

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

I HAVE BEFORE ME a most alarming, yet revealing book: a horror comic of the worst, though not of the usual, kind. Its subject is religion, crude in character, but subtly presented, with frequent use of simple but most effective symbolism. It is, in fact, a child's exercise book, disclosing the modern method of teaching theology in a Roman Catholic school. As might be expected, the whole scheme is very carefully prepared: from this standpoint it can hardly fail to evoke one's admiration. But its insidiousness can only cause grave concern to those who assess the likely effects on the mind of a child of ten or eleven.

The method adopted is pictorial, the child writing down the doctrines and dogmas and illustrating them herself in pencil and crayon, obviously from blackboard drawings by the teacher. Throughout the book of just over 50 pages, God is represented by an equilateral triangle, coloured yellow and emitting rays, with a fluted arc of clouds underneath; and until perhaps half-way, the numerals 1, 2 and 3 appear against the various angles, symbolic of the Trinity. Later, this is taken as learnt and the numerals are dropped.

"In the Beginning"

Alongside the first triangle is the statement, "In the beginning there was nothing, only God"; then two crude little figures enter (the head an oval, body and limbs straight lines) complete with wings, and we read: "Then God made the angels". But "Before the angels could go to Heaven they had to pass a test". One of the angelic figures passes and joins the triangle in "Heaven", the other plunges downwards towards a red and turbulent "Hell". So is given the lie — on the first page — to the oft-repeated Catholic protest that Hell is not taught to children these days. And we shall have occasion to note further references to this terrible teaching.

Crudely, yet carefully-planned, the lesson continues. We have the Creation in all its Biblical literalness: a flat Earth surrounded by water, and Heaven above it. A tree (of knowledge?) several representative mammals, and man and woman, occupy the Earth; there is a fish in the sea, a bird in the air, and two angels (like little gnats) and the trinitarian, triangular God in Heaven. Two further pictures illustrate before and after "sin". In the first a ladder leads up to Heaven: in the second it leads downwards and the man and woman look lost. The next picture, occupying a full page, has a large cross — instead of the ladder — leading to Heaven and the air is filled with, I suppose, the arrows of God — symbols, at any rate, of Christ's divine redemption. The ingenious caption deserves reproduction. It reads: "Only God is great enough to make up for Adam's sin, but as Adam was a man it was only fair that MAN should make up for it. God made this possible by coming down to earth and becoming man as well as God".

(Freethought controversialists will testify to the effectiveness of this kind of teaching. Absurd though it is, once lodged in a Catholic brain it takes a great deal of shifting. The "fair play" angle is worth noting.)

The Eternal Triangle

Henceforward the symbolism increases, with the triangle virtually ever present. We have the manger with the name "Jesus" above and "Man" one side, "God" the other, radiating or reflecting the light from the triangle. We have the temple in which he disputed at the age of 12; we have symbols of his teaching (a book) and his cures (a leg and an eye).

taking him to 30. Then the great cross reappears joining Heaven and Earth: the name "Jesus" upon it and the two slogans "Died on the Cross", "To Save Me from Sin".

The skilful use of current popular themes is shown in the definition of Christ arranged in tabular form. Questions are asked and answered in "quiz" fashion as follows: Jesus Christ is God? — Yes; Angel? — No; Man? — Yes; Animal? — "Not a mere animal"; Vegetable? — No; Mineral? — No. And we proceed by asking how many natures are there in Jesus Christ? The answer, of course, is two — the nature of God and the nature of man. This is emphasised pictorially by the two natures combining to form the figure of Christ.

Enter — The Church

Now the Church comes on the scene, with God shining his light upon it, as he did on the manger, and mother and child walking up the path to the edifice. "We should visit God very often in His Home" is the written accompaniment, for "Everyone who is saved from Adam until now, and from now until the end of the world, is saved through the blood and death of Jesus on the Cross". When Jesus died, the child is told, His soul went to Limbo for three days before being reunited with His body for resurrection. When He had finished teaching, He made St. Peter the leader in His name. "When St. Peter died another man was chosen to rule the Church on earth. This has gone on right to the present day". So is another indelible falsehood first imprinted on the Catholic child's brain!

Hell and the Devil, complete with pitchfork, then contend with Heaven and an angel to decide "particular" and "general" judgments; and there is one alarming picture showing human beings marching along in single file, to be saved — by climbing the rays from the triangle, guided by an angel — or to be thrown headlong into the clearly-marked fires of Hell, where they are tortured by the Devil.

Omission and Commission

We come now to four sins in pictures. Significantly, the first is doubting: a figure walks along with a question-mark over his head. The second is sinning in words, and one girl is shown causing another to cry by calling her

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Horror Comic with a Difference

— By COLIN McCALL —

"Beast" (one of the few pictures in this edifying book that can be endorsed on humane grounds); the third is by deeds, and we see Eve picking the apple despite a (for adults) preposterous notice reading "Do not touch the fruit"; the fourth is "Omissions", where, instead of going to 10 o'clock Mass, a person remains in bed, despite the clock alongside.

