately convey the thought of Prof. Spencer Jones when we repeat that probably a small

proportion of stars are encircled by planets similar to those that encircle our sun, and that a small proportion of them are viable to conscious life. One may add that such a conclusion still leaves room, in the apparently infinite universe, for quite extensive manifestations of conscious existence. Let us hope they have not made such a mess of it as has *Homo Sapiens*! Incidentally Prof. Spencer Jones has recently indicated his belief that mankind will eventually make contact with other worlds in space.

At present astronomy can only tell us **how** Life and the Universe have developed. It cannot yet inform us **why** we and the universe are here. Several more or less plausible theories of the universe have already appeared. Perhaps, one fine day, we shall know both the **how** and the **why** of the universe. Then speculation will give way to knowledge and materialism will finally replace theology. "God" will finally become, as the French astronomer Laplace said, "an unnecessary hypothesis".

## Hell Offends, Heaven Bores

By C. G. L. Du CANN

THE Conference of Modern Churchmen at Oxford recently took a considerable step forward in trying to bring the Christian religion—and especially, of course, its Anglican variant—into harmony with modern thought and atmosphere. Such attempts cannot but interest secularists. The gulf between the religious "intelligentsia" and the unsophisticated creatures of the lowest order, such as Billy Graham and Jehovah's Witnesses, ever grows wider.

At that Conference, Canon J. S. Bezzant, the Dean of St. John's College, Cambridge, criticised Scriptural imagery as "out-of-date". Indeed it is. Founded on ancient aristocratic conceptions of the importance of a King, a Judge, a Shepherd, and similar figures, it is undemocratic. Perhaps we ought to conceive God as a Trade Union or a Royal Family, and democratise the Triune Godhead, to be elected by angels' votes every five years, like our fools and knaves in the House of Commons. Angels and archangels and all the whole company of Heaven might be given votes and political equality. For a Hell, a Soviet of Mammon, Beelzebub and Satan might replace the Dictator on the model of the U.S.S.R.

Though the literary imagination, soaked in the Bible, rather boggles at the dethronement of those twin-Deities of heaven and hell respectively, God and Satan, it would all be in consonance with modern ideas and ideals. For Dictators are demodé. Further, the Hereditary Principle as enshrined in the doctrine of God the Son, Jesus Christ, does rather smack of our discredited House of Lords, and might be re-stated in more socialistic, not to say communistic, terms.

Certainly something must be done. When Canon Bezzant speaks of re-thinking the out-of-date metaphors and similes of the Bible, it sounds well enough. But when you actually do it, as I have tried to do in the preceding paragraph, the results are somewhat bizarre and grotesque, and are perhaps more likely to shock than to edify "true believers".

Yet as things are, the ancientries of the Christian religion make it more and more out of touch with the ordinary Toms, Dicks, and Harrys of the year 1955 in Britain. In the Canon's excellent phrase, "hell offends, heaven bores". Too true: both are intolerable concepts both to the educated and to the part-educated minds of today. A man who would not fling even an insect into his domestic fire, will hardly allow God to fling his wife and children (not to speak of himself) into everlasting flames.

Therefore—again in Canon Bezzant's words—hell has in effect been banished. But as long ago as Victoria's reign, the Privy Council, to the amusement of lawyers, "dismissed Hell with costs". Only amongst the most benighted of Britons and the most unsophisticated of Americans, does the horrible idea of "the everlasting bonfire"—Shakespeare's contemptuous phrase for the Christian Hell—linger.

But if Hell goes, much more goes with it. The Salvation doctrine, for example. From what are we to be saved if not from eternal fire? The answer may be: from sin.

Nowadays advanced Churchmen in the Anglican Faith have sought to make of Hell a state of mind rather than a place of torture. But is mental torment any more respectable than physical torture? Hell with mental rather than material flames, remains a degrading concept irreconcilable with a Deity of perfect Love and Goodness, and the giving up of spiritual geography and topography does not get rid of the difficulties of Christian philosophy.

It is therefore safe to say that Hell, either material or mental, is "on the way out" so far as modern folk are concerned. Heaven only is left—an equally dreadful prospect, as heaven is usually depicted, for those who hate music, even on golden harps, and detest headgear such as golden crowns as much as bowler hats. Heaven ceases to be a place "above the bright blue sky"—which anyhow our atomic age threatens to invade—and will have to be taught as being a state of mind to make it credible, let alone attractive.

Canon Bezzant, after all, is only saying very late what lots of people, Christians and non-Christians alike, have been thinking on the twin-subjects of Heaven and Hell. His remedy for these discontents with orthodoxy is that the Church should "re-think" the whole matter afresh. But is there any real hope that any Christian Church will decide to re-state, let alone re-think, the traditional doctrines? None, I should say.

