

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVI — No. 5

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fourpence

ONE OF THE FIRST things that strikes the critical reader of the New Testament is the profound and irreconcilable difference between the first three gospels, on the one hand, and the gospel of John on the other. In all the three Synoptic gospels Jesus appears, pretty consistently, as a wandering preacher, more or less human, whose miraculous feats are, so to speak, incidental to the preaching which is his fundamental purpose. In John, contrarily, we are not dealing with a man at all, not even with a miracle-working prophet. What we have here is a god, purely, simply and self-consciously so, the Logos or Word of God, walking about in human form. Nor is the difference only a personal one. The Jesus of the Synoptics talks like a man, his actual language being that of the Jewish Rabbis, whereas the Jesus of John talks in a mystical "high-faluting" jargon designed presumably to indicate his supernatural character. As an eminent French Freethinker has very aptly noted, "If Jesus actually spoke as the first three gospels represent him as speaking, he could not possibly have spoken as John makes him speak. It is only necessary to be able to read to see that this must be true". (S. Reinach, *Orpheus*.)

The Logos versus the Virgin Birth

Our canonical gospels, not to mention the apochryphal ones, represent Jesus as appearing in this world in quite different fashions. One may, perhaps, deduce from this that the Jesus of the New Testament is not a single, but a composite figure, drawn from many sources. According to our Mark, the Messiah suddenly appears fully grown "out of the blue". In the "lost gospel" of Marcion Jesus similarly suddenly appears at Capernaum, whereas our Matthew and our Luke give us the Virgin Birth story, clumsily superimposed on genealogies which trace the descent of Jesus from the national hero, King David, through Joseph. John, on the other hand, knows nothing of any Virgin Birth. As Bishop Barnes has frankly admitted, the author of our fourth gospel, goes out of his way to call Jesus "the son of Joseph". According to John, Jesus is a man, born and reared in the usual way into whom the Logos, or Word of God, entered when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. Henceforth, the Man Jesus is, so to speak, sublimated into the godhead. It is the Logos who, hereafter, speaks and acts: a god walking about Palestine in human form, knowing everything and seeing through everybody. The Logos, in fact, announces his arrival in a striking fashion: he refuses to recognise "his", or rather the human Jesus's, mother. No sooner has the god taken possession of Jesus than he makes the startling announcement to Mary, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" We are still a long way from the cult of the "Mother of God".

"Anything you can do, I can do better"

Once the god has arrived, he sets to work methodically to

put the other gods out of business. For the "miracles" described by John are carefully selected, so as to show the essential superiority of the Logos, "the Word made Flesh", as our author describes the new arrival, over all possible rivals. In fact, the effective motto of our gospel is that of the musical comedy song, "Anything you can do, I can do better". This is shown in the kind of miracles perpetrated by "the Word made Flesh". Every year at the temple of Bacchus at Andros near Ephesus (where the gospel may actually have been written), the Greek wine god turned water into wine. No sooner has the Word taken possession of the body of Jesus than he works the same miracle at

Cana in Galilee. The Roman Emperor Vespasian (69-79 A.D.) cured a blind man at Alexandria by rubbing the imperial spittle on his eyes; promptly the Logos reproduces his famous Pagan miracle. The Emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.) made his courtiers address him as "My Lord and my God", an unheard of title in Rome, with its long republican tradition. In John, the sceptical disciple Thomas is similarly made to address the risen Logos as "My Lord and my God". The famous pagan, "Mahatma", Apollonius of Tyana, made a speciality of raising the dead in a spectacular fashion; but the Logos beats all records in post mortem reappearances by raising Lazarus when his body was already "stinking". All the miracles in John are carefully selected to show that anything the old gods could do, the new one could do even better.

The anti-Jewish Gospel

Though perhaps written by a Greek-speaking Jew, our fourth gospel is violently anti-Jewish. It has often been remarked that the worst "anti-semites" are often renegade Jews! The Logos informs the Jews that they are "of their Father the Devil", or as an eminent authority on Gnosticism, Gordon Rylands, has suggested, "Ye are of the father of the Devil", that is of the evil god of the Old Testament, whom the heretic Marcion taught, had actually begotten the Devil. The author of John is obviously a Gnostic, and his gospel is full of the technical phrases used in Gnostic theosophy. Our gospel appeared at a time when the Christian church had made a clean break with Judaism and had become violently hostile to the Jews. In the book itself we have, perhaps, a clue to the approximate date; the Logos declares to the Jews that they will not receive him when he comes in his own name, but that they have already received another self-styled Messiah. As the gospel almost certainly appeared in the second century, it seems probable that this other Messiah could only be the famous Bar-Cochba, who explicitly claimed to be the Messiah and led the great Jewish insurrection against Rome (131-135 A.D.). Bar-Cochba persecuted the Christians as traitors to the "Zionist" cause, and his revolt may be said to have marked the definite break between the Christian church and the Jewish synagogue. If our gospel appeared

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Fourth Gospel

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

about 140 A.D., when Gnosticism was rampant and anti-Jewish feeling was strong in the church, as we know from other sources, this would be an appropriate period in which to publish a Gnostic and anti-Jewish gospel.