"God's life in me — Grace" is shown in relation to the natural world. Land, sea and air are dead things; Plants display life and growth; Animals, "life, growth and five senses"; Man, these plus a soul. In order to work, the narrative goes on, man needs a human nature — "a body and soul". And, accompanied as ever by the cleverly-devised drawing, we have the exposition: "Without a body, man cannot swim; without Grace man cannot do a single thing to get to Heaven", and this grace is called "Sanctifying Grace". There follows a pictorial analogy of an electric light which "makes the room bright" as Grace "makes our souls bright". Then "Grace" is separated into "Sanctifying" and "Actual": the latter temporary; the former — the presence of God, which makes us holy and able to do things "to earn Heaven" — a permanent habit of the soul unless it is lost by mortal sin. Here will be seen, "naked and unashamed", the primitive Christian system of rewards and punishments. This is the current way of presenting it to the young so that it will remain for life. I find it disturbing.

Horrific

Worse is to come. The next few pages are truly horrific. Under the heading "Soul", are shown three types in the form of the same, slightly comic "straight line" human beings with the oval heads. The first is upright and has a halo: it is a soul in a state of grace, "loving God"; the second retains the halo but is bent double: "a soul very weak because of venial (small) sins"; the third is lying flat and has no halo, the description being: "A dead soul because it is in a state of mortal sin". Then comes a repetition of the judgment, with terrible emphasis on doubt. Three human figures approach the parting of the ways: forked roads leading to Heaven and, presumably, Purgatory, respectively, with a headlong fall at right-angles marked "To Hell", where we have the Devil, his pitchfork and the flames. Over the heads of the three figures are question-marks, and one can imagine the agony of doubt that some of the young children might suffer as a result. This is playing upon fear in the most contemptible fashion. But, lest it be insufficient, we are then taken along the edge of a cliff, with an ominous arrow pointing downwards and the same fearful question-mark. This illustrates the "Path of Life Unsafe". Next week I intend to turn the remaining pages of this appalling little book.

(To be concluded)

New Zealand Calling

By ARTHUR O'HALLORAN

AS I WRITE our schools are breaking up for the long summer holidays, the shops are putting up Xmas decorations, the daily papers carry their appeals to make this a safe Xmas on the roads; there are unexpected warnings that we may find ourselves short of electricity; correspondents in one of our leading dailies are trying to settle among themselves who really *are* the heathen "in our midst", and on the eve of Xmas we get another hanging, the fourth in recent months, sanctioned by Ministers of the Crown who do a considerable amount of prattling throughout the year on Christian Ethics — the Christian Way of Life and so forth.

Cable news from overseas has featured Marshal Bulganin and Secretary Khrushchev, who, with shrewd diplomatic timing, speaking from Delhi and Rangoon, have been reminding many millions of Asiatic listeners that their religions and their gods are much more ancient than the Christian religion of western colonialism. Well, well! We rationalists don't hold a brief for any religion. Gods are man-made, we say. Religions (and goodness knows there have been too many of them) have stood in the way of human progress and human happiness whether they are old and started off in India or Japan, or Palestine, or as new ones in California. Eventually *homo sapiens* is likely to disown them all, if he has not meantime destroyed himself with atom and hydrogen bombs.

* * *

During 1955 there were many occasions when the press obliged by passing on to its readers the religious poppycock of politicians, mayors, church leaders, etc. "Christian ethics", "Christian civilisation", "moral order" that stems from Bethany, are evergreen talking points, especially for a school unveiling. At least the Mayor of Auckland thought so when recently at a Roman Catholic function — the opening of a new Catholic College — he delivered himself as follows: "No school could be great if it was not founded

on Christian Faith". The Governor-General, Sir Willoughby Norrie, speaking at a Scout Rally, was not to be outdone. The moral code of Scouting, according to Sir Willoughby, "is based on Christianity". What consternation in the camp if one of these religious protagonists ever becomes a bit rattled in his speech and trots out by mistake, "Slaves, obey your masters". I must quote the leader of the Salvation Army in New Zealand. He was bold, explicit and daring — perhaps we should say reckless. Maybe he believes the mantle of Elijah has fallen on him. Here's his prophecy anyhow — for what it is worth:

"Without the Christian Church this and other nations would destroy themselves within a generation".

* * *

The man who seems to know most about divorce in New Zealand, in a general apart from a purely legal aspect would seem to be Mr. Nixon, a lecturer in philosophy at Auckland University College. Mr. Nixon has for the past two years studied divorce under a Carnegie social science research grant. The result is a thesis which contains much interesting material. It may surprise people in New Zealand and abroad that, for every ten marriages entered into, one ends in divorce, and that this ratio is rising in N.Z. A Welfare State is thus no guarantee that the divorce rate will be low. As the innocent party (the children) are in many cases the greatest sufferers, in the long run, Christian, Freethinkers, and "heathen in general" cannot afford to treat the figures lightly or be over-complacent about some of Mr. Nixon's revelations.

* * *

A Maori witness at a prosecution for alleged Tohungas cult — or in the words of the charge, "practising on the superstition and credulity of the Maori people, by pretending to possess supernatural powers in the treatment of disease" — Solicitor: "Were you not told to have faith in God?" Maori witness: "Well, I gave God two weeks". The magistrate eventually threw out the charge.

Good God!