Indeed, the kindest word that most of his fellow-Anglicans, the low-brows and the middle-brows and all the Anglo-Catholic school, will have for Canon Bezzant, is the appellation of "heretic" if not "schismatic". Non-Anglicans, indeed, will hardly believe that he is a Christian at all, sweeping away the traditional God-webs of his Faith as he did at Oxford.

But the venerable canon may be a sign and a portent of the times, even if he is no sheep in sheep's clothing.

## Archaeology Used as "Proving" the Bible

By MERRILL R. HOLSTE

(Continued from page 286)

We have read Col. Henry Rawlinson's complete translation of the Behistun inscription and know that no kings who lived before the time of the biblical flood are listed therein. What Darius did was to list his own ancestors: Hystaspes his father, Arsames his grandfather, Ariamnes, Teispes and then stated: "From antiquity our family have been kings. Says Darius the king, there are eight of my race who have been kings before me. I am the ninth." This statement must be the basis of the false claim for eight antedeluvian kings, when the immediate ancestors of Darius actually were the kings referred to. Since Darius lived between the years of 558 B.C. and 458 B.C., the eight ancestors must have lived within the 250 years immediately preceding 558 B.C. Rawlinson's translation lists no other kings excepting allies or enemies, contemporaries of Darius. The eight kings could not possibly have been antedeluvian kings as falsely claimed by the article in *These Times*. The margin of our bible gives the date of the flood as 2349 B.C., showing that the article misplaces the date of the eight kings about 1,500 years.

We have learned, as a result of our engagement in controversy with pious persons and men of the cloth during the past twenty years, to suspect that every statement they make as to fact is a deliberate misrepresentation, and as far from the actual truth as it is possible to go without danger of detection. In fact, it seems that, as a matter of policy, they never tell the truth if a misrepresentation will do. Clericals all seem to proceed on one false assumption: "We have the truth. All facts must support the truth, the beliefs we hold, even though we can't see the bridge between the facts and our "truth." Therefore, we are right in claiming that these facts, all facts, support our beliefs." This must be the logic of the pious writers. We hope our re-statement of it will enable readers to see how false and misleading such "logic" can be. We hope readers will be forcefully impressed with the necessity of checking carefully every statement claimed to be factual if it is made by any pious writer or speaker.

The article continues with the next monument, the *Moabite Stone*. They say of it: "Another significant discovery was made by missionary F. A. Klein, in 1868, who found the *Moabite Stone*, which mentions Israel four times, calls King Omri by name, recognizes Jehovah as the God of Israel, and in two paragraphs admits the invasion and subjugation of Moab by the armies of Israel. See I Kings 16:29; II Kings 3:4,5." The article makes the claim that this inscription recognizes Jehovah as the god of Israel. What the inscription really says about Jehovah is this: "I (Mesha) took thence (from Nebo) the altar hearths of Jehovah and dragged them before Chemosh." We can find no other mention of Jehovah. Apparently the altar hearths of Jehovah served as a "gazingstock" for Chemosh as did the altar hearths of Daudoh.

This reminds us of the story of the Philistines having taken the ark of Jehovah and placing it before their god Dagon. As told in the bible, Jehovah mischievously overturned Dagon every night in a convincing and appropriate demonstration of his omnipotent power. (I Samuel, 5). However, it appears that god Chemosh was at this time, or at this place, at least, mightier than the omnipotent Jehovah because we are not told that he played tricks on Chemosh as he did on Dagon. Perhaps Jehovah was asleep? If Jehovah had played any juvenile pranks on Chemosh, like overturn-

ing him during the night, the Jewish scribes certainly would have bragged about it in their scripture as they did about their Jehovah's exploits against Dagon. The magazine article claims that the Moabite inscription mentions Israel four times. We counted and found the name "Israel" to occur six times in the translation available in Harper's Bible Dictionary, 1952 edition.

The Moabite inscription begins by announcing, "I am Mesha, son of Chemosh, king of Moab." This shows that the Moabites subscribed to the belief common to all the surrounding nations regarding the divinity of the person of the king and that the king was believed to be the son of their god. The Egyptian Pharaohs, the ancient Roman kings, the early Greek kings and the rulers of most of the other early Mediterranean peoples were also believed by their subjects to be divine persons and sons of their gods.

Mesha continues: "I made this high place for Chemosh in KRHH with Salvation, because he saved me from all the kings and because he let me see my desire upon all them that hated me. Omri king of Israel, he afflicted Moab many days, because Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him; and he too said: 'I will afflict Moab.' In my days he said. . . . But I saw my desire upon him and upon his house, and Israel perished with an everlasting destruction. . . ." Mesha's inscription contains a record of the victories gained by him over the Israelites. This is to be expected, for no king in those days of total, genocidal old testament warfare could be expected to memorialize anything but victory. So, we see that the magazine article tries to give a false impression when it says, ". . . the Moabite Stone . . . admits the invasion and subjection of Moab by the armies of Israel." The sole purpose of the *Moabite Stone* was to magnify the person and divine nature of king Mesha before his subjects and all posterity by publishing the glorious record of his exploits on imperishable stone.

The Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Israelites, Jews, Uidianites, etc., were all closely related Semitic tribes, speaking related languages. The Moabite and Hebrew languages were identical excepting for minor differences of dialect. The Semitic tribes all had the same general culture pattern, worshipped their local tribal deities in the same manner by making "sacrifice" in open air sanctuaries. All gods and spirits in those days thirsted for the blood of sacrifice. It was believed in those dark times that the life force or spirit of an animal or man resided in the blood because primitive observation had shown that the animal or man that had lost all its blood was very, very dead, without life or spirit. Upon this simple observation was based the theory of sacrifice. The people gathered for their sacrifices at the sanctuary (bethel) where their gods, and perhaps also the spirits of the ancestors, were supposed to reside and made sacrifice by killing the victim and ceremonially pouring its blood upon and around the altar as nourishment for the spirits. Then they completed the ceremony by eating the flesh of the sacrificial animal as food for themselves in the communal meal at which were present the whole family, or tribe, and supposedly also the ancestral spirits and/or gods. In fact, the gods probably were the ancestral spirits, for the Hebrew worship of teraphim, or gods, images, was intimately bound up with the belief in ancestral spirits.

(To be concluded)

## This Believing World

Who says our newspaper men are afraid to proclaim the truth? Here, in glowing prose, we have an editorial in the *Leicester Mercury* putting up a glorious defence of Miracles. The saintly writer not only believes in *all* the Biblical Miracles but, as he so beautifully points out, in *all* miracles which, as divinely ordered, "happen every minute of the day." What can a blatant and deluded Atheist say to such profound Faith? God describes comparatively few Miracles in the Bible but one "every minute of the day" makes 1440 every day all the year round. There is real Faith for you! We doubt if even Billy Graham has reached such pious heights.

Nothing impresses some readers so much as words, words, and words. In this, Miss Jean Macaulay, writing in the *Glasgow Evening News* on her visit to Lourdes, is supreme. She was "impressed" but also "appalled". And she filled columns with words enlarging on these topics, though it is only fair to say that she was appalled more by the high prices of everything there than by the deliberate fraud of it all. Whether she really believes in the "miraculous cures" regularly performed at Lourdes is hard to discover from what she writes, but (she tells us) just as we can't really explain electricity, so we cannot really explain the wonderful cures—especially the 48 detailed in a book sold by the Medical Bureau at Lourdes.

The truth is of course that Miss Macaulay appears to have gone to Lourdes as she would to Southend, and has never made an exhaustive study of human credulity—particularly the brand at Roman Catholic religious shrines. She is so naive as to admit that the only reason why she will remember "the ceremonies, mass praying, the services, is because she found them interesting". The outrageous swindle of this impudent religious drivel bringing hundreds of thousands of poor sick "pilgrims" to be "miraculously" cured seems to have escaped her. All she saw was "religion" at work as opposed to "talking" religion. How thoroughly she was hypnotised by "religion at work" one can judge from her articles—words, words, and words. But the religious lies peep out all the same.

Nothing "shocks" the Church—not even Materialism and Atheism—more than frank disclosures on sex coming from regular church-goers. Quite a number of young Christians of both sexes recently admitted, in a kind of miniature Kinsey enquiry, that they could see nothing wrong in sex experiences before marriage, and most Christian ministers are almost in tears about it. Perhaps their objection reflects Macaulay's reference to bear-baiting which the Puritans opposed, not because of its cruelty, but because it gave pleasure to the onlookers.

One would have thought that, what with the large sale of Bibles all over the world, the constant exhortations to put all our troubles on Jesus Christ, the enormous number of sermons delivered everywhere in Christian Churches, the thousands of religious books and pamphlets and journals published in all Christian countries, and in particular, the tremendous success of religious broadcasting, our parsons and priests would be more or less satisfied. Not a bit of it. Here we have Canon A. W. Eaton of Leicester now wanting in addition a tape recorder, so that the phenomenal uplift which all the foregoing has given to the world could become a super-uplift.

The Canon wants all the parish work to be recorded and then churned out whenever there's a weeny bit of slackening. What can a backslider think when he hears again the village religious title-tattle, the brainy back-chat which distinguishes a thoroughly religious Mothers' Meeting, the wonderful eloquence poured out by the curate conducting a marriage service, to say nothing of the ever-cheery message to his flock by the gracious and genial Vicar? It's an inspiring thought that a well-conducted tape recorder can bring men and women back to Jesus; and we wish Canon Eaton a well-deserved success. He might easily prove Jesus to be the greatest tape-recorder who ever lived.