The Church admits a Bowdlerised Fourth Gospel

It is well known that our fourth gospel had a hard struggle to get into the official church canon; there were several objections to it. The first reference to it as an authentic gospel is about A.D. 180, in a letter of the Syrian bishop Theophilus of Antioch. Even in the third century there was a school of theology known as the *Alogoi* (without the Logos), who rejected it. In our New Testament Epistles of John, which seem to be written by the same author as the gospel, mention is made of opponents of the gospel. It seems probable that the violent anti-Jewish attitude of the author has been pretty heavily Bowdlerised in our gospel, where, on occasions the Logos is made to speak well of the Jews! Also, as Bishop Barnes admitted, the puerile legend which forms the last chapter in our gospel, was absent from the original. It was put in, presumably, to oblige the powerful Church of Rome, by declaring that Peter, the traditional founder of that church, and not John, who was supposed to have written the gospel, was acknowledged by Christ as the head of the church. With these additions, this gospel, which is in such striking contrast with the other three, was admitted into their incongruous company.

The Gospel of Theology

"John" is the theologian's gospel. A famous modern churchman has defined it as "an inspired meditation on the saving mission of Christ". Our "St John the Divine" ought to read "St. John the Theologian", since John himself did not claim to be god. Apart from Catholic and Protestant "fundamentalists", very few Christian theologians would now try to claim that John gives us the actual sayings of any historical Jesus. Our gospel is actually one of the first treatises on theology produced by the Gnostics, who, as Gordon Rylands has convincingly shown, were the original founders of Christian theology. The church found the Logos a (literal) godsend in its propaganda amongst the educated classes in the Roman Empire, for the Logos was already known to Greek philosophy. At the same time, they accepted the Virgin Birth, which is conspicuously absent in John, where the Logos enters the body of a normally born man, Jesus. None the less, its influence on Christian theology has been immense. Only one other New Testament writing, the Pauline Epistle to the Romans, can compare with John in this respect. In the fourth gospel the divinely designated Christ, who "pitched his tent amongst us", is neither human nor historical. We have here the biography of a god who has descended from heaven to supersede both Jehovah, the Jewish "Father of the Devil", and the miracle-working Greek and Roman gods.

FACTS FOR FREETHINKERS

THE FOLLOWING LIST of bad Popes is by no means exhaustive.

CALIXTUS I (217-222). After a doubtful past he was said to have been guilty of dishonest banking transactions. It was also on record that Calixtus had previously "done time" for fraud in the mines of Sardinia, where only the worst criminals were sent — a Roman Dartmoor.

DAMASCUS I (366-384) was "a passionate man who made his way to the papal chair over corpses". The contemporary Pagan historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, describes his wholesale massacre of his opponents and accuses him of corruption and luxurious living.

BONIFACE VI in the year 896 "caused the body of his predecessor, Pope Formosus, to be exhumed, sentenced by a Synod and thrown naked into the Tiber, after his finger used in blessing had been taken off".

SERGIUS III (904-911) was the lover of Marrozia — the probable original of "Pope Joan", and the debaucheries at the Vatican were a by-word at the time. He is stated by his contemporaries to have had his two predecessors murdered.

JOHN XII (955-963). "He turned the Lateran Palace into a brothel, castrated a cardinal and raped the most handsome women who came to Rome on pilgrimage. He publicly toasted the Devil".

JOHN XIII (965-973) dug up the bodies of his enemies and tore them to pieces with pincers. He had his predecessor dragged naked through the streets on an ass and had his supporters murdered.

BENEDICT VII (974-983) is described by his later successor, the learned Gerbert (Silvester II) as "a man who in criminality surpassed the rest of mankind".

JOHN XXII (1316-1334). "In May, 1316, Pope Alexander died and was succeeded by the man who was suspected of

having poisoned him. To whitewash John XXII would be a thankless task. He had no conscience". At the Council of Constance he was accused of innumerable crimes and finally deposed.

INNOCENT VIII (1484-1492) authorised the torture and burning of witches. He had several illegitimate children according to contemporary Roman doggerel:

"Eight boys, eight girls the Pope in sinful love
Begot; thus Rome 'Father' rightly calls him".

ALEXANDER VI (Rodrigo Borgia), adulterer and poisoner, bought the votes of the cardinals who elected him. The Catholic historian, von Pastor, says of him: "Such were the means by which a man attained to the highest dignity who in the early days of the Church would not have been admitted to the lowest rank of the clergy on account of his immoral life". He had several illegitimate children.

LEO X (1513-1521). Pastor writes: "His pontificate was disastrous to the Papal See", adding that his Sale of Indulgences constituted "an extremely discreditable business".

PAUL III (1534-1549) owed his elevation as cardinal to his sister being the mistress of Alexander VI. He shamelessly promoted his illegitimates and was notoriously debauched.

PIUS V (1565-1572), a canonised saint of the Church, was a monster of cruelty, having been Grand Inquisitor before his election. "His burning hatred of heretics consumed all else in him. As Pope he waged a pitiless war against them wherever his Secular Arm could reach them. The suspicion has even clung to him that he was no stranger to the attempts on Elizabeth's life. Undoubtedly he would have thought it a good work if someone had made away with the heretic".

All the above quotations are taken from Prof. G. Krueger (Protestant), L. von Pastor (Catholic) and Joseph McCann (Atheist) in their histories of the Papacy. F.A.R.

The Scottish Sabbath

By REV. JOHN L. BROOM, M.A.