By F. A. RIDLEY

RECENTLY the present writer, on being abruptly informed of the sudden death in peculiarly tragic circumstances of an old friend, instinctively exclaimed "Good God!" As an ex-theologian (very much *ex!*) I have no belief in any supernatural agency; and if I perhaps show on occasions more respect for the intellectual qualities of some individual theologians, this attitude has been shared by other atheists. The late Mr. Cohen, for example, made no attempt to conceal his admiration for Bishop Berkeley. Nor, obviously, does the exclamation "Good God!" indicate any positive belief in theism, any more than the parallel expression "By Jove!" on the lips of the school-boy indicates a positive belief in the existence of the Latin god Jupiter. However, time was when there were a great many who actually believed in Jupiter, and similarly were, and still are, many who believe not only that a god exists but that he is pre-eminently *good*. What is the object of this strange belief? In the following paragraphs I shall allow the hypothesis of God's existence to pass unchallenged and confine myself to the problem, one that theists nowadays would hold to be of equal importance, of why God must be regarded primarily as an ethical being. That is, why, on the actual evidence supplied to us by the visible universe, should we suppose the Creator to be of necessity a moral being?

It is a truism among critics of historical theism that so far is it from being the case that "God made man in his own image", the opposite is precisely true: man has always made God in his own human image. It is also known to students of comparative religion that just as man, his actual creator, has evolved through a number of evolutionary stages, so has the same process embraced the created gods, the work of men's imaginations. If barbaric man originally created his gods, more civilised men have, to an extent at least, *civilised* them; civilisation has had its *celestial* repercussions. It is a far cry from the bloodthirsty Jehovah of the early O.T. narratives to the evolved deity of modern Liberal Christianity. Between the sanguinary god of the Mexicans, in whose honour and for whose cannibal enjoyment hetacombs of victims were sacrificed, and the philosophical Absolute or Supreme Being of Bishop Butler or Dean Mansel, are the intermediate stages. Any detailed history of the evolution of theism would have to include the above and all intervening stages. One may say that man has civilised God by attaching to him an ethical content. God is a product of human imagination confronted with an external universe which it could not comprehend. But the "good" god is a hybrid, the offspring of imagination tempered by the slow evolution of civilisation. Theology, or at least, the more ambitious systems of theology, claim to *prove* the existence of God by *natural* reason, or what is technically called Natural Theology. The original founder of Christian theology, the unknown author of *The Epistle to the Romans*, laid down the fundamental axiom of Christian apologetics, "for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead".

Developing this theological acorn into a mighty oak of logical metaphysic, the greater Christian and Muslim theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas and Al Ghazzali, produced elaborate series of "proofs" of the existence of God which develop unintelligibility to the point of impressive-

ness. However, the "proofs" of these medieval theologians, ingenious as they often are, are practically valueless to their modern successors, since they were based on the Lilliputian universe of medieval astronomy and not on the actual facts of the modern universe. It would certainly tax even the subtle intellect of a medieval doctor to prove the *benevolence* of any possible creator from the universe as disclosed by *contemporary* science.

A modern apologist for an attenuated form of theism, a man of great intellect and mental honesty, totally free from ecclesiastical prejudice, has made within the last century a half-hearted attempt to reconstruct Natural Theology on the basis of the actual universe. In his literary swan song, his *Essay on Theism*, John Stuart Mill, one of the intellectual glories of the Victorian era, said everything which he thought could honestly be said in favour of the existence of God in the era of Darwin and Spencer, his illustrious contemporaries. In 1873, shortly before his death, Mill wrote:

These, then, are the net results of Natural Theology on the Divine attributes: a Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture, of great and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps also more narrowly limited than his power; who desires, and pays some regard to, the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives for his action which he cares more for and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone. Such is the deity whom Natural Religion points to, and any idea of God more captivating than this comes only from human wishes, or from the teaching of either real or imaginary Revelation.

Thomas Paine also believed solely in the deity postulated by Natural Theology, but his God seems to have been rather more robust than Mill's bowdlerised edition. Alexander Pope once described one of his contemporaries as "damned with faint praise". In relation to his truncated divinity, Mill also seems to have employed the same technique and to have damned his God pretty effectively with "faint praise".

The actual truth about the universe, as disclosed by modern knowledge appears to be that it is like the Shakespearean Caliban, absolutely *amoral*, which appears to be, *pace* Mill, the predominant characteristic of any hypothetical creator. The primary characteristics of the universe as we have come to know it *since* man made God, are space, emptiness and silence; these, presumably, would be the primary attributes of its alleged creator. Of the worlds scattered sparsely throughout space, the vast majority appear to be uninhabitable by any form of conscious life, certainly so by human standards. Even in the few that are, of which our own planet is exceptionally endowed for sustaining life, large parts are uninhabitable, and the "struggle for existence" appears to be the all but universal rule. Even confining ourselves to *human* life, it is difficult to trace much sign of beneficence. Gibbon's famous description of human history as "a register of the crimes, the follies and the misfortunes of mankind" is no doubt somewhat one-sided, as is the even more trenchant summary of a German pessimist, "History is the conjugation of the verb 'to eat'". None the less, human history is a pretty melancholy affair, and any progress is due more to "mutual aid" rather than to divine! "From the things that

(Concluded on page 85)

This Believing World

The BBC is, we understand, greatly disturbed at the falling-off of hearers — and one reason given is that the public is getting more than tired at some of the “uplift” programmes devised for its spiritual salvation. One of these programmes is “The Bible in Modern Life”, and a recent speaker, the Rev. J. Huxtable, gave us a specimen of Fundamentalism surpassing anything even Billy Graham could devise. He did not say, as it happened, much about the Bible in modern life, but told us all about God, and what God said, and thought, and did. It was a wonderful example of a mid-Victorian preacher at his worst, and had as much to do with modern life as an African taboo.

