

The Freethinker

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IN THE medieval "age of faith" theology was universally regarded as the "queen of the sciences", or "the Heavenly Science". Nowadays an increasingly large number of people regard the former "queen" as a pseudo-science without objective validity, in broadly a similar category as, say, astrology or alchemy. In the case of theology, as perhaps of its step-sister astrology, it is indisputable that great intellectuals have accepted it in the past, nor are the mental attainments of some even of its present defenders unworthy of respect. Unlike astrology and alchemy, theology is still widely regarded as a legitimate science. What are we to make of this claim?

Christianity and Theology

The earliest Christians were not theologians; they had in any case no distinctive theology of their own. As is obvious from the N.T., the founders of Christianity were Jews, orthodox or otherwise. Moreover, it seems likely that Christianity started as a revivalist sect believing the end of the world to be a matter of months rather than years. We have often thought that Jesus and his Apostles, as depicted in the Gospels, would have been much more at home with Jehovah's Witnesses than with the more sophisticated churches of today. Their mental outlook was primitive in the extreme; it appears quite certain that the Gospel Jesus could never have taken a degree in theology!

The Churches Civilise Christianity

Christian theology began among the Gnostic heretics on the fringe of primitive Christianity. These unknown writers, of whom the author of the "Pauline" *Epistle to the Romans* and the author of our Gospel of John were the most important, were the founders of Christian theology who adumbrated its fundamental concepts. Gnosticism, in a modified form after being officially "edited" by the Church, proved a godsend to the Churches when once the belief in the immediate Second Coming had proved false and when Christianity was left, so to speak, high and dry in an unfriendly climate, in a world which unaccountably but resolutely refused to come to an end! To borrow an excellent phrase of Mr. Cutner's, "the Churches civilised Christianity". The main instrument through which the Gnostics and their successors the Church Doctors accomplished this civilising mission was by evolving a pseudo-rational theological system. Theology has not been *entirely* reactionary in its effects; contrarily, in some ways it was highly progressive. The highly theological Christianity of the creeds may appear to us to be very crude, but the original pre-theological Christianity was certainly a great deal more crude. In fact, if one wishes to see what Christianity would have looked like *without* theology, one needs only to look at such authentically primitive sects as Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh Day Adventists.

Greek Philosophy and Christian Theology

As the new religion began to spread throughout the Roman Empire it came into contact with the educated classes, who had been conspicuous by their absence at the inception of Christianity. Then, as McCabe has aptly expressed it, the dilemma of the Church was how to present its pre-scientific Gospel in an educated environment, while at the same time retaining its effective hold over the illiterate masses. The latter task it accomplished by the familiar combination of priest-craft, primitive superstition and Hell-fire. But for educated Greeks and Romans something more subtle was

required, and it was to meet this need that the elaborate theological system was evolved, as the most important part in civilising Christianity. Here the Church found the raw materials lying ready to hand — Greek Philosophy and Roman Law, both already highly evolved before Christianity was born. Greek philosophy played the decisive role; one might define Christian theology as Greek philosophical method artificially pressed into conformity with Christian (that is, in this connection, Gnostic) dogmas. The fundamental ideas of the pseudo-science of theology are pre-scientific, indeed often pre-historic! But the formulation of these pre-scientific dogmas is precise, logical and frequently subtle in form. These qualities are derived directly, and indeed often verbally, from the classic formulations of Greek philosophy, which was certainly not originally fashioned for such purposes. Without the *Dialogues* of Plato, which it closely imitates, our Fourth Gospel could never have been written in its present form. Even the Athanasian Creed, that incomprehensible elaboration of the Egyptian Trinity, swarms with Greek technical phrases drawn from Greek philosophy.

Aristotle and Catholic Theology

The theological system of the ancient Church was based chiefly upon the arch-idealist Plato, that "Christian before Christ", who asserted the inherent supremacy of the ideal over the material, and denied the ultimate "reality" of the material world. Since the 13th century, however, the Roman Catholic Church, at least, no longer follows Plato. Today in Catholic theology philosophical idealism is a formal heresy and Bishop Berkeley, for instance, is on the *Index of Prohibited Books*. Since the 13th century Aristotle (as, of course, interpreted by the Church!) reigns supreme, and modern Catholic theology is framed exclusively within the categories of Aristotelian logic. Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels, certainly would not have understood it! This theological revolution was carried out by Thomas Aquinas and his colleagues, now canonised saints of the Church, but in their own day targets for the abuse of their contemporary "fundamentalists". St. Thomas, now the supreme authority in Catholic theology, was denounced by the then

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Theology and Science

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

Archbishop of Canterbury and condemned by the University of Oxford as a dangerous "modernist". It would appear that even then Oxford was the "home of lost causes". At the Reformation, Luther, Calvin and other Protestant doctors tried to refashion the theological systems in the light of their contemporary knowledge, and both Catholic and Protestant "modernists" still continue their historic mission of "civilising" Christianity — sometimes, as in the case of the late Bishop Barnes, almost civilising it out of existence!