OF ALL the unwholesome innovations which the Reformation introduced into Scotland, that of Sabbatarianism is probably the most to be deplored. It is true that the founders of Scottish Calvinism were by no means ultra-strict in their observance; John Knox, for example, enjoyed his game of bowls on the Lord's Day as heartily as throughout the week. Their successors, however, became ever more intolerant, until in the nineteenth century it became sinful to venture out for a stroll on Sunday unless one were on the way to and from church, an abomination which still survives in some northern areas of Scotland. And even in the south the continued closure of most places of entertainment every seventh day, coupled with the absurd law by which one cannot consume alcoholic liquor on Sunday, unless one is a so-called traveller, bear witness to the surviving strength of the Calvinist tradition.

There are, however, several welcome indications that our Sabbatarians are on the retreat. The Free Church's recent condemnation of the Duke of Edinburgh's Sunday polo was attacked not only by cheerful pagans, but also by some high dignitaries of the Church of Scotland, notably the Rev. H. C. Whitley of St. Giles and the Rev. R. Selby-Wright, one time 'radio padre'. It would be interesting to know, incidentally, if this means that the church is now prepared to sanction the wholesale liberation of Sunday from restrictions on pleasure-seeking. If it does not, then the church is here guilty of a particularly obnoxious form of class distinction.

The most shattering argument against Sabbatarianism but one which is seldom used by its opponents, probably as a result of sheer ignorance, is that "the Sabbath" is not Sunday at all but Saturday. The day on which Jehovah in the Book of Exodus is said to have rested end enjoined us to keep holy was the seventh day (Saturday) and not the first day (Sunday). The identification of the two is quite unscriptural, and was indeed unknown before the Reformation.

Waiving this decisive point, however, and admitting for the sake of argument, that the Sabbath is Sunday, are we really in this day and age going to base our actions on a code of laws devised for a nomadic people 2,500 years ago? The fact that these laws are credited to the will of the chief tribal god of the Jews is of no more importance to us today than the fact that to the ancient Greeks Zeus had the power of life and death in his thunderbolts. Some of the Ten Commandments, it is true, such as those against stealing and committing adultery, are, like the laws of all semi-civilised people, of obvious social value. But the consecration of Sunday as a day of rest and worship is simply a relic of primitive superstition based on an absurd creation myth. Ignoramuses like Billy Graham, who would have us try to perform the impossible feat of believing the whole of the contradictory hotch-potch which makes up the Bible, forget (if indeed they ever knew it) that the immoral god of the Old Testament also commands us to put witches to death and keep slaves. The advance of enlightened humanism has forced even Christian nations to abandon the last two precepts, though not before thousands of innocent old women had been burned to death and countless numbers kept in life-long subjection to cruel masters in obedience to the injunctions of scripture. It will not be long, we hope, before the antiquated taboos governing Sabbath observance also sink into well-deserved oblivion.

In actual fact the revolt against Sabbatarianism originates from the founder of Christianity himself. Every one of the recorded utterances of Christ on the subject is opposed to the practice. "The Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath" he taught, and as a result was accused by the strict Pharisees of being a Sabbath-breaker. Modern Sabbatarians are the spiritual descendants of these Pharisees of old. There is no doubt that had there been a Lord's Day Observance Society in the 1st century A.D. Palestine, it would have condemned Christ in the same terms as did the fanatical upholders of the law of Moses.

Our Sabbatarians are not even consistent. They object to the reading of Sunday newspapers, but devour avidly those appearing on Mondays. Yet it is the latter they should assail, since they are, of course, the product of labour on the Lord's Day.

Most objections to Sunday entertainments are, as we have seen, based on flimsy religious grounds, but a few unthinking people occasionally advance secular arguments as well to try to bolster up a hopeless case. It is sometimes said, for example, that one day of the week should be "different" in some way from the other six. Why this should be so is hard to determine, since a difference can only be justified if it is of benefit to the population as a whole. But there can be no doubt that the population as a whole is profoundly miserable on Sundays. Finding the cinema and theatre doors closed against them, our young people (and many not so young) parade the streets aimlessly while their elders and betters recline listlessly at home with half a dozen or more sensational tabloids strewn around them. This may be deplored, but it is part of the great problem of training in the use of leisure on any day of the week, and has nothing specifically to do with the question at issue. As it is, those who lack the wit to entertain themselves sensibly would obviously be much better employed gaping at even the worst Hollywood and West End trash than propping up street corners. Anyone is, of course, entitled to make Sunday as "different" for himself as he pleases. But he is not entitled to foist his preference on those who disagree with it.

Routed at every turn, the Sabbatarian suddenly finds himself a Socialist making a last-ditch stand on the welfare of the worker. Why should some labour to provide others with Sunday entertainments is the cry. Those who use this argument often ride to church on a bus without a thought that they are thereby depriving the driver and conductress of their day of rest. It is, of course, hardly worth pointing out that a shift system is operated without complaint on the Continent, and that anyhow on weekdays cinema, theatre and dance hall staffs have still to work while the majority of the population is at rest. Indeed many people actually prefer to enjoy their leisure at a time other than a general holiday.