★

As for the Third Programme, we all know that it is specially designed for the more “advanced” hearers — so we had a talk the other evening about a new translation of the New Testament made by a Jewish convert, which the speaker, Prof. T. W. Manson, said, proved beyond doubt that Jesus was a Jew — very good news indeed for our “intellectuals”. Needless to add, of course, that everything in the Gospels took place exactly as described — *in Greek*. In English, the translation, according to Mr. Schonfield, is not always quite right. Still, a falling-off of listeners is far better than ceasing such wonderful “uplift” programmes.

★

The death of the Rev. R. J. Campbell, the other week — almost unhonoured and unsung — recalled his once famous “New Theology” which, over fifty years ago, caused such a hullabaloo in the Christian Churches. Fired with religious enthusiasm, Mr. Campbell tried to square Christianity with common-sense, and brought on his devoted head the curses of the Faithful. He gave up the Inspiration of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, Divinity, and Resurrection of Jesus, a Flaming Hell packed with Devils, and so on — in short, he did his best to civilise Christianity. A little more positive thinking, and he would have been in the Freethought camp.

★

But he was quite unable to do that extra thinking; and leaving the City Temple, where he drew large congregations, became “converted” and went over to the Church of England. His “New Theology” had actually little new in it, for most of its tenets had been admitted into other sects of the Christian Faith and sometimes formed part of a very religious Rationalism. But it was all taken seriously by Christian writers, and the trouble suddenly ceased when Campbell surrendered the fort. We think we are right in saying that so little was left of Campbell’s reputation that the BBC hardly, if at all, referred to him when he died.

★

As every true Christian will tell you, the best-attested event in history is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is not the slightest doubt that it happened exactly as the four contradictory accounts in the Gospels describe it. But our Spiritualists have a case which is even better attested. It is that the spook of Lt. Irwin came to Mrs. Garrett, the medium, when his airship, the R.101, was destroyed. *Psychic News* says so. In these columns some years ago, was proved that the description of the seance was one of the biggest frauds in the history of Spiritualism — even Harry Price, who commissioned Mrs. Garrett, was obliged to admit that. But will this stop Spiritualists and *Psychic News* from quoting it as an absolute proof for the case of

returning spooks? No more than the religion-besotted Christian, who believes in such a fraud as the Resurrection, would ever give up true Christianity.

★

Missionaries in England for Islam — and they certainly succeed in making converts — never like to discuss the question of slavery. There have been no more ferocious slave drivers than Muslim Arabs, and even now, in 1956, in Saudi Arabia, young girls and fit men fetch very high prices. Raiding parties of religious Muslims carry away all the poor girls they can get, butchering any defenders, and every year swells the number of slaves in Saudi Arabia to more than half a million. Whatever may be said against modern Christianity, it has at least abolished slavery and the horrors it entails. And Muslims want to convert Christians!

★

In its very sympathetic “Profile” of the Pope, the *Observer* points out that he is “unique” among modern Popes in “having seen a Vision of Christ”. He has, of course, had a number of “visions” of the Virgin, like so many other Popes, but only Gregory the Great in 1056 ever had a personal Visit from Jesus before; so Pius XII has been specially blessed in this way. Naturally, not a hint is given by the *Observer* that both Popes have seen the Vision — much in the same way as drunks see pink elephants — anything might be seen when one is ill. But the *Observer*’s implication is that the Vision was a true one — that it really was Jesus who came to see the Pope. Can anyone wonder why so many religions are perpetuated? Why so many people believe in Devils, Hell, Heaven, and Angels?

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

PRESS STATEMENT ON BLOOD SPORTS

At the instigation of Mr. W. Morris of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the League Against Cruel Sports has asked the N.S.S. to comment on the published replies of the Archbishop of Canterbury to questions about hunting. The Executive Committee has accordingly issued the following statement to the Press. A copy has also been sent to Dr. Fisher.

When recently asked by the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sport to state the Church of England’s attitude to hunting, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, declined to issue any official statement. No resolution has ever been passed concerning the ethics of hunting, he said, and clergy and laity “are free to form their own Christian judgment”.

Unlike the Church of England, the National Secular Society made up its mind on this subject long ago and has continuously campaigned for the legal prohibition of blood sports.

The fact of evolution (nowadays, we believe, accepted by the majority of Church leaders) puts the whole problem of blood sports in a quite different context from that of pre-evolutionary thought. Man’s recognition of his organic relationship with other animals enables him to appreciate the sufferings which they undergo.

Now that public conscience has repudiated capital punishment as an outworn relic of barbarism, we suggest that the time has come for an extension of elementary humanity to defenceless animal species.

Signed on behalf of the Executive Committee
of the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY,

F. A. RIDLEY (*President*). COLIN MCCALL (*Secretary*).
February 23rd, 1956.

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.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 1 p.m.: Speakers—J. M. ALEXANDER 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 A. 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. (Mechanics Institute).—March 18th, 6.45 p.m.: J. M. THORNTON, "Common Ground".

Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 20th, 7.15 p.m.: Miss K. KNOTT, "Contemporary Christian Writers—a Critical Review".

Glasgow Branch N.S.S. (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, March 18th, 7 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Freethought and its Enemies".

Glasgow Rationalist Press Association (Central Halls, 25 Bath Street).—Sunday, March 18th, 3 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Irrational Intellectuals".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 18th, 6.30 p.m.: L. EBURY, "Religion, Science and Progress".

Manchester Humanist Fellowship (64 George Street).—Saturday, March 17th, 3 p.m.: A Lecture.

Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, March 18th, 2.30 p.m.: A. DANIELIAN, "Why I am a Christian".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 18th, 11 a.m.: A. ROBERTSON, M.A., "Remission of Sins or Writing of Wrongs?".

West Ham Branch N.S.S. (Community Centre, Wanstead).—Thursday, March 22nd, 7.45 p.m.: COLIN MCCALL, "Irrational Intellectuals".

West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 18th, 7.15 p.m.: G. PODMORE, "Colonialism".

GOOD GOD!—concluded from page 83

are seen" one does not deduce, in the mid-twentieth century, the existence, or still less the beneficence, of a Creator.

As the old French writer Montaigne pointed out, and as the current Existentialists have more recently affirmed, "the world is neither good nor evil: it is the *place* of good and evil". For the universe as a whole morality is incidental—one might almost say *accidental*. The universe as such is, in Nietzsche's famous phrase, "beyond good and evil". It is *amoral*, and so, almost by definition, would be its hypothetical creator. A "good God" simply makes bad sense!

The Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund

Closing Date

IT HAS BEEN decided to close the Chapman Cohen Memorial Fund on March 31st. Perhaps those readers who wish to make further subscriptions will please make a note of this "deadline" date. There will no doubt also be some who would wish their names to be included in this roll of honour, a tribute to the memory of one of the greatest champions Freethought ever had.

So far as THE FREETHINKER itself is concerned, no further appeal will be made, for the time being. No money will be asked for—and none will be refused! Some may care to continue their donations to THE FREETHINKER Fund, which was suspended in 1954. If THE FREETHINKER is to continue, the situation still permits no complacency or relaxation of effort. And financial assistance is far from being the only method of help. Here are others:

(1) See what can be done through your local N.S.S. Branch by way of appointing vendors during the summer months, and not merely on those sites where actual meetings are in progress. The recent appointment of a Trade Union sub-committee by the National Executive will, we are hoping, open up other possibilities of extending the circulation of the paper.

(2) Try to persuade your Public Library to display THE FREETHINKER, and get the request renewed periodically.

(3) Mention THE FREETHINKER, or quote from it, in any local press correspondence in which you are engaged.

(4) Take an extra copy for leaving in a propitious place.

(5) Get your newsagent to take half a dozen copies and to display one, guaranteeing to buy any remainders.

We do not pretend that the above list exhausts all possible methods of help, and we shall welcome new and practicable suggestions.

Once again, sincere thanks to all who have supported the Fund.

Notes and News

WE notice (not for the first time) that Dr. Billy Graham has got his values all mixed up. Immodesty in dress, he told an audience in Toronto, is as "bad as murder". "Many of you women", he continued, "have dressed in such a way as to bring impure thoughts to the minds of men. May God have mercy on your souls!" The American Freethought magazine, *Progressive World* (February) asks most pertinently, "Just how do you know, Billy?" And it advises him to look the other way in future.

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WE have received many compliments on the improved paper, format, and printing of THE FREETHINKER in recent weeks. By no means the least prized are those from our more elderly readers, who testify that it is now much clearer and easier to read. This is an appropriate occasion to thank our new printers for the help they have given us and for the admirable way they have produced the paper in extremely difficult circumstances.

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

THE FREETHINKER, 1955

Volume 75

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The Voice of Prophecy

By H. CUTNER

FROM TIME TO TIME we get requests to deal with the "remarkable" prophecies which fill the Bible. Whether the enquirers are writing from the Christian standpoint is often difficult to tell, but I suspect most of the writers are Christians who are quite sure that there is no other explanation but that the Precious Word is Inspired, that it comes direct from God Almighty, and that we Freethinkers are therefore bound to be silenced for evermore.

As an example, there is "The Voice of Prophecy Bible School" in Watford which sends out literature in which is insisted that every word in the Bible is Divine, and that Prophecy has proved that claim to the hilt.

In this literature, you get the good old words so beloved by mid-Victorian Protestants — Salvation, Righteousness, Justification, Sanctification, Forgiveness, Sin, and so on. It is a conglomeration of incredible stupidity. As some kind Christian passionately anxious to save my immortal soul managed to have a "course" of lessons sent me, I took the trouble to look up some of the "prophecies" in the Bible, and put forward a few relevant questions for the Bible School to answer. Needless to add, no reply to my letters was forthcoming; instead, I was asked why had I not answered the questions dealt with in the course which all "students" are supposed to answer? Questions like these — "What great future event will seal our destiny for eternity? What is our condition without Christ? What three-fold experience is necessary for our salvation?" — and similar imbecilities. The Voice of Prophecy Bible School was utterly unable to justify when challenged by me a single "prophecy" in the Bible.