Science and Pseudo-Science

There are, it will be universally acknowledged, certain *fully scientific* sciences; astronomy and geography are relevant examples. They are genuine sciences because both their fundamental ideas and their technical method conform with observed facts and logical reasoning. There are also what may perhaps be described as semi- or demi-sciences based partly on facts but partly on unscientific foundations, such

as interest or prejudice. History, Law, Economics and perhaps even Psychology are among those that come to mind wherein unscientific factors (e.g. national, class or other interests) come into play. Finally, there are pseudo-sciences, *pre-scientific* in their fundamental ideas, dating from prehistoric times, yet rigidly scientific in their logical formulation. Of these theology is, nowadays, by far the most important, and therefore the most socially dangerous. Astrology is another which still finds educated defenders. Theology is, however, the only pseudo-science still widely credited by people not demonstrably illiterate, and to possess an official Chair in recognised Universities. Its foundations now appear to be crumbling beneath an imposing façade of formal logical elaboration. It would seem to be only a matter of time before theology, like the other members of the species to which it rightly belongs such as alchemy and astrology, will become merely a *historical* branch of the genuine science of Comparative Religion.

Man in the Universe

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE notion of the universe as a stage specially set for the advent of life is a notion characteristically associated with religious myth and, later, with philosophical speculation. The patent absurdity of a geocentric Cosmos has placed the many religions of the world, including Christianity, in the position of petty parochial conceits. Philosophers have not been wanting, however, who have been eager to read the universe as a great novel with man as the hero. Such fantasies, however warming to our pride, receive no support whatever from astronomy, which, indeed, gives us a picture most unfriendly to such dreamed-up romances.

The whole universe is composed of 92 different sorts of elements, whose atoms combine to form compounds which must obey the same chemical laws throughout the universe. Living matter needs the six-electron element carbon. That is, life is a function of conditions in which carbon is an essential factor. While life is made possible in the indispensable presence of this one element, there are three elements (Nos. 26, 27 and 28) ready to promote the existence of magnetism, and nature lends no less than ten in favour of radioactivity (Nos. 83 to 92). Therefore, so far from the universe being specially designed to produce life, if it had any purpose at all then magnetism and radioactivity are the more likely recipients of its favours!

Idealists have constructed a fanciful universe in which mind holds all matter in thrall. Matter is the mere eject, and ultimately the servant, of the absolute mind of which we are part, and to which the world of matter owes its very existence.

At the beginning of the century the followers of Bergson were presenting existence as the dynamic story of a great struggle in which life was confronted by the obstacle matter, which it eventually, and through much suffering, turned to its own use. This theory ran into the insurmountable barrier of biological fact. The Bergson bubble burst, and his followers, the more cautious neo-Vitalists, on the principle of rendering unto Caesar, paid homage to brute matter and its unyielding deterministic causal processes. They played with the idea of a "bio-field" and allowed matter to determine the direction taken by life just as the railway lines control the path of a train. They retained, however, the vitalistic conception of a realm of value which lay at the end of the journey.

The bravest speculations come from the panpsychists who solve the whole problem of matter by abolishing it forthwith. All "matter" is really mind — in little drops at a time. These spirit-monads are all that exist. This blotting of terminology can hardly commend itself to the scientist, least of all to the psychologist. If matter is already mind, what is the relevance of the evolution of the nervous system and the cerebral system? The granting of a psychical nature to matter, differing only in degree from the "feeling" experienced in an organism, ignores the definite evolution of the nervous system and the new level it marks in the quality and complex functioning of the physical events in it.

If these flights of philosophical fancy have any value at all, it is a poetic value and not a scientific one. If man can be inspired to nobler deeds by such propaganda, so that we make-believe, we shall not discount it. Life is a discarding which attacks a planet in its old age. But it throws up the poet and the musician. Life is a thin filament covering the planet's surface, supremely unimportant and transitory on astronomical standards. But between its cry of despair and its noise of battle are the meditations of Marcus, the sonnets and the symphonies. Man is an unwanted passenger in the dust of the heavens. But his race has produced the scientist who calmly puts his yardstick across the whole sorry scheme — man's final revenge on nature.

SCHOPENHAUER

Grim thinker, unfriended and unfriendly,
Stark prophet of the Will, whose utterance,
Beyond the reach of wrong or evil chance,
With icy edge of keen acuity
Has from the quarries of experience shaped
A form of Phidian beauty, Pallas-fair,
A marble-dream of living thought, with bare
Benignant limbs, by Maya's veil undraped;
Confronting with supernal loveliness
Of dauntless brow serene and spirit-sword
The world's deceit, the Heaven's malignant stare,
Potent to conquer ultimate despair.
So stand, victorious! eloquent to bless
Mankind, avenged by the heroic word.

REX CLEMENTS.

Our British Israelites — 1

By H. CUTNER

It is NOT surprising that some people, dazzled by the wondrous claim that the Jews are God's chosen people, and feeling that such a claim should be, as "Britishers", their own, should discover that the British are Israelites. Of course, by Israelites, they do *not* mean Jews. They have discovered that in God's Precious Word there is a — more or less — distinct difference between Israelites and Jews, and they have even produced a Bible in which this difference is clearly shown. To put the matter in a few words, they point out that the Jews are descended from Judah, while the British people are the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The tribes used to be considered lost, but they have now been found — in the inhabitants of these islands; some more enthusiastic believers are ready to add, even in the inhabitants of the United States.

All British-Israelites have one great distinguishing feature. It is a Fundamentalism which even the all-believing Billy Graham would find it hard to beat. The Bible for them is true in every dot and particular. As for its "prophecies", they are even more true. Wherever it says "God said", he literally said it. He said it in Hebrew, just as the Serpent tempted Eve in perfect Hebrew. There is no doubt about it. It is all there in God's Word, and the British people, not the Jews, are God's fulfilment of his Divine purpose.