When all has been said and done, the fundamental issue at stake is one of freedom of action. No anti-Sabbatarian wishes to close the doors of the churches on Sunday or any other day. But they refuse to believe the absurdity that morality is dependent on the hands of the clock so that what is right at a second to midnight is wrong at a second afterwards. Those who have a taste for it can worship to their souls' content. All that is demanded is that an equal tolerance is afforded those who wish to spend their Sundays

[Continued on next page]

This Believing World

A Jesuit priest, Fr. F. Pareja, wants Scottish Christians to go all out to convert the world's 350 million Muslims to Roman Catholicism. This is not altogether surprising for, so far, neither Jesuit nor non-Jesuit Catholics have succeeded in converting English and Scottish non-Catholic Christians to Roman Catholicism in spite of the most intense campaigning, even to the extent of getting many key positions, for example, on our newspapers and in the B.B.C. Even Jesuits have to explain their utter ineffectiveness in this conversion business, so to hide their colossal failure, they want Scots now to try their hand at demolishing Islam. Some job!

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However, according to Fr. Pareja, it should not be too difficult. In the first place, all Muslims reverence Jesus as a Man (with a capital M) and, so he tells us, "our Lady as having conceived her Son by Divine intervention". Moreover, all Muslims believe in the same good old God as Jews and Christians. So it should not be too difficult. In any case, a little more prayer by all Catholics would expedite matters with "the Angelus thrice daily". We used to think that Jesuits had no sense of humour, but this appeal should dispel that illusion. Even Jesuits can be very funny sometimes.

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Some weeks ago Canon E. D. Reeman complained that the Church's failure to reach the people who were starved of religion was because it did not speak their language. Theological students were crammed with too much theology — they were brought up "in an atmosphere of learning". What a pity it is that some of this learning appears to have often disappeared by the time the student gets into the pulpit. And what a pity it is that the worthy Canon himself did not indicate in his speech how, for example, he would approach the unbeliever. How would he propose to bring God back to an Atheist? What would be his language?

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The truth is, and nothing proved it more than the Billy Graham campaign, that to bring people to God and Christianity, no matter what kind of language is used, they must in the first place be thorough believers in religion in general or Christianity in particular. It is astonishing how these two "musts" help in conversion. When Canon Reeman faces an audience of Freethinkers and forces them, through the right language, to accept Christ Jesus as their Saviour — then and then only has he the right to criticise the theological colleges. What earthly use is a parson without some — even a weeny bit — of learning?

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The greatest proof of the way in which true religion transforms man from a beast to an angel is shown particularly in the Holy City of Palestine — in Jerusalem. It used to take brigades of Turkish soldiers to prevent Jew and Christian from flying at each other's throats during the long occupation by Turkey — and now? It takes miles of barbed wire and squads of soldiers to prevent Jews and Arabs from transforming the Sacred streets into a blood-bath. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, glare at each other with hatred, yet they are all bursting with religion; while all believe that their churches, mosques, and synagogues have always been the grand resting-place of God Almighty.

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For Freethinkers, the real joke is that all these churches, mosques, and synagogues, are modern, comparatively speaking, and this means that they are all frauds. This is

certainly the case with churches with such grand sounding names as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Burial Place of Abraham, and similar pious inventions. As almost everywhere, religion — Christianity, Islam, and Judaism — and particularly in the one recognised "Holy" city, has bred little but pure and unadulterated hatred!

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Our sporting readers will, we are sure, be delighted to learn that a unique Marathon took place recently in New Jersey — a number of very religious teenagers galloping through the Bible and reading it at breakneck speed. The winner read it right through in 73 hours 14 minutes, a wonderful feat which deserves a suitable cup from God Almighty. We suggest the one Jesus used at the famous Passover Supper, during which he said the Cup was filled with his Blood.

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No one — except God — knows what became of this Cup which, under the name of the Holy Grail, had some marvellous adventures with King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, and has now completely disappeared. This is a pity, for it would make a handsome religious prize, and could be competed for every year and suitably engraved. In any case we trust the speed at which the Bible can be read in future Marathons will be greatly increased. A record in this direction would surely bring joy to Heaven.

Prayer in the United Nations

REPLYING to the question, "Is it true that prayer is forbidden in the United Nations?" in the Lynn, Massachusetts (U.S.A.) *Daily Evening Item*, the American Representative, Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., said: "No. It is not true. Every session of the General Assembly, in fact, opens and closes with a minute of silent prayer or meditation for the benefit of all delegates, whatever their religion may be". The American Freethought paper *Liberal* justly describes this as a "pretty piece of side-stepping". Certainly organised prayer has no place in the U.N., no preacher being allowed to open or close the sessions. Whether or not the members spend the minute of silence in prayer is impossible to say. It is highly probable — as *Liberal* says — that most of them are thinking of other things.

THE SCOTTISH SABBATH — concluded from page 35

at a cinema, theatre or dance hall. There is no doubt that an overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland is in favour of the Sunday opening of places of entertainment. It is intolerable that in an alleged democracy the will of the many should continue to be flouted in deference to the fanatical narrow-mindedness of the pious few.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 50th ANNUAL DINNER

followed by Social and Dance

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 4s. (in U.S.A., \$3.50); half-year, 12s.; three months, 6s.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S.—Lincolns Inn Fields, Kingsway, W.C.1.: Every Tuesday, 1 p.m. Tower Hill: Every Thursday, 1 p.m. Speakers: J. M. ALEXANDER, W. CARLTON, and others.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Every Friday at 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and H. ARTHUR.