For my own part, I have never been able to understand why prophecy in the Scriptures should have disturbed anyone. For a prophecy to be valid at all, it must be shown that it was written *before* the event, and that the prophecy is clear and unmistakable. There was a "seer" in the sixteenth century called Nostradamus who published hundreds of quatrains in very obscure language. It is quite possible to extract from some of them some description of later events; but during the eighteenth century Nostradamus and his prophecies were almost laughed out of court. In any case, he never claimed that it was God Almighty who helped him to write down his verses.

The prophecies of Jesus claimed by nearly all Christians to be found in the Old Testament have no more to do with "our Lord" than with green cheese. It is astounding to find intelligent people pointing to this kind of thing to prove that Jesus was the Messiah expected by the Jews.

For if there is one thing certain, it is that the Gospel writers had before them not only a number of accounts of Pagan deities, Pagan stories, Pagan ritual, to say nothing of all kinds of what are now called Jewish Apocrypha and Apocalypses, but they had also the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint. They did not trouble with the "original" Hebrew because, for one thing, it is doubtful whether they could have read a line of it, and for another, copies must have been very scarce. It is quite a mistake to look upon the Gospel writers as ignorant fishermen. All the Gospels, the Apocryphal ones as well as the (so-called) Canonical ones, were the product of highly trained writers possibly from the best Alexandrian schools. They were not writing a "biography" of someone called Jesus of Nazareth, who used to go about "doing good". They were writing the story of a God who came down from

Heaven and, as they had to influence Pagans as well as Jews, they "pinched" the story of the Virgin Birth from similar stories in Paganism; and anything that could apply to the ideal figure they were inventing, found in the Septuagint was immediately written up as an Old Testament prophecy. All the N.T. Gospels were written and finally edited in the second century, certainly *after* the year 150 A.D.; and the Septuagint had been in use even among the Jews for at least from 150 B.C. Later, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the remnant of Jews began to throw overboard their Greek Bible and, perhaps under the influence of the famous Rabbi Akiba, who was slaughtered in the Bar Cochba rebellion in 130 A.D., practically standardised their Bible in Hebrew, the language used in all orthodox synagogues ever since.

But the point to note is that it was not Jesus who fulfilled the "prophecies" in the Old Testament, but the Gospel writers who *stole* certain events and descriptions from the Greek Septuagint, and wove them into the story of Jesus which they were inventing.

In the nineteenth chapter of John will be found typical examples of the way that writer — whoever he was — deliberately "pinched" many things from the Old Testament and had the impudence to call them "prophecies". And to show how this kind of thing was too much even for the *modern* Roman Church, we can take the most famous "prophecy" of all, that in Isaiah relating to the virgin who was going to have a baby and call him Emmanuel. Although Jesus was never called Emmanuel. Matthew had no scruple whatever in using it for his Gospel; and for 1900 years it has been used by Christians to overwhelm the Jews, often with ferocious pogroms for daring in the face of such a marvellous prophecy, to refuse to accept the Virgin Birth and Jesus as their Messiah. And what does the *Catholic Encyclopedia* say about it? Merely that "modern theology does not grant that Isaiah 7, 1-4 contains a real prophecy fulfilled in the Virgin Birth of Christ". It maintains that Matthew "misunderstood the passage". Misunderstood indeed! The heavenly Apostle — or whoever wrote Matthew — *stole* it. He saw the word "virgin" in the Septuagint and that was good enough for the credulous followers of the new Messiah. He never troubled to find out that the Greek translator of Isaiah had used the wrong translation which in Hebrew was merely "young woman". But the *Catholic Encyclopedia* has at long last to admit that the "inspired" Apostle had made a mistake.

There are no prophecies of Jesus in the Old Testament. And those in it which have nothing to do with Jesus but with the fate of a tribe or a nation or a town — they were written long after the event prophesied. There was a time when "prophecy" was a Godsend to Christians on the conversion rampage. Nowadays, our bishops and other intellectuals in the Churches prefer, if possible, to leave it severely alone. They concentrate on Jesus as a sort of super Sunday-school teacher who went about "doing good". Perhaps one day even that will go the way of prophecy.

—NEXT WEEK—

OUR BRITISH ISRAELITES

by H. CUTNER

The Margaret Knight-Ashley Sampson Letters

IV

KENSINGTON, S.W.7.

November 30, 1946.

DEAR MARGARET,

Yes, I am quite familiar with the "Reason v. Rationalisation" argument, and have often used it; but I can't for the life of me see that it means more than that the motive behind the reasons differs in each case. The reasoning is either good or bad in one or both cases regardless of motive, and the issue of the argument must stand or fall by *that*, not by the motives which prompt the arguers. If the "rationaliser" tries to make facts fit his argument, then he's reasoning badly and should be told so; but not without instances of his perversion of the facts. You accuse me of rationalising, which is true if you mean "defending" a position not founded primarily upon reason; but, if I have perverted the facts, you should be able to show me what facts; and how I have perverted them. This you've not done.

Then you pass on to say, "You again accuse me of thinking that reason is the only thing that matters". Yes — I did and I do! You are quite satisfied with an explanation whenever it suits the reason regardless of the emotions, and utterly contemptuous of a belief that suits the emotions (which Christianity certainly does not, except on a sublimated plane — but more of this anon) without reference to the intellect. I have always maintained that the true religion must satisfy the intellect and take account also of the moral will and of the emotions — since the God of Truth is also the God of Goodness and of Beauty.