Few British-Israelites would really condescend to debate the question with a blatant unbeliever. I once was asked if I would debate with a British-Israelite in Hyde Park, and readily consented. My opponent duly gave his speech — it seemed to me to be a tissue of imbecilities — and I mounted the platform and gave what I thought was a crushing reply. But my opponent had disappeared. He was talking a few hundred yards away to a friend, and only came back when my time was up. He hadn't heard a word I said — nor did it matter for him. He used *our* platform to deliver *his* message, and utterly ignored everything I said. In truth, whatever I said, was a matter of supreme indifference to him.

Now, the whole case of the British-Israelite depends on the distinction between Judah and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. And the strange thing is that most opponents actually admit that there was a tribe of Judah and the Ten Lost Tribes. It never occurs to them that the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is pure, unadulterated myth. There never were these people in history. There is not the slightest trace of them anywhere except in the Bible.

Nobody knows, of course, who wrote Genesis, not even when or where it was written. Nobody knows what language it was written in. Nobody knows who put the Pentateuch in the "modern" Hebrew script. What is, however, well known is that in its present form it is a highly edited and comparatively late document. The present text was "settled" some time in the fifth or sixth century, and it differs in hundreds of places from the Septuagint Greek translation made in the third century B.C., as well as from a text known as the Samaritan, made God knows when, for nobody else does. There is nothing in secular history to support a single story in Genesis — except where it can be shown that the Genesis writer "pinched" a story found in secular history which may be true.

Thus, at the very outset, the British-Israelite is faced by us with a total denial of his actual foundation. If there never was a Jacob — and there wasn't — there could never

have been any Twelve Sons of Israel. Their story as related in Genesis is fantastic. It is possible to show that their chronology is utterly hopeless. John E. Remsburg in *The Bible* gives a specimen worth repeating:

Judah, Jacob's fourth son, married and had three sons — Er, Onan and Shelah. Er grew to manhood, married Tamar, and died. Onan then married his widow, and died also. Shelah, who was much younger than Onan, grew to manhood and refused to marry his brother's widow. Tamar then had two sons, Pharez and Zarah, by Judah himself. (Gen. 38.) Pharez grew to manhood, married, and had two sons, Hezron and Hamil, before Jacob and his family went to Egypt. When they went to Egypt, Judah was but forty-two years old.

The truth is that the writers of Genesis were not giving us history at all, but something which would satisfy the Semitic tribes which came back with Ezra after the Captivity — as it is called. There is no reason to doubt that Palestine was often conquered by more powerful nations than its own people, and making slaves of a conquered people was one of the prices paid by the conquered. But no one yet knows exactly who were the unfortunate conquered people in this case. That there were two tribes later called Israel and Judah who were either fighting among themselves or were being attacked by other nations may well be true. But who were they?

For one thing, were they a white or brown race? No one really knows, but the probability is that they were of the same lineage as the Arabs surrounding them, that is, they were brown. Did Ezra bring some whiter people with him when he took over Palestine? (I say Ezra only for convenience. The return from the Captivity may well have been another invasion.) As far as I know, secular history knows nothing of Ezra or Nehemiah. But whatever are the facts, the one thing clear is that the "Ten Tribes of Israel" who were led into captivity were thenceforth "lost". They never came back. But supposing there never were any Ten Tribes? Supposing the whole of the Twelve Tribes are as mythical as the Twelve Apostles?

If you turn to the 49th chapter of Genesis, you will read how Jacob, when about to die, called all his sons together and blessed them. But many sharp-eyed critics found in the "blessings" a more or less clear allusion to the Signs of the Zodiac. Reuben is called, for example, "unstable as water"; that is, Aquarius. Simon and Levi "are brethren"; that is, Pisces. Judah is "a lion's whelp"; that is, Leo. Dan shall be "a serpent by the way"; that is, Scorpius; and so on. Naturally, the descriptions are "hidden" as much as possible, but once understood, they are unmistakable, though we must not expect our modern astrologers to agree with all the descriptions.

The point I wish to make therefore is, at the outset, that the British-Israelites have literally no case unless they can show that Genesis is absolutely historical; and that they cannot do. There never were any Ten Tribes. The most we can say at the moment is that there may have been two Semitic tribes in Palestine, but what they were called before they settled there nobody knows. Their history was "made-up" after the invasion — if it was an invasion — by Ezra. His followers were later known as Jews and most of them were wiped out by the Romans in 70 and 130 A.D. The remnants no doubt made converts through the centuries, and that some of these converts reached the British Isles with many other people like the Phoenicians can be accepted. Most of the converts were from some of the white races around the Mediterranean — hence we find that the

[Concluded on page 92

This Believing World

Whatever made Mr. Oral Roberts, the "well-known" American evangelist, visit Australia to spread the Gospel? Didn't he know that it was present-day Britain which provided a veritable gold-mine for his brother in Christ, the Rev. Billy Graham? Mr. Roberts appears to have had the unhappy experience of the other world-famous evangelist, Dr. Torrey who, fifty years ago, was chucked out of this country just as Mr. Roberts was recently (more or less) kicked out of Australia. Mob-rioting forced him to close his Melbourne meetings — but not before he had collected £8,500 from two cities, a most respectable sum for bringing "thousands of souls" to Christ. All the same, Mr. Roberts is never again likely to visit Australia.

In New Zealand, although every effort has always been made to bring Maoris to Christ Jesus by telling them the simple, beautiful truths of Christianity — most of which, by the way, have long since been given up by our own Church intellectuals — the obstinate "natives" still believe in some of their ancient faiths, especially when sponsored by a Tohungan — that is, a Maori wise man or witch doctor. A case came up a few months ago before the court in which a Tohungan actually claimed he could cure disease by "faith-healing", the impudence of which must have staggered the good Christian magistrate. Were not these Maoris aware that only through Jesus and his Church could faith-cures be effected?