West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR, EBURY and WOOD. THE FREETHINKER on sale at Marble Arch.

INDOOR

Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanic's Institute).—February 5th, 6.45 p.m.: Dr. C. A. SMITH, M.A., "Freethought and Totalitarianism".

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, February 7th, 7.15 p.m.: J. STONEHOUSE, "Development of Human and Material Resources".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, February 5th, 6.30 p.m.: Alderman W. H. SMITH, "Justice".

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (64 George Street).—Saturday, February 4th, 3 p.m.: V. TURNER, PH.D., "Witches at Home and Abroad".

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12 Shaw Street).—Sunday, February 5th, 7 p.m.: A. HENRY, "Freethought and Disease".

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, February 5th, 2.30 p.m.: Professor W. J. H. SPROTT, "A Philosopher visits the New China".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, February 5th, 11 a.m.: DONALD FORD, "The Deprived Child and the Community".

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1.).—Sunday, February 5th, 7.15 p.m.: STUART MORRIS (P.P.U.), "Peacemaking in the Atomic Age".

Notes and News

THERE is just time for a last reminder of the Annual dinner, details of which will be found in the advertisement in this issue. The tickets have sold well, but as there is more accommodation than usual it is probable that late applicants will be successful.

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ONCE again we ask the indulgence of our readers if this copy of THE FREETHINKER appears later than usual. Our printers are doing their best to ensure supplies as early as possible, though working under difficulties.

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £1,059 16s. 1d.; C. Blee, 10s.; Mrs. S. C. Hassell, 5s.; S. Trent, 4s.; A. Hancock, 2s.; Mrs. E. Gubbins, 3s.; D. Davies, 10s.; T. H. Laird (North London), £2 2s.; G. A. Kirk, £1 1s.; L. Pearce, 6s.—Total to date, £1,064 19s. 1d.

Donations should be sent to "The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund" and cheques made out accordingly.

Notice to Readers

WE very much regret that, owing to rising costs of production and distribution, we are compelled to increase the price of THE FREETHINKER from 4d. to 5d., as and from the issue dated March 3rd, 1956. Renewals of subscription after this date will be increased from £1 4s. to £1 8s. for one year (U.S.A., 4 dollars) and *pro rata* for 6 months and 3 months, i.e., 14s. and 7s. respectively.

This step has been taken reluctantly and belatedly, but we feel sure that our readers will appreciate the necessity for it, and we call upon them to buy and/or sell as many copies as usual. It is relevant to add that suggestions towards raising the price have been received from many readers.

Receiving little or no revenue from advertisements, THE FREETHINKER has been a forum for unorthodox opinion since 1881 and it is prized as such, today, in many parts of the world. We know that readers wish us to keep it alive and we are sure that they will consider the extra penny well spent in helping to do so. They will also notice the improved format.

For our part, we shall continue to present new and stimulating matter in keeping with the glorious tradition of Freethought and THE FREETHINKER.

A Note on Thomas Paine

By H. CUTNER

AS MOST FREETHINKERS know, Thomas Paine was black-guarded by the followers of gentle Jesus for over 100 years in the vilest terms; and lots of true Christians would do the same now if they had the chance. No Christian has ever forgiven him for writing *The Age of Reason* in which he conclusively proved that the Bible was not true from its own internal evidence. He used no vague theological language which often can be made to prove everything, or nothing for that matter, but plain vigorous English—so plain indeed that it aroused the wrath of the late Sir Leslie Stephen in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Paine's plain speaking was too much for this very reverent Rationalist, who drew upon the lying, libellous *Life of Paine* by Chetcham to support him. Stephen no more believed in the Bible than did Paine, but one should never use clear unequivocal language to say so was no doubt his critical guide.

It was young John M. Robertson who replied to Stephen in one of the finest controversial pamphlets ever written—

—NEXT WEEK—

THE VATICAN & THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

By F. A. RIDLEY

Thomas Paine, an Investigation — and Stephen was quite right to ignore it. Had he tried to answer it, there would have been little left of his reputation either as an historian or a thinker. But in the end he was compelled feebly to apologise for his attack on Paine after the publication of Moncure Conway's monumental biography of the "Great Commoner". Stephen claimed he had been "misled" by Cheetham. In any case *The Age of Reason* is still read and will continue to be read — while Stephen is, except for students, mostly unread.

But Paine's reputation has, in spite of the Christian lies and libels hurled at him, steadily increased, and his reputation has never stood higher than now. Anyone with a reputation to keep would be very chary these days attacking the man who in politics and religion and in nobleness of character stands as high as Thomas Paine.

Thus it is not surprising that in his essay on Paine (in the volume *From Anne to Victoria* edited by Bonamy Dobree, first published in 1937) Mr. Leonard Woolf says that he "was a very remarkable man and his life is of great significance in the history of mankind and of civilisation". This fine judgment, recognising as it does the universal character of Paine's contribution to the welfare of mankind, is a far cry, a very far cry, from the ignorant and impudent vituperation which the more Christian of our community felt fit to besmirch him with.

Mr. Woolf recognises, in fact, that a book like *The Rights of Man* which Paine wrote in reply to Burke's attack on the French Revolution (before it had degenerated into the Reign of Terror) was a remarkable contribution to world politics, foreshadowing as it does so much of what we call the Welfare State. Paine was no professional politician; he was not, strictly speaking, a professional writer. But his remarkable gift for clear language and thinking made *The Rights of Man* one of the greatest political tracts ever written. No wonder the ruling classes of the time were frightened and, if they had caught its redoubtable author, they would have hanged him.