Your next sentence causes my hair to rise on end. For you say to me, "You insist that $2 \times 2 = 5$. I insist that it doesn't, and you indignantly say that I seem to think mathematics is all that matters". This, my dear Margaret, is sheer bosh — I am sorry; but it really is! For, apart from the calm assumption you make that your argument is the obviously right one when the issue is *sub judice*, I have never made a statement in the least like this, and I challenge you to give one instance of my having done so in all our correspondence. Mathematics is, of course, not in the least like theology. It is an enclosed system of self-evident facts from which reason makes deductions and is a ground from which to draw upon. I am really astonished that you, as a philosopher, should imagine that a comparison of this kind can be made between mathematics and theology. In fact, how can you possibly deny that theology *is* the concern of other faculties than the intellect (though the intellect is an important factor in it) when you have just elaborated your views to the contrary? I have never known you flounder like this before — a false analogy can certainly land people in strange places. I have never budged one inch from the conviction that a sound theology must satisfy the reason, but I must insist with equal conviction that it must take account of the emotion — with which you profess to agree, although I notice that it always proves an embarrassment to you if put to the test, as in the present instance.

Your next paragraph deals with Christianity "working". Here you truly say that all but one instance I offer relate to ethics, and then go on to say that you think the Christian ethical system "works" quite magnificently, but has nothing to do with Christian doctrine. For the moment I'll accept this idea, just to see where it leads us. For I suppose you realise that this "excellent" (your own word) ethical system was the invention of a criminal lunatic — a lunatic because He professed to be God and died for that one conviction, and criminal because He demanded that all his

disciples should teach this and be ready to die for it, too. (This, you remember, is what finally staggered Joad and made him decide that he might have ranged himself on the wrong side in his early attack on Christianity.) It must be an embarrassing position for you that such a magnificent ethical system was invented by a criminal who was also insane; but I have something more positive to say about your position here. For if the Christian ethic is the true one, i.e., victory by turning the other cheek, being enriched by giving, winning your enemies by loving them, inheriting the earth by meekness, defeating your persecutors by praying for them, etc., etc., then obviously there are spiritual laws at work in contradiction to the laws of nature *which are stronger than them*. From where can they originate except in a plane that is higher than the natural plane? It is going to lift our argument at least one stage higher — on the Christian side. So, if you are willing to do that, we can carry the argument into a higher field; but, if not, you had better withdraw your acceptance of the Christian ethic without the Christian dogma from which the ethic got its inspiration and by which it ultimately stands or falls; but it might be a waste of time to go into all that before you have decided where you really stand on this issue.

We then come to "prayer". I am afraid that here you parody me again. For you say "prayer is bound to work by your criterion. For if you get what you pray for you conclude that your prayer has been granted, and if you don't, you consider that (a) you didn't pray hard enough, or (b) you are better without it". This looks as though you suppose the Christian thinks of prayer as a matter of words, which was quite clearly repudiated by Christ to the Pharisees — though words sometimes, perhaps generally, play a part in it. Christian theologians have always insisted that prayer is fifty per cent. a matter of disposition, and also largely an act of the will which is determined to co-operate with God in the answering of it. You quote this year's harvest. Thank you for playing into my hands! For it is almost certain (judging from their own views on the subject in general) that the majority would have used a good harvest to glut the markets in our own favour and have left the Germans to starve. This may be why God said "No".

A more obvious case is that of the famous Day of Prayer in the spring of 1940, which was immediately followed by the fall of Belgium, Holland, France; and the enemy on our own doorstep. A prophet might have foreseen it. For it was that total collapse of Western Europe which caused Hitler to lose his head and think he could attack Russia with success — we have his own word for that; and this, as we know, brought about his own downfall.

I could give you countless instances of this kind of answer to prayer; and it is self-evidently ridiculous to suppose that God automatically answers our prayers with a "Yes". For that would mean that we ruled Him instead of His ruling us.

Then there is one more thing I must say about this "emotional" business of being a Christian because "it satisfies my emotions". What emotions? For I can't see how the Sermon on the Mount can be said to satisfy what are obviously the strongest emotions — fear, pugnacity, acquisition and sex. Some of your Freudians, as well as many great philosophers, have regarded it as a complete violation of human nature. Do you perhaps mean that I have projected an Oedipus or Electra complex on to an

imaginary Deity? Perhaps so, but, if so, I should want to know (a) why these human rather than animal emotions, that in me at least are weaker than those of the flesh, should possess so much more power (for Christianity demands continence) and (b) why we should rationalise a Faith that demands the renouncement of all the most pressing and immediate appetites for the sake of a future and quite uncertain happiness, instead of "rationalising" a non-faith that would permit these gratifications and allow us to be vengeful, ambitious and greedy into the bargain? I do want an answer to this. I have been looking for it all my life, but nobody seems able to provide it.—Yours ever,

ASHLEY.

(To be continued)

Animals and The Church

By G. H. TAYLOR

READERS will have noted the Press statement on blood "sports" issued by the N.S.S. in response to the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sport, and will no doubt also have read Mr. Ridley's article on "The Ethics of Hunting", which shows how the Archbishop of Canterbury is placed in an embarrassing position by the Society's request for a clear-cut condemnation of blood sports by the Anglican Church.