At all events, witnesses were produced who testified to marvellous cures so long, of course, as they were paid for first — which, after all, has always been a long-honoured procedure in Christian circles. One of the Maori incantations is, "Maori to the right; pakeha to the left; all up to the Most High. This is for the Most High and may the Most High take your diseases away and throw them into the deep, deep sea". This strikes us as quite as effective in shushing diseases away as any incantation in the name of Jesus. What exactly is the difference between a Christian priest in a lace frock and a crook, and a Maori Tohungan with feathers and a bowl of water, fortified by cigarette smoke — the Maori ritual?

Just as miraculous cures of quite incurable diseases have always been a feature of religious cults, so have they had equally credible "Visions". In the *Sunday Mail*, its investigator, Mr. R. Pollock, has given us a number which he "really believes in". For example, when the Germans came over in their aeroplanes in 1940, the inhabitants of a South Downs village called Firlie looked up in the sky and there it was, "a perfect picture of Our Lord". They all recognised it as, of course, what Jesus really looked like is known all over the world. One of the witnesses is a 90-year-old lady — and she at least just ought to know. The Vision had the backing of the Vicar of Glynde, a neighbouring village.

Then there is the equally authentic Vision at Ipswich, where literally hundreds of people saw, in 1914, a "perfect formation of Christ on the Cross". The Rev. H. Green has no doubt whatever of this beautiful Vision. And just as true is the one seen by those lucky people (as Tommy Trinder would say) in Aboe, Co. Tyrone, where, in September 1954, appeared "Our Lady dressed in white, motionless and beautiful". Such testimony is irrefutable, for Aboe is now "a national shrine". We haven't the heart to differ from Mr. Pollock, for what earthly good is a

religion which does not cure or produce Visions or which has a God who does literally nothing?

One thing, however, is religiously produced in America which no one doubts, and that is the Almighty Dollar. As there are in that Land of Plenty more religions than churches for them, many shopkeepers are turning their premises into a church and these are opening now at the rate of ten a month. All they have to do is to "register" the places for a very small fee, create a few Bishops, employ some girls collecting money for "charity" in the name of the new church, form a congregation who pay the "expenses", and hey, presto! some of them can make £300 a week. Even the Rev. B. Graham cannot do better than that.

The "Daily Express" has had recently some magnificent inspiring stories of the way in which prayer is always answered. Hundreds of people have sent in their experiences and the selections published should make everybody grovel at once on their knees. But the curious thing about these experiences is that never is a prayer for the winner of the Derby answered, or the way in which a football player can win a big prize. A prayer that is always answered is one in which you pray for Mum not to get angry with you, or to get Dad to buy you a money box, or even one which grants your request not to go to school for a day. You try it and see how good God can be.

LEICESTER DISCUSSION

The Leicester Secular Society were recently requested by the Christian Student Movement at the Leicester University College to attend for a discussion on atheism. The invitation was accepted and a party of five Secularists sallied forth to spread the "Gospel of Freethought in the camp of the C.S.M.", which was represented by eight attractive young ladies and one gentleman.

Mr. Kirk opened the discussion for the Secular Society with an excellent paper setting out the aims, objects and nature of Secularism. We found that our friends were quite willing to dismiss most of the O.T. as Babylonian myths, but they thought the N.T. was all that a Christian needed. Christ's moral teachings were shown to be second-hand, and the characters of St. Paul and the later evangelists were examined and found wanting.

The meeting closed with an open invitation to a "return match" at the Secular Hall.

OUR BRITISH ISRAELITES (concluded from page 91)

European Jew is white. He could not have been white — the "Israelites" came from Asia Minor. The Palestinian Jews before 70 A.D., that is, about the time given to Jesus Christ, were brown — the colour of Jesus, had he really existed.

But the British-Israelite has a different explanation about this colour business. The Lost Ten Tribes went into Europe and as soon as they reached the Elbe they called themselves Saxons, that is, Isaac's sons, and they then turned colour — from the Arab brown to the Saxon white. That is their explanation of the white British.

But not all of them, it is true, talk like this. And in my next article I shall give some of their delightful claims. I call them delightful, but for themselves everything is most solemn. No laughter is allowed when it comes to the thing of God.

For Your Bookshelf

Bound Complete

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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.

In the issue for March 9th the title "Facts for Freethinkers—No. 8" was missed from the note on Papal Decrees on slavery. More in this series will be appearing from time to time.

We regret that in Mr. Ridley's article on Hunting the names of two organisations were confused: The League Against Cruel Sports and the National Society for the Abolition of Cruel Sport. The question to the Archbishop was put by the latter and subsequently commented on publicly by the former.

REV. E. ROBERTSON.—You say "Britain is predominantly Christian". This justifies the Christian monopoly on the BBC. We have also heard that Britain is predominantly pagan. This explains the rise in crime.

S. W. BROOKS.—The passage in Tacitus has been dealt with over and over again. You will find a detailed discussion in Prof. Drew's *Witnesses to the History of Jesus*, in the six volumes on the Myth Theory by J. M. Robertson, by G. W. Foote in his *Sign of the Cross*, and by H. Cutner in his *Jesus—God, Man or Myth*.

W. MILES.—Your letter is merely a series of assertions that the Bible is true. Assertions unsupported by facts leave us with nothing to answer.