Paine had of course written a great deal in America before this — his *Common Sense* and *The Crisis* had made him as famous as George Washington himself. In *Common Sense*, says Mr. Woolf, "Paine is a common man talking common sense to common men; he had a genius for doing so and the genius is astonishingly rare. In the eighteenth century no one talked common sense about the subjects which Paine dealt with, politics, society, kings, classes, and religion; indeed very few people do so in the twentieth or have done so in any century". And he adds:

In *The Rights of Man* and in *The Age of Reason* he wrote, as I have said, common sense for common people about government, society and religion. He wrote it in language which ranks only just below that of the greatest prose writers. He asked men to use their reason and to observe the evil results of passion and privilege, of violence and superstition. He preached the doctrine that society should be ordered by liberty, equality, justice, and humanity, and by so doing he was a democrat long before the days of democracy.

Mr. Woolf naturally notes the splendid stand made for a free press by Richard Carlile and the brave men and women who helped him. Their imprisonment never stopped the circulation of Paine's two great books or "his great influence upon the political and social thought of the lower orders". For,

It was pre-eminently from him that the working classes and working class movements first learnt to think, and what they learnt was common sense, toleration, reason, humanity, a hatred of privilege and the abuse of power, a love of liberty in life, speech and thought. It was in fact from Tom Paine that they learnt to lisp the language of democracy.

But all the same, Mr. Woolf appears not to have noticed (as he should have done) the part played by our own Free-

thought Movement in keeping the name and work of Thomas Paine alive — in meeting the abuse and slander of his Christian opponents with the truth against which in the ultimate nothing can prevail.

The infamous libeller, James Cheetham was unhappily quoted by a man of Sir Leslie Stephen's reputation, but we should never forget how that great American Free-thinker, Ingersoll, time after time challenged the enemies of Paine, and made them squirm in their lies and defeat. And here in England, it was Bradlaugh and Foote and Wheeler and John M. Robertson who defiantly met the Christian liars and defamers. In short, it was the Free-thought parties in both England and America that fought for Paine's reputation and won! It is easy to forget even now that it was Joseph Lewis of New York (famous alike as an author and Freethinker) who had a splendid statue of Paine put up in Paris's University City — and if he were sufficiently supported he would have one put up here in London.

Chosen Question

By G. H. TAYLOR

A CRITIC describing himself as a theological student writes:

In your article on telepathy you allow the possibility of an at present undetected receptor, or sense. By Extra Sensory Perception I mean something rather different from "extrasensory". I mean, by "extra", that some possess it and some do not. I do not mean that it is over and above the natural range of human senses. Though not myself having their power, why should I deny that others have actually gained intuition of God by this means? If that is so, then the word "atheist" simply means one who is blind, or rather, has a blind spot. But he should not deny what others can see.—Theolog.

Our reader is thus adducing ESP to back up what some Christian apologists have said for a long time. Defeated on the usual grounds of theistic controversy, they hope to restore the certainty of God's existence by a straight appeal to intuitive contact with the Deity himself, and "there is no arguing with personal experience", as Shaw Desmond has it in his book, *God*.

This position has, of course, been a favourite one with apologists, because, if tenable, it absolves them from having to answer the atheist's arguments. In the face of such private revelation, says one (Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*), "argument is no longer necessary". We are told that the only sure way of knowing God exists is to "sense" his Presence (Horton, *Theism and the Modern Mood*); that intuition is the only certain source of belief (Brown, *Pathways to Certainty*); and that religious experience is "overwhelming data" (Dunning, *God and the Absolute*).

We thus see how the belief in a God is driven back on the supposedly unreachable recesses of the human mind, presumably affording a safe harbour from atheist attack. The hard-pressed advocates for God have hitherto tended to call this special power a rare "mystic faculty". Then came Psychoanalysis with its "Unconscious". Could the special "eye" which sees God be lodged herein? And now comes the new opportunity, ESP. Can the intuition of God, so far from having to rely on a "mystic" power, be regarded as a natural consequence of ESP? In other words, is God now "on tap" for those specially endowed?

To the argument for God on these terms I make the following observations:

(1) The more you prove the existence of a "God", the more you blacken his character. The only excuse for God's behaviour is that offered by the Atheist, that "God" is a

figment of the uninformed imagination. Mystic apprehension of God does not relieve him of the responsibility for the cruelty and wastefulness evident in nature, his supposed handiwork. Intuitive contact with the Supreme Being does not make him any more necessary as First Cause. Knowledge of the Almighty through ESP does not lessen his stupidities as an Evolver, or mitigate his barbarism in the methods employed. A Creator who cannot surmount the stock difficulties is not likely to be rendered more plausible by being intuited by a handful of contacts who first learnt of his existence at mother's knee.

(2) Apparently God succeeds, like Billy Graham, only with believers. Is there any known case of a person experiencing God who did not already know of his supposed existence? Of course not. What they know of God was gained through the usual channels of propaganda, and not through any special sense. The power of suggestion is obviously there to start with, and vitiates the experience as in any way scientifically verifiable. No one ever suddenly sprouted a "sense of God" without having been previously instructed through the normal senses. No test has ever shown what this special power can do unaided.