## Review

PORTUGUESE PANORAMA, by Oswell Blakeston; Burke; 18/-.

The author has a keen eye and can describe what he sees. Moreover, as a convinced sceptic and hater of priestcraft he saw, and vividly describes much of interest to freethinkers, Portugal is one of the least known, and one of the poorest, most illiterate, and in consequence superstitious and priest-ridden lands in Europe; all of which is very fully disclosed. Portugal has had, historically two short periods of relative enlightenment: one under the benevolent despotism of the 18th century Marquis de Pombal, Portuguese Prime Minister and disciple of Voltaire, who forced the Portuguese Church to practise toleration, and the bureaucracy to practise punctuality by means of specially imported English grandfather clocks; the other under the short-lived "masonic" Portuguese Republic which followed the abolition of the monarchy in 1910, that monarchy which boasted the official title of the Vatican's "most faithful" son.

Today, however, Portugal is again a clerical paradise, a political theocracy directed since 1928 by the dictator, Dr. Salazar, a pupil of the Jesuits. The author describes how, in the clerical-fascist paradise, state, nation and culture are at the disposal of political Catholicism. No Protestant Church is permitted officially, and political and personal liberty are non-existent under a Nazi-trained political police. A profusion of magnificent churches rise to heaven amid an illiterate and semi-starved population, the fruit of past Portuguese piracies in the colonial empire which the Borgia Pope had conferred on his "most faithful" sons. It is world-famous today that Heaven has intervened to give special approval to this clerical paradise. Mr. Blakeston did not fail to visit Fatima, scene of the blessed Virgin's last appearance on earth. Mr. Blakeston concurs with the present writer's theory that Fatima, named after Muhammed's daughter, may have been the scene of a Muslim religious cult during the long Arabic occupation of Portugal. I am still of the opinion that this line of inquiry might lead to interesting discoveries in the field of comparative religion.

It must not, however, be supposed that the book is an arid polemic or a bald narrative of dry-as-dust facts. It sparkles with vivid descriptive touches, sometimes striking a deeper note, as when a group of students climbed the statue of the free-thinking Marquis and left the inscription, "Come down; they're at it again." Indeed they are "at it again" and not only in Portugal.

F. A. R.

## GOD'S HOLY WORD BACKFIRES

A long-term prisoner wrote to the warden:—  
"Dear Warden:

I've been reading the Bible you gave me, and I find therein that all I have to do to regain my freedom is to ask for it, according to St. Luke, 2, 10: "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." So I knocked on the door that preventeth my freedom, so you will soon open it. Anxiously awaiting your reply."

No. 471144.

The Warden's answer:  
"Dear No. 471144:

I too read the Bible, and find in the same chapter, St. Luke, 2, 7: "And he from within shall answer, Trouble me not, the door is now shut . . ." Trusting you will abide by the Lord's Word for the next 25 years,

Sorrowfully, your Warden."

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

## THE FREETHINKER

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### To Correspondents

Correspondents may like to note that when their letters are not printed or when they are abbreviated, the material in them may still be of use to "This Believing World," or to our spoken propaganda.

M. WICKS (Mrs.).—Please support your bare assertions with evidence and we will deal with it.

D. E.—Thanks for interesting anecdote concerning Evan Roberts the revivalist.

F. HOOPER.—The Pope has no faith in miracles when he is ailing. He always looks to medical science to keep him alive.

### 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.

Orpington Group. Ramble. Meet at St. Cary Cray Station, Sunday, September 18, 10.20 a.m. or Farningham Road Station, 10.51 a.m. (Train from Victoria, 10.18 a.m.) Bring lunch. Leader, Mr. A. J. MINERS.

#### 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."

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Trades Hall, Thurland Street).—Thursday, September 22, 7.30 p.m.: F. HERRICK, "Conscience and Society."

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, September 18, 11 a.m.: S. K. RATCLIFFE, "New Patterns in World Affairs."

### Notes and News

Our contributor, the Rev. J. L. Broom, had the following published in the *Evening News* of August 12:—

"... Billy Graham's doctrine of salvation by faith encourages immorality.

It implies that, for example, an unorthodox Christian, such as the great Albert Schweitzer or a saintly Hindu like Gandhi, are for ever debarred from entering Heaven; and conversely, that a man who has been cruel or selfish in his life, will, provided he repents and accepts Christ on his deathbed, join the angelic hosts above, while good-living persons who disbelieve in Graham's message are being tortured in Hell."

### The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Previously acknowledged £932 10s 10d.; R. Morrell, 2s. 6d.; A. F. Harris, 5s.; A. Hancock, 1s.; David Dain, 5s.; W. Maybank, £5; W. H. D., 2s. 6d.; N. S. and J. (in happy memory of a beloved man), £2. Total to date, £940 6s. 10d.