The history of the leading Christian Churches in relation to animal suffering is manifestly a history of ignorance and cruelty. And if it is claimed that the cruelty of the ecclesiastical courts was in fact no greater than that of the secular courts, then what becomes of the claim that religion elevates mankind?

While the secular courts in Europe generally dealt with domestic animals, the creatures prosecuted in the ecclesiastical courts throughout the centuries included a wide variety of wild animals, such as rats, mice, grasshoppers, weevils, mosquitoes, snakes, and many others. But even in the secular courts the influence of the Church—on the side of cruelty—was often in evidence. In 1474, at Basle, for instance, a cock was arraigned, tried and convicted of the heinous offence of laying an egg, and sentenced to be burned at the stake. On a height near the city, with the attendance of a priest and a solemnity equal to that attaching to the burning of a human heretic, the unfortunate hermaphrodite was put to the flames together with its diabolical product.

This and many other animal trials were governed by the Biblical notion of demoniacal possession. It is not surprising, in virtue of the story of Christ sending "evil spirits" into Gadarene swine, that pigs were the greatest sufferers. Animals (including birds) of a black colour were thought to be particularly favoured as a lodgment by evil spirits.

Trials, convictions and sentences were elaborately devised. One sentence on a pig which in 1494 was prosecuted by the monks for committing a murder on land belonging to the Church, reads:

We, in detestation and horror of the said crime, and to the end that an example may be made and justice maintained, have said, adjudged, sentenced, announced and appointed that the said porker, now detained as a prisoner and confined in the said abbey, shall be hanged and strangled.

Were it not for the attendant cruelties, the procedures in the ecclesiastical courts would be highly diverting. Animals were often anathematised and sometimes excommunicated; the latter, one supposes, in virtue of their being possessed with an alien spirit. In 1338 a swarm of insects did some damage to crops in the Tyrol; they were condemned in the ecclesiastical court and a parish priest solemnly excommu-

nicated them by "inch of candle". The impudent insects, however, resisted the power of the Church, it being pointed out that this was due to the inhabitants not having paid their tithes. However, when there was nothing left for the insects to eat, the anathema finally took effect and they departed.

Not a single divine injunction to kindness towards man's fellow-creatures is to be found in the Bible from cover to cover. The late H. S. Salt commented as follows:

On love of animals intent,
With sympathy divine,
Fierce devils from the tombs were sent
Into a herd of swine.
And still our gossellers relate
How good a deed the Lord did;
But what the pigs thought of their fate
Goes unrecorded.

(Matthew viii, 32. Mark v, 12, 13.)

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM

Mr. Cutner's article of January 13th last on the absurdity and waste of money in trying to convert Jews to Christianity reminds me that in South Africa the largest Christian denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church, also has a small band of workers trying to convert not only Jews but also Muslims to Christianity. They have a small measure of success, but this is offset by more ex-Christians turning Muslim. There are virtually no white, or European, Muslims amongst us. Why, then, should these coloured Christians want to become Muslims? Islam is far more difficult to practise, and involves far more sacrifices than Christianity.

The only good reason I can think of is that many young Muslim women are most attractive, but will not marry out of their religion. The would-be spouses, like Henri IV of France, no doubt think "Paris well worth a mass", and make the sacrifice of becoming followers of the prophet, with all it entails.

But why not atheism?—apart from the marriage consideration. As was quoted in THE FREETHINKER of January 13th: "It is no use expecting people below a certain level of education to arrive at a scientific and rational outlook".

So one superstition is merely exchanged for another.

LEONARD MARTIN (S. Africa)

[Apropos of the strictness of ritual referred to by our correspondent, the *Aden Chronicle* for February 16th reports an astoundingly cruel case of punishment. The victim, a journalist, was last year convicted on a charge of breakfasting in the holy month of Ramadhan and also of carrying alcoholic liquor, and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, eighty lashes and deportation on completing the sentence. He is now suffering from T.B. and the *Chronicle* appeals to the Sultan for leniency.—Ed.]

RATIONALISTS

Mr. J. Dowding (9/3/56) says that "internal squabbles" are "detrimental to the organisation(s)" of Freethought; and he suggests that Mr. Cutner and THE FREETHINKER "will do more good attacking our enemies than our allies". I agree. Unfortunately, though, it is often hard to tell one from the other. Consider the following: "I am a man in search of a religious faith"; "Oh, yes, I think there is no doubt" (that Jesus existed); "No! No! that is exploded" (the mythic theory); "There was a theory 30 years ago which a few Germans advanced"; "I really believe that a great deal of what we have in the Gospels about Jesus, his life, his miracles, and perhaps his appearances after death: a great deal of that is good history"; "I don't feel competent to talk about the Ascension because I am not a theologian"; "But I do fundamentally have this belief that there is a sense in which all men and women are incarnations of God; however imperfect and frustrated, that is what they are trying to do, that somehow the divine is constantly all the time being realised in and through true human souls... I will accept that Jesus was a most potent instrument of that realisation". To whom would Mr. Dowding attribute those remarks—enemy or ally? In fact, they were spoken by Mr. Dennis Routh in his radio debate with two Christians. Mr. Routh was ostensibly supporting Mr. Hector Hawton. Mr. Hawton must surely have been tempted to exclaim: "Protect me from my friend(s)!"

COLIN McCALL

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