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

- Birmingham Branch N.S.S. (Satis Café, 40 Cannon Street).—Sunday, March 25th, 7 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "The Secular Basis of Culture".
- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics Institute).—March 25th, 6.45 p.m.: W. BARTHOLOMEW, M.A., "Reflections of a Schoolmaster".
- Conway Discussion Circle (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, March 27th, 7.15 p.m.: General Discussion—Social Occasion.
- Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, March 25th, 6.30 p.m.: F. SUGARMAN, "Israel, Egypt, and the Middle East".
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, March 25th, 7 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "The Ten Lost Years".
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Technical College, Shakespeare Street).—Sunday, March 25th, 2.30 p.m.: REV. E. HALL, "Religion—Origin and Persistence".
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, March 25th, 11 a.m.: LORD BOYD ORR, "The Morals of Power".
- West London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.1).—Sunday, March 25th, 7.15 p.m.: G. SCHAEFFER, A Lecture.

Notes and News

SPEAKING at the opening of Younghusband House in London on March 6th, Lord Samuel said that differences of religious faith were again becoming a dividing line between nations and a governing factor in world politics. Then—in the words of the *Daily Telegraph*—he "recited a gloomy world-wide list" of "new religious antagonisms of our own day". He thought that religion had made a quite inadequate effort to take the lead towards peace and concord, but he hoped that Younghusband House would be a permanent rallying point "in a cause second to none in its urgency and ultimate value to the welfare of mankind". A supporting prayer was then offered by the Bishop of Chichester and was echoed in four languages. We have no doubt whatever that the representatives of the Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu faiths who were present at the ceremony are all sincerely devoted to the cause of spreading peace and concord, as was Sir Francis Younghusband, who founded the World Congress of Faiths and after whom the House is named. But we consider their efforts misguided.

★

SURELY, too, it is misleading to refer to the Christian, Jewish, and other faiths as though there were only one sect of each, when this is far from the case. We do not know precisely how many of Omar's "Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects" persist in Islam, but we know that *some* do! We cannot count the numerous Christian denominations, and there are splits of varying degree among Jews and Buddhists. How can international unity accrue from internal disunity? Religion has not only *been* inadequate; it must always *be* inadequate in uniting mankind. At its worst it breeds intense hatred, and even in its mildest and most personal forms it is a distraction from worldly affairs, the very affairs where the unity is needed.

★

MUCH of the March issue of the Maltese Roman Catholic periodical, *The Faith*, is devoted to the subject of education. "In a Catholic country especially", says the Editorial, "the Government should not only show respect to the Church in regard to her fundamental right to education, but it should also help her to fulfil this her divine mission with ease and profit. The State has nothing to fear or lose from the execution of this right by the Church. No one has more at heart the common good of the people...". And a front-page quotation from Fr. M. Raymond, O.C.S.O., states that "Secular education is not and cannot be real education, because a man can never be educated unless he is 'brought out' and led to God". In our own columns you may read how the Church—in accordance with her "divine mission"—"led" a ten-year-old girl to God. We leave readers to judge if it is for "the common good of the people".

★

WE regret to announce that the International Congress of the World Union of Freethinkers, due to take place in Amsterdam in September, has had to be cancelled owing to organisational difficulties. Several of our readers were already making preparations for the trip; they will be pleased to hear that certain alternative plans are being considered. At present it seems likely that the visit of French Freethinkers to Geneva on August 18th, will become an international gathering and be prolonged for a few days. Homage will be paid to the memory of Voltaire. Full details will be given later.

The Margaret Knight-Ashley Sampson Letters

V

BUCKSBURN.

December 7, 1946.

DEAR ASHLEY,

Have I misunderstood you all along? Or have you really changed your view? In your previous letter you were indignant (and said I was accusing you of dishonesty) when I said that the ground of your religious beliefs was emotional. But in this letter you say that emotional grounds for belief are as good as any other. And you suggest that it shows a narrow and intolerant outlook to be "contemptuous of a belief that satisfies the emotions without reference to the intellect". (Such as the belief that Hitler was a great-hearted gentleman who only wanted peace?)

You certainly seem to be implying one of two things. Either (a) the fact that a belief gives emotional satisfaction is evidence of its truth, or (b) if a belief gives emotional satisfaction we are justified in holding it regardless of evidence. If you really *do* hold either of these views, then we have been at cross-purposes.

I agree, of course, that religion is much more than a set of beliefs. It involves also an attitude to life, a moral code, and (in some cases) individual ecstatic experience. All these things are, in my view, much more important than dogmas, and both logically and psychologically independent of them—but I'll return to this later. The point I want to make now—and it is absolutely crucial—is this. *In so far as religion is a system of belief, these beliefs must be subject to the normal criteria of reason*—in other words, they must not contradict one another, or be plainly in conflict with fact. If you seriously mean to deny this, then clearly we are wasting our time in discussion.

Of course I demand that a belief should satisfy the intellect (or, at any rate, not affront it). It is the function of belief to satisfy the intellect, just as it is the function of art to satisfy the emotions. I shouldn't think of asking whether an ecstatic experience was rational—that would be as pointless as asking whether the *Ode to a Nightingale* was sound ornithology—but if the ecstatic experience leaves a residue of belief behind it, this belief must be tested like any other, and abandoned if it proves untenable.