Considering all the sound and fury which preceded and accompanied the Graham campaigns, the net results were laughable. 253 converts from the whole Glasgow circus! And yet Billy can talk of mankind "standing on the fringe of a historical spiritual awakening." It is, of course, the same fringe as thirty years ago. Religion is always "on the verge" of a great revival. Billy was received at 10 Downing Street and by the gems of British aristocracy; he actually included the Queen and her husband in his congregation. Is not all this a sign of the Churches' desperate need to arrest the breakaway from religion? Revivalists of former times had no need for such buttresses; they managed to get along very well on their own steam (or gas). But such has been the decline of religion in the face of secular betterment and secularist propaganda that today the revivalist campaign depends for its impact on all manner of artificial supports.

And the result? £47,500 to bring in 253 converts. Number of atheists converted: Nil.

Characteristically calling a spade a spade, Mr. Guy Aldred, referring to the Graham campaign in the *Glasgow Word* (September) says: "Considering, not the nightly reports of alleged converts, but the final official figures, the names of the people who so importantly inaugurated the campaign should be pilloried for remembrance. . . ."

Mr. Aldred scathingly criticises the whole religious set-up of the campaign, and it is a pity that so very few newspapers have the courage to tell its readers the truth.

In our issue of August 26 we gave news of the recent trial for heresy in Wisconsin of a young Lutheran pastor, the Rev. G. Crist, who denied, among other things, heaven, hell, the virgin birth, miracles and the resurrection. It is now reported in *Newsweek* (U.S.A.) that two more ministers, who were Crist's classmates at the Theological Seminary, are also under investigation for heresy on similar charges. Meanwhile, Mr. Crist is ordered immediate suspension until his case is reviewed by the full Synod (lay and clerical) in nine months' time.

Sending fraternal greetings to THE FREETHINKER, the Friendship Liberal League of America report that they have succeeded in getting a 15-minute talk on Freethought for the radio, and are hoping eventually to land a thirteen-period contract. We have every confidence that these uncompromising Freethinkers of the Liberal League will make skilful use of their opportunity.

If there are men who regret the Good Old Times, without too clear a notion of what they were, they should at least be thankful that we are rid of that misguided energy of faith which justifies conscience in making men unrelentingly cruel.

—James Russell Lowell.

NEXT WEEK

UNDERWRITING THE ATOM

By LORD BOYD-ORR

## Science and Mystery

By the Rev. JOHN ROWLAND, B.Sc.

IN the courteous note appended to my article on "Unitarianism and Freethought." Mr. G. H. Taylor asserts that the statement that there is a residual mystery in the universe—a statement which most religious folk of all denominations would accept—is a "groundless dogma." Mr. Taylor, in that assertion of his, provides an excellent example of the kind of thing to which my previous article was attempting to draw attention—the erection of barriers between different groups of people, and barriers for which there can be no real basis in fact.

That there are sincerely religious people who accept the work of the scientists, who accept the whole scientific scheme, including the theory of evolution, but who nevertheless hold that there is a residuum of knowledge which eludes the methods of science—that is the idea which I was trying to put forward, and that is the idea which to my mind is very difficult to escape.

One does not need to take very many examples to show that it is true. Let me take what I regard as the most outstanding example of all, and that is the relationship between mind and matter. We all know that there are cases where mind seems to control matter. Consider a great runner. There will be occasions, during a race for an Olympic Games championship, when the body of a Bannister or a Chataway will be tired and weary, when a new effort appears utterly impossible, when it seems that the man is defeated and finished. Yet, by some almost unimaginable effort of will, that man can somehow make himself put on that little extra sprint in the last 200 yards of a three mile race, and will win because his will controls the muscles and nerves of his weary body. Note : his will controls his muscles.

We are sometimes told (and this, I suppose, will be the average Freethinker's explanation of such things) that there are chemical or physical explanations of all mental changes. We get in a rage, we are told, because the adrenalin content of the blood-stream increases. Others say that the adrenalin content of the blood-stream increases *because* we get in a rage. But is it not far more sensible and rational to say that these things work along parallel lines, and that the reason why the adrenalin-content and the mental state work on parallel lines is one of the mysteries which we cannot understand?

Typical of the Freethinker's attitude is Mr. Cutner's attitude to Poltergeists; I remember, years ago, that the late A. Gowans Whyte took just the same line with regard to water-divining. Less typical is your extract from *The Liberal* (August 19), criticising the late Woolsey Teller, who had denied that hypnotism exists as a phenomenon. Freethinkers usually deny anything which appears to have any kind of supernatural explanation, just as many scientists do. Poltergeists, water-divining, telepathy, flying saucers—many oddities which do not fit within any neat and tidy mechanical scheme are not discussed, they are just denounced or merely ignored. And that seems to me to be all of a piece with the assumption that any belief in a fundamental mystery behind creation is a "groundless dogma."