(3) If direct communion with the Deity is the function of a special extra sense, then those who have it should surely perceive with it permanently, at will. It should not come and go; that is not how senses behave. Those with sight have only to open their eyes to see.

(4) If this special power is in short supply, and God is all-wise, why doesn't he put atheists on the Priority List? Is the Heavenly Ministry of Supply no better organised than the earthly one? In forever endowing those who already believe, the Almighty is simply sending coals to Newcastle. He is providing a unique opportunity for those who least need it.

(5) If God can be directly known and sensed, why cannot these privileged viewers describe him? Or, if they attempt to, why do their descriptions cancel one another out?

(6) The "sense of a Presence" is not peculiar to religion at all, as psychologists have demonstrated amply (see e.g. *God or Man?* by Prof. J. H. Leuba). It has been noted, and even induced, under quite secular conditions, and rationally explained.

(7) As for the "mystics", whatever strength their "faculty" has, it apparently cannot withstand bromide of potassium, which has been known to remove their fancies.

A subsidiary question comes from Mr. R. McKeown, who says:

Somebody in Glasgow posted me a strange pamphlet with a drawing of Chapman Cohen at the front. It took three long pages to describe how ignorant secularists were. It told me what they didn't know, but for the life of me I cannot see why blind men should deny what others can see, or deaf people refuse to believe that others can enjoy the Moonlight Sonata.

Now the above is really an object lesson in the dangers of analogy. The atheist is supposed to have lost his "spiritual sight", a power which he enjoyed when he was a Christian believer. But a man who becomes blind does not deny that there are things to be seen. He does not say that what he once saw was only an illusion. The atheist gives up his belief in God just as he gives up his belief in Santa Claus. Moreover, if he was once a believer himself, he understands the belief in God from the fact of his own personal experience.

There is no analogy between God and the Moonlight Sonata. The latter has physical concomitants, such as a piano, a pianist, material marks which make the music, and so on, all of which can be verified as existing. The fallacy in this analogy is the comparing of the ungiven with the given.

Was Jesus a Homosexual?

By C. G. L. Du CANN

NEW IDEAS are "caviare to the general", as Shakespeare sadly said of an unknown play. (Was it his own or another's, I wonder, but that is a secret now that we shall never know.) What made that play "please not the million" and what made it "caviare" to the vulgar multitude?

Probably its nauseating ingredient was original thought.

Certainly sharp and striking ideas instinctively arouse hatred in conventional minds, which are either violently repelled or roused to hostility by them. The human mind, like a train, runs on a track of rail; like a plodding cart-horse, it follows a rut and reacts in fear from being disturbed in its accustomed groove. Even minds accustomed to, and familiar with, wide travel out of the beaten road, feel a shock, not altogether pleasurable, at an entirely new notion.

So it was with my mind when reading one of those interminable volumes — which force the fatigued reader to believe that life can be everlasting after all, at any rate in French or Russian literature — written by Marcel Proust and translated into English under the title of *Remembrance of Things Past*. It was in one of that series of Proust's masterpieces — it may have been *Swann's Way* or the first volume of *Cities of the Plain* — that I read, with astonishment, that certain Israelites had put forward the theory that Jesus Christ was a homosexual.

So much and no more. A tantalising theory! One felt baffled that Proust merely mentioned it. The mind, frustrated at receiving no more than the bare suggestion, unsupported by evidence or argument, could hardly rest content with that bare affirmation.

Naturally one thought the clue must be in those semi-secret Apocryphal Gospels — which most Christians have never read or even heard of — for they are often sources of Christian legend as distinct from the regarded "verities" of the Four Evangelists. But I can recall nothing amongst the attributions to Jesus of the Apocryphal Gospels that would justify the slightest sodomitical supposition. Then, irritated by failure, my mind turned to the Evangelists, and of course the Gospel of John at once stood out like a candle-flame in darkness.

Of course! The "disciple whom Jesus loved", I remembered. "Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved", and how Simon Peter backoned to that favoured person that he should ask Jesus who his one future betrayer was to be, and how: "He, then, lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him": "Lord, who is it?"

The Johannine story continues that Jesus answered that the betrayer should be the recipient of a dipped sop, which he then gave to Judas Iscariot — a dramatic incident — and "after the sop Satan entered into him" and he went out immediately into the night.

There is also the story of how the unnamed disciple "whom Jesus loved" stood by his cross and was given the care of the Virgin Mary to be his mother henceforward. This beloved disciple "outran" Peter to the sepulchre at the Resurrection. There is another enigmatic saying that the beloved should "tarry" till the Lord came.

It is not the fashion of the modern Christian Church to emphasise favouritism by the Deity — though God knows nothing is more apparent on the face of heredity — for these are "democratic" days when the least is supposedly equal to the greatest, in defiance of realities. Or if favouritism amongst Christ's disciples is to be recognised — as by the undemocratic Roman Catholic Church — the

favourite today is Saint Peter the fisherman with his keys of Heaven and Hell.

Strange indeed that neither Matthew nor Mark nor Luke records the love-scene with the beloved disciple John at the Last Supper! Indeed, Luke records that strife at the Supper arose as to which disciple should be greatest — an incomprehensible story when one of them was so distinctively beloved!

