

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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MOST READERS have heard of the Leicester Secular Society, an institution anterior to the N.S.S. and the oldest extant secular society, so far as I am aware, in Britain. For more than a century the Leicester Secularists have pursued their uphill task, waging war on every species of religious superstition and social reaction. For about three quarters of a century the headquarters of the Society have been in their fine hall in Humberstone Gate, in whose spacious lecture hall the Free-thought message has been advanced by such as G. Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant and Kropotkin, not to mention past presidents of the N.S.S. One also recalls that it was as secretary of the Leicester Secular Society that Joseph McCabe started his long career as a propagandist. Today, affiliated to the N.S.S., the Society continues its historic mission as the centre of Free-thought in the city of Simon de Montfort, the traditional founder of parliamentary government in England.

As all who have visited the Secular Hall will recollect, five heads are displayed outside its entrance, those of Socrates, Jesus, Voltaire, Paine and Robert Owen, the latter perhaps now better known as the pioneer of British Socialism, but in his own day equally famous as a critic of established religion. The Leicester S.S. was in fact started by Owenite missionaries, among them G. J. Holyoake, later to become the godparent (*sic*) of Secularism. Much comment has been caused by the presence of Jesus in this gallery of eminent Rationalists. It must be remembered that most of the Victorian Freethinkers professed to believe in a human and historical Jesus. Robert Taylor, who, as Mr. Cutner has demonstrated, was probably the first English Freethinker to proclaim publicly that no such person as Christ ever lived, made few converts among his *English* readers; he evidently failed to convince the founders of the Secular Society at Leicester.

Four Great Men

We are perhaps justified in putting a question mark to Jesus but there is no doubt of the *historical* character of the other four who guard the entrance to the hall. Only one (Owen) can be claimed as a thoroughgoing atheist and materialist. Socrates, Voltaire and Paine were ostensibly Deists and believers in the immortality of the soul.

Socrates, the Greek Dr. Johnson

Some classically trained scholars might raise their eyebrows at the inclusion of Socrates in this company. Like Jesus, he wrote nothing. We have to rely on the reminiscences of his disciples, of Plato in particular, and, as Greek scholars will agree, it is questionable how near is the Socrates of the *Dialogues* to the real Socrates. Nevertheless, however "bowdlerised", Plato's Socrates refers to an authentic historical personage, a kind of non-literary Greek Dr. Johnson, relying for his tremendous effect on his strong personality and a formidable faculty for logical argument. In the

recorded history of philosophy, Socrates occupies an ambiguous place. Possibly his eloquent advocacy for the immortality of the soul owes at least as much to Plato as to its reputed author. For Plato, Socrates' eloquent biographer was, as Nietzsche expressed it, a "Christian before Christ".

Voltaire

No such doubt remains about Voltaire, even if he did on one occasion erect an altar to his deistic god with the pious inscription, "Voltaire to God!" However, a man is surely entitled to be judged by his life's work and not merely

by his occasional ambiguities. As to the net result of Voltaire's career there is no need to argue; Voltaire was not, perhaps, an original thinker of the first rank, but he was the greatest, wittiest, and most effective populariser of Free-thought that world literature has known. No one has subjected the antiquated dogma, the "dead hand" of the Churches, to such scathing irony. No one has done so much to make superstition ridiculous. There have been more erudite specialists, more profound thinkers, in the ranks of Free-thought; none the less, in the scope and variety of his attainments and of his services to mental freedom, it would perhaps be no exaggeration to style Voltaire as the greatest individual Freethinker the world has known.

Two Great English Pioneers

We are glad to know the Leicester S.S. is a patriotic body! It includes two great English—or shall we say English-speaking, since Owen was a Welshman—Freethinkers. Both "Tom" Paine, the veteran of the American and French revolutions, and Robert Owen, the founder of English Socialism and the creator of co-operative colonies in America, played other parts besides that of critic of religion. Each was an international figure in his day, both wrote voluminously on many themes, both were pioneers of revolt in many spheres, and both were execrated by the conservatives of their age. Owen was a Pacifist, Paine a practical revolutionary who fought against England in Washington's army, and later presented General Buonaparte with a blue print for the invasion of England. In Free-thought circles no publication of Owen's has attained the posthumous fame of Paine's *Age of Reason*; however, the influence of the Owenite "missionaries" on English Free-thought still awaits its historian, but it was certainly profound, and the Leicester S.S. stands today as visible proof. Bradlaugh was, no doubt, the more impressive personality, but Paine and Owen were the pioneers.

Why Jesus?

To turn from these four great *historical* characters to a perhaps entirely mythical figure, it is true that well-known books have been written *about* Jesus, but are they equally *reliable*? We know, at least, who actually wrote *Candide* or

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Four Great Men and a Question Mark

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

The Age of Reason. But who really put together the Gospels, from which the actual signatures appear to have been lost? Was there ever a Jesus, and if not, what is he doing at Leicester? Can it be that our friends there have some fresh light on the problem? Or do they merely wish to preserve the *memory* of Jesus in a post-Christian secular age, when the work of Voltaire, Paine and Owen shall at last have come to fruition?