Rationalists and Freethinkers, I feel, should beware of accusing religious folk of setting up "groundless dogmas," because there are many groundless dogmas in the general philosophical set-up of Freethought and Rationalism. The trouble about Atheism is that it is an over-simplification; it lays down the law, says that all men fit to a preconceived pattern, and makes it appear beyond all doubt that the material, mechanical outlook is a complete explanation of the world as we know it, whereas there are many things in the

world which are not merely beyond our present explanations, but which seem likely always to remain so. The mind-matter problem has really eluded all the philosophers and all the theologians from Plato and Plotinus to Whitehead and Hoyle. It is, in the sense in which I use the word, a mystery; and I cannot see that we are ever likely to understand it completely. Similarly there are many other (though lesser) mysteries which tend to escape the yardstick of science. And it appears to me that when once an agreement is reached on that issue, there is a far better chance of a believer in Liberal Religion and a Freethinker finding the common ground which certainly exists.

The "die-hards" on both sides of the theological fence will, of course, deny this. The dyed-in-the-wool Materialist, whether Marxist or not, will foam at the mouth at the suggestion that there is any possibility of a compromise between Rationalism and any kind of Church; the Catholic, whether Roman or Anglican, and the follower of Billy Graham, will foam at the mouth at the suggestion that there is any chance of accepting any part of the Rationalist case, and embodying it in a Liberal Religious philosophy; but there are Humanists, as there are Unitarians and Quakers, who will see that some such synthesis of knowledge is not only possible but desirable. That is my case; and I hope that there will be some among the thoughtful readers of these columns who will agree that it is at any rate arguable.

### A REPLY TO MR. ROWLAND

By G. H. TAYLOR

MR. ROWLAND'S friendly criticism is directed specifically at Mr. Cutner and myself. For my part, I will reply here and then leave Mr. Rowland with the last word. For the rest, Mr. Cutner is well able to defend his own territory.

Mr. Rowland speaks of the great barrier which divides us. My purpose here is to indicate what that barrier is.

He says there is much that still eludes the scientist. True; but that does not make it a "mystery." Science is only in its infancy.

I see nothing mysterious in a man's will controlling his muscles. Mr. Rowland's will controls his muscles every time he strikes a match or buttons his coat. And unless the muscular power is there ready to meet requirements, no amount of "willing" is of any avail.

What Mr. Rowland needs to show, in order to prove his case, is :

- (1) that Bannister's *actual* performance was in excess of his *physically possible* performance, and
  - (2) that the extra physical power was superadded by will.
- He must then, to substantiate this, show
- (3) how it got into his body,
  - (4) where it came from, and
  - (5) precisely what was the manufacturing process.

Before he embarks on this nightmare of speculation I offer him the materialist explanation, namely, that the incentives to run fast were causally sufficient to drain the reserves of physical energy to the extent of achieving the desired end.

Now look at the alternative — the explanation from "mystery." I am to suppose that 200 yards from the tape Bannister is left without the necessary power to continue. However, all is not yet lost, because an obliging fellow called Will is standing conveniently by, carrying a bag of Mystery, from which he extracts oxygen and new tissue. These he pours into the exhausted body and the race is completed.

In other words, once you abandon the law of parsimony, as Mr. Rowland does, you abandon economy and land yourself in the most extravagant speculation and unsupportable dogma. My recent article on "Vitalism in Retreat" gave instances from the history of biology of this type of explanation having repeatedly to be abandoned as science progressed.

I agree that the mind and matter relationship eluded Plato, Plotinus and A. N. Whitehead. Try the modern critical realists such as W. P. Montague, R. W. Sellars and Morris R. Cohen.

The most useful common ground between Unitarians and Freethinkers is, I suggest, in peppering the B.B.C. for fair play. The Unitarians were themselves a persecuted sect in the late seventeenth century, and their history is one of sterling honesty and independence; certainly no Christian would turn Unitarian to improve his trade. Snubbed by Toc H and cold-shouldered by their Christian brothers, it is in this sort of atmosphere that Unitarians have, in proportion to numbers, produced finer thinkers than any other section of Christianity. James and Harriet Martineau, Page Hopps and Channing, Carpenter and Greg, are names less known than some eminent divines of their period who wrote far less intelligently on the same subjects. And to-day such lesser lights as Rattray, Redfern and Balmforth have been far ahead of the rest of Christian apologians; one might even say half way to Freethought.

What, then, is the barrier? Mr. Rowland objects to my "assertion" that mystery-explanation is dogma. But note this: it was *not* a mere assertion, because I gave reasons, and also defined "mystery" (which Mr. Rowland did not do, though he introduced the term). If Mr. Rowland wants to reject my assertion, the way to do it is to dispose of my reasons for it. There lies the great barrier between us.

The Great Barrier is logic.