You say that I assert that your beliefs are irrational, but bring no evidence to prove it. Well, dashitall and Imeanter-say—I've been bringing evidence all through the correspondence! (I am now going to sound thoroughly caddish. I'm afraid—but you emphasise this point so strongly that you leave me no option.) I knock the bottom out of every argument you use, and at the end you come up smiling and "challenge me to show" where you are reasoning badly! I thought, from your penultimate letter, that you'd tacitly accepted defeat on the omnipotence issue, since you avoided all mention of it, and concentrated on the "reason isn't everything" line. So (in my pagan way) I was trying to be magnanimous by not forcing it on you again. But evidently I quite misinterpreted your silence. So now I feel bound to observe that intellectually you have not got a leg to stand on until you answer my argument about omnipotence and evil—which, so far, you have most signally failed to do.

Despite your protests, I still think that my "twice two are five" analogy is a perfectly good one. You make self-contradictory statements, such as that a world full of evil was created by an omnipotent and benevolent God—and when I point out that they're self-contradictory, you say that I attach far too much importance to the intellect.

On the rationalisation issue I agree, of course, that one shouldn't reject a valid argument because the person who used it had "interested" motives for doing so. But the point I am getting at has been admirably expressed by Russell in the chapter on Aquinas in the *History of Western Philosophy*: "In Aquinas the appeal to reason is in a sense insincere, since the conclusion to be reached is fixed in advance. He does not, like Socrates, set out to follow the argument wherever it may lead. Before he begins to philosophise, he already knows the truth: it is laid down in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently convincing reasons in its support, so much the better; but if his arguments are refuted, he will not change his view; he will invent other arguments, or fall back on revelation. The finding of arguments for conclusions fixed in advance is not philosophy but special pleading. I cannot, therefore, rank Aquinas among the great philosophers".

Now for your argument about Christian ethics (you have changed your ground here, too, surely?). Let me say at once that I don't regard Christianity as "the" ethical system, in the sense that it is the only, or even the best possible, one. As I said in a previous letter, I think it is in some respects inferior to the code of 5th century Athens. Its defects are that, being intended primarily for a subjected minority population, it tends to emphasise the "under-dog" virtues (humility, patience under oppression, etc.) at the expense of the more aristocratic virtues (justice, tolerance, disinterestedness, etc.) that were admired by the Greeks. And it is also (for my taste anyhow) much too anti-intellectual. Still, I should be very sorry to see it replaced by the ethic of totalitarianism.

But your point is that Christ was either divine or a criminal lunatic, and that it's preposterous to suggest that a good ethical system could have been proclaimed by a criminal lunatic. Well, I don't know much about the Higher Criticism (of the textual kind), but I gather there are many eminent authorities—including theologians—who hold that there is no ground for asserting that Christ *did* claim divinity. I understand that the Gospels contain many later interpolations—and it is certainly obvious that they contain a great deal of wildly imaginative "hearsay" reporting—so possibly the claim to divinity can be explained away on these lines. But if it can't (and I don't know enough about the subject to profess to hold a view) then we must admit—I agree—that Christ had a streak of madness; though why you should say that he must also have been a criminal defeats me.

But is there anything so overwhelmingly improbable in a person with a streak of madness being an admirable character or a highly original thinker in other respects (cf. Cowper, Johnson, Mary Lamb), or exerting enormous influence (cf. Hitler)? I don't deny that it is very remarkable—the career of Christ is remarkable however you look at it. But to reject it (i.e., the view that Christ was not wholly sane) as too improbable for consideration—and to prefer instead to accept the virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection and all the rest of it—that is surely to carry the gnat-and-camel technique to extremes?

One final point—there is a strange inconsistency in your letter. You begin by arguing that the fact that Christianity gives emotional satisfaction is good ground for believing it. And you end by arguing equally strongly that the idea that Christianity gives emotional satisfaction is nonsense! But I think it all turns (once again) on the

distinction between ethics and dogma. I agree that the practice of Christian ethics doesn't give a conspicuous amount of emotional satisfaction — but I never said it did. But there is no doubt that some of the Christian *dogmas* give immense satisfaction, and that is one reason why many people cling to them. It must be extremely consoling — if, as Johnson said, you can abandon your mind to it — to believe that there is a God who takes a fatherly interest in your welfare, that you are immortal, that all the injustices of this life will be set right in the next, and so on.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely, MARGARET.

(To be continued)

Horror Comic with a Difference

By COLIN McCALL

(Concluded from page 82)

HAVING absorbed the frightful lessons outlined last week, the child proceeds to learn about the Church of Christ. The Kingdom of God does not mean merely (sic) Heaven but also the Church which "Christ was to found while He was on earth". The Apostles, naturally, are introduced as the first priests — "Bishops of the Catholic Church". "Thus" (how this word conveys a sense of the inexorable!) "the great work of Christ went on and still goes on through the work of the Bishops and priests of the Church". We see a priest in the pulpit ensuring this continuance. Pictorial analogy then returns with drawings of an altar and Sacraments, compared to a house with smoke coming from the chimney. "Just as the smoke is a sign telling us that there is a fire in the house, even though we cannot see it, so the Sacrament is a visible sign of invisible Grace which is poured into the soul" is the mystic caption, likely to be accepted as profound by so many of the youngsters who copy it down.

The Sacraments of Penance and Baptism now illustrate the possibility of giving life to the dead through Sanctifying Grace. As in a pantomime transformation scene green chalices become green trees, arranged in order in a field and bearing titles, "Confirmation", "Penance", etc. — the last and highest being "Holy Orders". A gate marked "Baptism" gives access to the field. But we are back among the utensils on the next page: a jug of water, salt-cellar with cross, and a crucible of oil. In Baptism, we are informed, "the 'matter' or stuff used is water"; the "form" is: "I baptise thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost". The salt and oil are used by the priest, the former to show that "the Grace just put in the soul must last", the latter signifying strength to fight for God. And the chalices return: first Baptism making the infant a "child" of God, then Confirmation making the child a "soldier" of God, too.