The Faith of a Scholar

(A critical review of *The Existence of God* by A. E. Taylor)

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

IN CONSIDERING Prof. A. E. Taylor's defence of orthodoxy we enter the field of professional apologetics. Sir Arnold Lunn and Mr. C. S. Lewis are essentially amateurs in philosophical disputation, for although Mr. Lewis is an Oxford don, his subject is English Literature, while Sir Arnold is an expert mountaineer but as I tried to show, a very inexpert theologian. The late Prof. Taylor, however, held the chair in Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh for many years, and indeed the present writer was once one of his students. He was a fine scholar with an international reputation, and we may be sure that his arguments for theistic Christianity are the strongest which can be advanced in favour of this outlook. That they are nevertheless seriously defective, as I hope to show, should be a source of considerable satisfaction to the Freethinker.

The little book *The Existence of God*, which was published in 1945 is a very closely reasoned defence of the classic theistic arguments. The author begins by attempting to show that science cannot *disprove* God's existence. A scientific hypothesis is always framed, he points out in the following terms: "If this hypothesis were true, such and such events would be inevitably perceived under such and such conditions, and therefore if they are not perceived, the hypothesis cannot be true". Therefore in order to be able to disprove the existence of God, scientifically we would have to be able to say "If God exists and directs the course of nature, certain events must occur, about which we find in fact they do not occur". But, claims Taylor, this is just what we are not in a position to say, for we do not know what conditions would operate if the divine control of nature were a fact. Now it is obviously true that science cannot disprove God's existence if the word God is not defined, and an atheist who knows what he is talking about would never assert the contrary. He would, however, make instead the annihilating observation that the concept of "God" in itself has no meaning and can therefore neither be proved nor disproved by science any more than can the concept "abracadabra". If, however, Prof. Taylor is referring to the *Christian* God (which we may legitimately assume), then surely we can say that a loving Heavenly Father would not permit such abominations as earthquake, flood and hurricane and since these do in fact occur, we can prove by scientific means (empirical observation) that the Christian God does not exist. It must be noted, however, that Prof. Taylor, who is no fool, sees this point and goes on to claim that we have no right to assume that if there is a God directing the course of events his purpose can only be to "make the good happy and the bad unhappy". But surely we have every right to assume just this — to assume that is that a righteous God (such as that of the Christians is alleged to be) would not deliberately inflict suffering on innocent persons any more than would a righteous human parent. It is no answer to this to claim that God's ways are not our ways, for as John Stuart Mill

wrote, "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go".

Prof. Taylor's next point is that the whole of science rests on certain metaphysical presuppositions which cannot themselves be proved by the scientific method and which are therefore extra — or pre-scientific, e.g., that nature is rational and that only the empirical type of investigation can lead to truth. Now again it is true that as Hume pointed out two centuries ago, there is no logical necessity why a certain cause should always be followed by a certain effect. It would be quite as *logical* for a match to melt when struck as to burst into flame. It is nevertheless a reasonable assumption that if an effect has been seen to follow from a cause nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, it will also do so on the thousandth occasion. The patient empirical observation of nature by scientists throughout the centuries has "proved" for all practical purposes that nature is rational, i.e., amenable to scientific investigation. If, moreover, we come to think of cause and effect as two different ways of looking at the same phenomenon rather than as one event, followed in time by another, causation becomes, as John Lewis argued in his *Introduction to Philosophy*, a *scientific necessity*, and Hume's difficulty and Taylor's objection disappear. It may be admitted that every scientific hypothesis must initially rest on an assumption. But the point is that the assumption remains an unproved dogma unless tested by experiment and this is the very objection which atheists have against the theologians — their basic dogmas, unlike those of science, cannot be so tested, and thus remain mere unsupported assertions. Again, it cannot be denied, as Taylor says, that the statement, "The empirical method of research is the only guide to truth", cannot itself be proved empirically, for any attempt to construct such a proof would violate the principle. Nevertheless, such logical dilemmas beloved by Dr. Joad hardly carry conviction and indeed, like the paradoxes of Zeno such as Achilles and the tortoise and the flying arrow which never moves, reveal reason gone mad because divorced from experience. Moreover, they can be turned against the arguer by pointing out that in this case, for example, the assertion that the statement that empiricism is the only guide to truth cannot be proved empirically, cannot *itself* be proved empirically and therefore is not itself true . . . and so *ad infinitum*. In fact, the reliability of the scientific method is admitted by all men of commonsense who refuse to let themselves be confused by metaphysical tricks of language. We all trust the evidence of our sense ("I saw it with my own eyes" is regarded as certain proof by all sane people) though, of course, we admit our senses sometimes deceive us. But even in the latter instances we correct what we regard as the error of one sense by reference to another as when we say that a stick which appears bent when held under water can be proved "really" straight by touch and measurement. In short, the onus is on those who claim that the religious method can give us accurate knowledge of reality to produce as convincing and verifiable evidence of their assertions as do the scientists.