## Lunar Superstitions

By RUBY TA'BOIS

WE live in an age of superstition. People who have rid themselves of the superstition of religion, and proudly admit it, yet go round clinging to some other equally unfounded and illogical belief. To this class belong lunar superstitions.

Many people still implicitly believe that our moon has an influence on the weather; that the full moon encourages crime; that agricultural pursuits should be guided by phases of the moon, to mention only a few. These examples are all fallacious. The only known and proved effect of the moon on our earth is a tidal one.

Meteorologists take no account whatever of the moon in their weather forecasts, and it can definitely be asserted that the moon does not influence the weather, though it is difficult to convince people of the fact. Long-period accurate observations of weather have failed to show any correlation between the weather and our luminary.

Although the belief that the full moon has some weird compelling power over the habits and actions of men has been advanced in courts of law all over the world to explain eccentric and criminal conduct, medical science has repeatedly expressed the view that the idea is nonsense. This superstition has probably been handed down the centuries from the days when primeval man used the light of full moon to commit deeds of savagery. This notion has been held partly responsible for hundreds of suicides and crimes of violence. Country doctors sometimes sympathise with the belief of patients in this power of the moon, for psychological reasons. Neither is there any foundation for the widespread notion that certain seeds should be planted during the waxing of

the moon if a successful crop is desired. Exhaustive experiments have proved the futility of the theory. The only "evidence" of the moon's influence on the growth of land plants was published by L. Kolisko about his experiments at Stuttgart during 1926-35, when he claimed that a particular phase of the moon at the time of sowing plants or seeds influences the period and percentage of germination as well as the subsequent growth of the plant. But his results have never been confirmed by numbers of other investigators, several of whom admitted that if a lunar effect exists it is too obscure to be of any value in agriculture.

In ancient Egypt Osiris was sometimes interpreted as the moon "because the moon with her humid and generative light is favourable to the propagation of animals and the growth of plants." The sun, on the contrary, being personified as the moon's enemy Typhon, was described as "scorching and burning up all growing things and rendering the greater part of the earth uninhabitable by reason of his blaze and often over-powering the moon herself." Osiris, then, in one of his aspects was originally a god of vegetation. This transferred to the moon gave rise to the fallacy that the moon is the ultimate cause of plant-growth.

Primitive beliefs were that the moon possessed some magical power which could be exerted over almost any sphere of human life. Its weird appearance, especially its puzzling change of shape at the phase, its connection with the hours of gloom with accompaniments of ghosts, witches and evil spirits conspired to originate the notion that the moon had a malign reputation. Amongst other things, the moon was thought to be the chief cause of floods and deluges.

The waxing and waning of the moon was the cause, according to primitive people of "things expanding and shrinking as the moon waxes and wanes." This correlation extended to many and various phenomena of nature such as marriage, house-building, tree-felling, pig-killing, nail- and hair-cutting. In other words, savages associated waxing and waning of the moon with real processes of disintegration and reintegration, decay and growth alternately. Knowing as we do today that lunar phases do not represent real changes in the moon's shape or constitution, the main basis for these beliefs disappears.

But this does not deter some stupid and illogical people from hanging on to the superstition. For example, a correspondent wrote to *The Listener* a few years ago describing a Canadian winter. "The thermometer had dropped to sixty below and it was full moon. Under these conditions the young spruce and balsams in exposed positions were freezing and splitting with cracks like pistol shots. You see, the sap in the trees rises with the waxing moon and sinks when it wanes. Thus at full moon all the blisters on the balsam which contain fluid are full to bursting—with the result I have mentioned."

The practice of killing pigs under a waxing moon is still observed strictly in the West of England by farmers for no better reason than that the ancients writing on agricultural matters had laid down the ignorant maxim that certain activities, such as cutting and gathering and planting and killing must be carried out according to the phases of the moon. A commentary of Plutarch states that "the onion is the only vegetable which violates the usual law by sprouting in the wane and withering in the increase." This amusing departure from the rule led to its modification, apparently; for at the present time, when sowing corn and felling trees, forcible arguments are advanced in defence of doing exactly the opposite at the phases of the moon from what the rule demands.

Today, in Germany, many superstitious people regulate almost their entire conduct by phases of the moon, especially in regard to business matters and making money. It seems some of the lunar phases are distinctly more propitious than others for these activities.

Sleeping in the moonlight is still believed by some to have harmful results of a mental nature, another hangover from the primitive belief in the baleful influence of the moon. This is another notion entirely devoid of scientific foundation. People who have slept regularly in open moonlight over periods of years can testify to having suffered no adverse symptoms whatever. The ancient Greeks had similar fears of the noxious effects of moonlight when they used to hide young children in the woods to shield them from it.

Yes, our moon has been responsible for many past and present superstitions and fallacies. The moon was associated with the resurrection from the dead. When the new moon reappeared after disappearing for about three days, it was said to have "risen after three days." This sounds suspiciously like the Christian legend of the resurrection *after three days*.