According to the last but one verse of the Fourth Gospel, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was John himself, the recorder of this affection. Yet John receives — except from himself — no recognition from anyone of what, on Christian premises, must be accounted the most stupendous honour. To this day, the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (13th Edition), in relating his biography, omits this most important fact of all about him. It is as if one wrote Christ's life and forgot the Crucifixion, or the life of Judas Iscariot and missed out the Betrayal.

The non-mention of this "beloved" in the first three or four synoptic gospels, on a homosexual theory, might be ascribed to personal jealousy. Certainly such favouritism could hardly go unnoticed, one would think. Is there anything in the fact that the Twelve Apostles were all males to support a homosexual theory? No. For the mental religious climate of the East and the period was anti-feminine, and Jesus had many devoted women amongst his followers, though not in his inmost circle.

Nothing could be more offensive to the average Christian than the ascription of homosexual leanings (or even heterosexual love) to the Saviour of mankind. Love between man and man is believed to be invariably physical, unnatural, and so "the abominable crime", as our English law-books call it. Yet the love of David for Jonathan can hardly not be respected; Damon and Pythias were not brutes or criminals; and as André Gide has shown convincingly in his *Corydon*, men of homosexual temperament may be as controlled, as chaste, or as saintly as you or I. Or they may be depraved as the rest of the world.

One reaches the conclusion that there is not enough evidence in the Gospels to answer the question "Was Jesus a Homosexual?"

But fascinating other questions are raised by the imperfect story of "the disciple whom Jesus loved". Did he return the love of Jesus? To what extent? Was he "that other disciple known to the High Priest"? Was he young? What were the special qualities that attracted the love of Jesus? The aged John at Patmos, fulminating out the apocalyptic Revelations, does not seem to fill the bill.

It is tantalising, indeed, for wistful Christians not to know the answers. As tantalising as not to know the answer to Shakespeare's regretted unsuccessful play — that "excellent play" acted only once but very much more handsome than fine (which can hardly have been the rubbish beginning with "the rugged Pyrrhus"). It must have been good to have moved Shakespeare to mourn for it.

CORRESPONDENCE

GOD VERSUS JOB

F. A. Ridley says, concerning the "Book of Job": "Even in our bowdlerised text God gets the worst of all the argument and appears very much as a figure of fun".

According to the traditional A.V., Job, during God's long speech of self-vindication, interjects: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer; Yea, twice; but I will proceed no further". When God ends his speech Job says:

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; But now mine

eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent. In dust and ashes".

These words surely indicate Job's acknowledgment that *he* is the one who has had the "worst of all the argument"!

The poem as a whole is reminiscent of Greek drama. The arrival of messengers with news of a series of disasters to Job's household recalls a well-known dramatic convention in Greek tragedy; the futile debating and bickering between Job and his friends is used as a mere "build-up" for the "climax" of the story, the abrupt and unexpected intervention of God and his silencing of Job's criticism.

The author's intention is thus seen to be completely orthodox; he has written a pious work of fiction in order to point the moral: "Man proposes, but God disposes".

To say that the author of "Job" intended to portray God as a figure of fun is sheer nonsense; a better case could be made for the view that Shaw's *Saint Joan* portrays Joan of Arc as a figure of fun!

S. W. BROOKS.

A REPLY TO MR. CUTNER

In an article "On Hell and Other Matters", by Mr. H. Cutner, which appeared in the issue for December 22nd, Mr. Cutner's charge against me that I show reverence for the Church and its teachings is just comic. In my *Thou Art Peter* and other books I criticise severely many theological dogmas. Mr. Cutner does not understand impartiality in argument. He explodes with wrath and scorn against those he strongly disagrees with.

It gave me no "awful wrench" to write my article. Whether Jesus was an historical figure or no must be determined by impartial criticism. To make the mythicist solution a test of genuine freethought is absurd.

My provisional opinion about the Shroud of Turin is that it is *probably* the shroud of a man of the time of the early Roman Empire who had been crucified — *possibly* Jesus — but that the figure on it is largely faked as *we have it*. The belief of some competent chemists and physiologists that it is authentic calls for a more searching investigation by a commission of experts.

A. D. HOWELL SMITH.

HOLY MATRIMONY

A London paper (*Telegraph*, December 20th) reports from Vienna that a new law ordains that, in future, Church marriages will not be valid unless the civil ceremony has previously been performed and registered.

Many people may be surprised to hear that our own law is very similar, in that a marriage by an officiating priest would not be legal unless the priest had previously obtained a permit from the Civil Authority to perform marriages.

The priest is, in fact, merely acting for the Marriage Register office as far as our law is concerned. This Christian claim that "marriages are made in Heaven" is just another of those pious untruths on which the whole structure of Christianity is built.

M. C. BROTHERTON.

HOME-MADE EDUCATION?

The suggestion of C. N. Airey and E.S.B. that parents should educate their children at home instead of sending them to school is intriguing, but surely unrealistic. How do parents find time to school their children? Does E.S.B. consider that most parents could teach their children efficiently? Teaching is a skilled task and even in subjects where the parents had special knowledge, they would need to prepare carefully in order to teach efficiently.

Will E.S.B. comment on the fact that she went to university and her father was a school-teacher despite their disapproval of orthodox schooling? And if compulsory schooling leads to orthodoxy of thought, would home-education be any better?

E. CROUCH.

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