The recurrent theme of upward and downward paths has, this time, two figures only: one with his eye on the gleaming triangle above, knowing "that what he has comes from God and must be good for him"; the other thinking that God "is not fair". The reader may be left to guess the destination of the complainant. To avoid such a fate, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost should be borne in mind. Four of them enable us to *know* God's Will; three (Fortitude, Piety, and Fear of the Lord) enable us to *do* what He wills.

Three following pages treat of Confession. The child walking towards the church is told to think about what she is going to do; kneeling in prayer, she must ask God to help her to make a good Confession. Then — horror again — she must "think of Hell" and be sorry for her sins.

Need I add that the figure is again poised on the edge of the abyss, with the Devil and the flames below? These pictures fill me with a hatred of Catholicism which can never be mitigated. I can never forgive the Church for its teaching of Hellfire and, when Catholics deny that it is still taught, my thoughts will turn to the exercise book in front of me now. I shall think of a class of school children, listening, drawing, writing; being mentally injured for life. And it is no use saying "God made beautiful things for us", as the next illustration does; the damage has been done. The cross is a symbol of terror, not of love.

Overleaf, it is back to Catholic ritual in the form of the Eucharist. "Remember that it was God who said 'This is My Body, this is My Blood', and God cannot lie, so it must be true", says the "great lying Church". And am I alone in feeling disgust at the words "When Our Lord is in the tabernacle the red lamp is kept burning"? Before Communion the child is instructed to confess big sins and be sorry for small ones, and the prayer is given. There follows a consideration of the duties of a priest: to offer Mass, to preach, to hear confessions, to administer the Sacraments, and to marry, illustrated in colour. And the ten-year-old child must know that divorce is forbidden. A judge may try to break the marriage bond, but "however hard he tries, he *cannot* break something made by God". Two people have had a divorce ("made by man") and are trying to marry again, but "there will be no new marriage bond because the one made by God is still there". The picture proves it: the bond, yellow and radiant, holds the divorced couple together and prevents them from going off with their new partners.

The cannibalistic mass returns. The priest kneels before the altar, holding the Host above his head, while the radiant cross reflects the gleaming triangle in the corner of the page. The mass is "Calvary all over again"; when we go to mass we go to Calvary. Three white cloths represent the three cloths in which Jesus was laid in the tomb; relics of a Saint are in the altar stone; and God Himself, of course, is in the tabernacle. Wax candles represent Christ the Light of the World, and remind us of the first Christian martyrs, the curtain on the tabernacle is called the veil, and so on. The instruction is thorough; of that there can be no doubt. The significance of the priest's dress is shown in full colour with red, the "colour of the Feast", predominant; all the implements are described and drawn. The mass is like Calvary, we are informed once more, and the climax is reached with a drawing depicting Heaven with its God and its Communion of Saints, the Church Triumphant; earth with the Church Militant but also "suffering". I should like to have heard the teacher's spoken comments on the "Church Suffering", but that is denied me; I can only ponder.

The grandiose spectacle just described might be thought a fit ending for the book; but there is just one more picture to come. Not content, the teachers who are agents of the Church of Rome, must frighten the child with a last lesson. So, we have a person ill in bed. Above the head of the bed is the (eternal) triangle, but at the foot stands the Devil again, pitchfork in hand. The final picture and the final moment. Hell, it will be remembered, was encountered on the first page of the book: the Devil (the fallen angel) tumbling into the flames. The Devil is there at the last.

—NEXT WEEK—

THE RISING GENERATION

A New Feature devised for the Young

With him we come to the end of, perhaps, a year's work in religion in a Roman Catholic school. We come to the end of the horror comic with its crude but compelling drawings. Who can doubt that the Church of Rome is still the greatest enemy we have to face? Beside it, the Church of England pales into insignificance. No other Church school would tackle the problem of indoctrination so thoroughly—so terribly thoroughly! Pictorial education with plenty of colour, a shrewd mixture of literalness and simple symbols, carefully-calculated language—these combine to produce a minor masterpiece of deception. Unashamedly playing upon terrible fear in the minds of little children, Rome prepares its soldiers for the Church Militant. When next you hear of "liberal" Catholicism, think of this book and its childish compiler; think of her priestly tutors and resolve again that you will never cease your fight against the Roman Catholic Church. You are fighting for humanity.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE HOW AND WHY

Your admirably succinct article, "For Newcomers", puts the case with force and clarity. Within its terms of reference your argument is incontrovertible. "Science", you say, "is concerned only with the How of things". It is undeniably true; and its achievements in that field are so impressive as to be overwhelming. I am not, however, quite convinced that the final sentence in the quotation from *Materialism Re-stated* states the exact facts. Certainly, the general tendency of "the civilised intelligence is (to be) content with understanding the How of events", but there is, it seems to me, a definite counter-current which must be taken into consideration. But let us admit that the civilised intelligence is so content. Is not this psychologically a retrogression? Is it not a wilful curtailment of our mental powers, leading to the atrophy, *inter alia*, of the imaginative faculty. Gladly accepting, as one does, scientific fact as 100% true, are we to say it is foolishness for the mind even to consider the possibility of such a thing as purpose, cosmic or specialised? Metaphysics are a part of our mental furniture. Man is not only a thinking, but a feeling, animal. Our emotions are facts just as truly as are elephants and mosquitoes. Though the mind contains within itself thought, feeling, memory, imagination, will, and much else, it remains a unity. Accepting unreservedly the dicta of rational thought, are we to be debarred from the employment of the other elements of our mental make-up? May not their cultivation prove fruitful, and indeed help in the edification of rational thought, by providing, so to speak, the space between the rungs of the mental ladder? Let us not fall into the old ecclesiastical error of denying the validity of everything not contained in our "Bible" of science. Is it really inconceivable that our hopes and aspirations—the poet's dream, the mystic's ecstasy—point to anything but moonshine? Must the age-old questionings of man be taboo because they do not fall within the scope of natural science? If it be so, man's brain may become bigger and his bodily comfort be more assured, but he will be a shrunken creature nevertheless.