## Correspondence

### DEMOCRACIES

Your correspondent G. W. Clark (August 19) quotes from Chamber's Dictionary a definition of democracy as "a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively. . . ." I quite fail to see how this requires the existence of an opposition party. Whom would the "opposition party" represent as opposed to the "people collectively"?

It is difficult for those bred in a class society to envisage life in a society where there is no class conflict. The only possible opposition would come from those who wished a return to the old conditions of private landlordism and capitalism as we know them. With all their associations of unrest, poverty and war. It is not conceivable that they could ever hope to form a "party" in a country where the "people collectively" are the owners of all the means of life and are participants in the planning and development of their life. And while we are about it, we might ask ourselves just how much power, supreme or other, we ourselves can exercise over the shaping of our lives and the ordering of our public affairs. I myself, for instance, although I have a "free and secret vote," have no representative in Parliament.

(Mrs.) G. MATSON.

I would suggest to G. W. Clark (August 19) that, in fact, people are *totally unable* to arrive at an estimate of merits, as "democracies," of the U.S.S.R. and U.K., respectively. Particularly if, as is likely, they rely for information on the products of the fevered imaginations of most British political "experts."

In fact, the U.S.S.R. is *at least* as democratic as the U.K. How much of a democracy is in a nation in which 80 per cent. of the productive capacity, and 50 per cent. of private capital, is in the hands of 1 per cent. of the population? This powerful minority are—within the law—not answerable to "the people" (who are dependant on them) for the use of the power they possess.

Religions and anti-religious views are accorded unimpeded propagation in the U.S.S.R.

Contrast this situation with the U.K., where Freethought, expressed nation-wide, is such a rarity that the views of Margaret Knight are the signal for a storm of abuse from the "Free Press."

R. P. TOPPLE.

[We intervene merely to restore accuracy. There was not "a storm of abuse from the press." There was a storm of abuse from a *section* of the press. As Mr. Gilbert Harding said in *The People* (January 16), "Bishops were started screaming and behind them yapped scores of other churchmen like a pack of Bible-punching hounds. And naturally they got a newspaper or two to scream with them." Note: A newspaper or two.—Ed.]

### CHRISTIANTY IN PRACTICE

The issue between the supernaturalist and the anti-supernaturalist may be stated as follows:—Can all natural phenomena, including human beings, be shown to belong to a single causal system governed by immutable natural laws? Or is there room for the hypothesis of a transcendent being who is (somehow) external to

the order of Nature, and is able to suspend or nullify the operation of natural laws?

Atheists, materialists, monists and pantheists are all united in accepting the first of these alternatives. Theists, however, refer everything to the arbitrary will or choice of a transcendent God.

Christians claim that the person they call Jesus Christ was this God incarnate in human form. Jesus, in his rôle as "the Christ" or "Man-God," promised, according to the New Testament, that "all things" would be possible to those who requested them in his name; extraordinary powers would be granted to those who had faith in him. See John XIV, 12-13, also Mark XVI, 17-18.

G. H. Taylor (*Freethinker*, August 26) relates the sad case of a modern Christian, a Florida preacher, who was rash enough to take Jesus at his word and put to a practical test the promise recorded in the passage from Mark cited above. The vast majority of Christians, however fervently they may *profess* to have faith in courage to carry their belief to its logical conclusion; they demonstrate its futility more clearly and decisively than a whole volume full of abstract Freethought arguments.

S. W. BROOKS.

### FREEDOM OR EQUALITY?

Edwin G. H. Crouch writes in your issue, September 2, that over-population is not the cause of war, and adds that the real problem is left unsolved.

Both the questions in the second paragraph of his letter could be answered specifically and I would like him to name and quote the politicians who "approve of unemployment."

However, the moment he starts the old argument about the privileged and the under-privileged, we know where we are and can read between the lines. It is obvious he is one of those Communists, not necessarily Kremlinist, who cannot stand the thought of anyone having a penny more than he has and all the way through his letter up to the last sentence about the "class structure of our time" one sees the bitter hatred of his class towards the others.

To my mind this is the crux of the matter:—"If citizens are to be made equal they are likely to become less Free; if they are left Free they will soon cease to be equal."

I am not sure who coined this delicious phrase but I prefer Freedom—what does Edwin G. H. Crouch prefer?

C. DRAPER.

### THE FREETHINKER

I want to congratulate you on all the recent issues of *THE FREETHINKER*. One thing I like about it is that you do not believe in beating about the bush but come out quite plainly as a hundred per cent. Atheist. I was also glad to notice that the *Progressive World* has copied a number of articles from your paper.

MENZIE MACTAVISH.

Winnipeg, Manitoba.

[The latest issue of *Progressive World* to hand contains reprints from F. A. Ridley and G. H. Taylor.]

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