No, sir; I take my stand on your title—I claim the rights of a "Freethinker".

REX CLEMENTS.

THE "MEMORIAL" MEETING

The "Memorial" Meeting for the late Chapman Cohen and Joseph McCabe was a curious affair. One had heard of the Admiral Who Never Went to Sea and even the Mad Hatter's Tea Party without the Mad Hatter, but a Memorial Meeting must surely be adjudged as just as odd an occurrence when the revered subjects of what should be an honoured occasion are scarcely mentioned by the platform speakers.

Until 9.30 p.m., which was two hours after the meeting had started and when I felt that perhaps it was as well to leave, there had been a number of long speeches on a variety of subjects, but no appraisal of the work or an appreciation of Chapman Cohen, the man. What references had been made to Joseph McCabe appeared to be somewhat inadequate. The broader issues of the N.S.S. were neglected, and few of its aims and objects were touched upon. Both the chairman and the official organiser made the great mistake of talking too much, and then not about the men of whom we had come to be reminded. These two officials qualified for the structure of the wag sitting a few rows behind me during

the meeting, who murmured at one point, "The function of the chairman is to stand up, speak up and then shut up". But perhaps the long-windedness to which we were treated would have been less apparent had there been more warmth and modesty from the platform. This, coupled with a surprising lack of appreciation, made the conduct of the organisers difficult to excuse.

Chapman Cohen had been Editor of THE FREETHINKER for 25 years and President of the N.S.S. for the same period; his work as author, pamphleteer and reformer were well known; but neither the man, the editor, the president, the orator, nor the debater were touched upon.

I escorted the widow of Chapman Cohen to the Holborn Hall, an elderly lady of rare kindness and great dignity, possessed of a quiet but burning pride in her husband's memory. The wives of great men are entitled to share the admiration and respect due to their husbands, because more often than not they cannot shed responsibility for much that their menfolk do. It would surely have been the merest gesture by way of an acknowledgment for his magnificent service to "the best of all causes" if the widow of Chapman Cohen, now in her eighties, had been warmed by the affection and admiration of the tributes from the platform.

The evening might be described in one word—"curious". But that word is perhaps as good as any other to describe such a singularly ungrateful performance.

PETER COTES.

[Perhaps we should mention that Mr. McCall's tribute to Chapman Cohen came after Mr. Cotes had left.—EDITOR.]

THE MESSIAH AND MIRACLES

With regard to the debate or discussion on the radio between two Humanists and two Christians, the writer of "This Believing World" endeavours to write-down the talk, e.g., "Nobody was a bit wiser about anything". What! Nobody, not even some of the listeners?

Now, if two Humanists, Freethinkers or Rationalists, are allowed by the BBC (almost a Christian organisation) to contend over the air by arguments that Jesus Christ was not the Messiah, nor did he perform miracles, we ought to rejoice that we have reached that stage of toleration on the public programme of the broadcast.

It was also foolish to write that "it would be safe to say that all the Christians who heard it were not shaken in their belief in the truth of Christianity". That is a dismal point of view, and may be untrue. Who can tell what effect the debate had upon the listeners? It should have made them think, and bring out their scepticism. Let's hope it did. We must bring pressure to bear on the BBC for further debates on religious, secularist and humanist questions.

ALFRED J. CORRICK.

OVERPOPULATION

With reference to "Sufficient for All" (17.2.56), I invite Mr Matson to read *The World's Hunger* by the economist, W. Vogt. Local gluts, wastages, and financial trickery do not invalidate expert general conclusions: rabbits are poisoned precisely to obtain more food from land already saturated with chemical fertiliser; all is not food that nowadays bears the name; one Briton in four suffers from calcium and/or vitamin B deficiency; American "astronomical figures" have been known to be inexact; and no Capitalism, Communism, Socialism, or "change of food ownership" can invalidate the arithmetically-demonstrable fact that world population divided by world arable square miles yields a quotient that is far too high.

Mr. Matson's "free humanity breeding free men and women" is a worthy ideal, but one that will never be achieved by free breeding. No man or woman has the inalienable right to procreate until he or she has earned it, not in pounds, shillings and pence, but before the impartial tribunal of biological desirability; intellectual and social qualities; and the inflexible considerations of world production and distribution. This fundamental reform must take precedence over all else, since everything else hinges on it. Establish this, and humanity will begin to live, instead of struggling to live at all; financial jugglery will be considered a fit occupation for madmen only; and we shall have taken the indispensable first step to realising Mr. Matson's ideal.

This is the challenge—and against the reform are pitted the immense inertias of 40,000 years of human tradition. The outlook is grim; how could it appear otherwise?

R. READMAN.

POINT FROM LETTER

WE are told Jesus is "unique". Mercifully so! Whether it be myth or history, this figure has caused more misery in 1,900 years than any other.—MOLLY ROCHE.

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