(To be concluded)

—NEXT WEEK—

THE GHOST SHORTAGE

By G. H. TAYLOR

Our British Israelites — II

By H. CUTNER

APART FROM insisting that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were never really lost, for here they are in all their glory in Britain, all British-Israelites are convinced believers that God Almighty chose two "Families" and two only as his "Chosen" — Judah and the Ten under the name of Ephraim-Israel. Ephraim was the younger son of Joseph and British-Israelite literature is packed with his name. It has always been a wonder to me why they so rarely give it to their children. Perhaps it is far too sacred.

Most British-Israelites get red in the face with anger when they start talking about the descendants of Judah — the Jews, and they insist that, thank God, eleven of the Blessed Apostles were not Judahites. The twelfth was Judas Iscariot and — thank God again — he was the only one of the Apostles who was of the tribe of Judah.

Some even go further. It is that God Almighty saw to it that Jews and Israelites have a totally different cast of countenance. In his *Oxford Wrong*, Mr. Edward Hine quotes Isaiah 3, 8-9, to prove this: "For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen: because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory. The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves". To make this much more damning against the Jews, Mr. Hine piously altered "their countenance doth . . ." to "their countenance shall . . .". It was God who saw to it — it "shall" be done. This is the gem of British-Israelite comment:

Prior to the Crucifixion, the Jews could have passed anywhere without even being known, except by their Mosaic observances. After the Crucifixion, their recognition was to be universal, and how was this to be effected? Only by the mark of God being fixed upon them; their physical type was now to be recast — to undergo an entire change . . . Scripture is so explicit upon this point, for speaking alone to Judah, and not to Israel in a passage where Judah is directly mentioned by name without any reference to Israel at all, we are told . . .

And Mr. Hine gives his religiously "emended" version of Isaiah, adding, "Thus, from this time they became a marked people, that they may be recognised anywhere . . .". This is the kind of drivel which our British-Israelites have lapped up, and no doubt are still lapping up. There is no more a Jewish race than there is a Christian race. There are all sorts of people whose ancestors, no doubt, were converted to Judaism, and they are white, brown, and even black. There are, in fact, even some Chinese Jews.

As for the British people — there has always been an influx into Britain of all kinds of people — certainly Phœnicians, Romans, Saxons, Scots, Jews from European ghettos — to say nothing of people like the Jamaicans who are also "British". All these, in some way, have been grafted upon the "original" stock — which incidentally may not have been the "original" one for the people who first dwelt in this island perhaps will never be discovered.

The passage from Isaiah is the usual "poetical" fulmination of those religious fanatics who are always "prophesying" all kinds of horrible punishments if you don't do what you are told in a "holy" book, and which many of the unfortunate delinquents believe was written by "God", when a moment's consideration ought to have shown was really written by wily priests.

But, asks the British-Israelite, how do you account for "God's promise to Jacob"? It will be found in Genesis 35, 11, "A nation and a company of nations shall be of

thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins". For the Lord, it is obvious that about the greatest thing that could happen to anybody was this delicious bit about "kings".

Of course, the "nation" here can only mean the British nation and the "company of nations" must mean either the British Empire or the British Commonwealth of Nations — some of which are most anxious to get out of the Commonwealth, in spite of God's promise to Jacob. In any case, the quotation is only a part of what was said, for the next verse says that "the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it", and it is surely obvious that it was in this "land" would grow the "nation" and "the company of nations". This kind of doubling to emphasise a word seems to be often usual with ancient writers, for we have the case of Jesus riding into Jerusalem "sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass". No true Christian believes for one moment that "our Lord" sat on two asses when he went into the Holy City. It would have made the spectators laugh, and laughter was about the last thing the Man of Sorrows ever indulged in. In any case, the translation of the passage should be "a nation, even a company of nations".

But the joke about the hatred of Judah by all genuine British-Israelites is that, according "to the scriptures", Jesus himself was a descendant of *Judah* and not of Israel. In other words, he was a Jew like Iscariot, and he appears to have known nothing whatever about the distinction between Israel and Judah. He never really referred to it in the British-Israel way. Nor for that matter did Josephus. As the historian of the Jewish people and the son of a priest (I think), he would have known all about the wonderful events which had happened to the Ten Lost Tribes and which sent them to Europe and Britain. He would also have known how these Sons of Isaac — why were they not known as the Sons of Jacob or Israel? — or Isaac's Sons, or Saxons, changed at one fell swoop from an Arab brown to the Saxon white. But there is not a line in his voluminous history which credits him with the slightest inkling of the Glorious Destiny reserved for the Ten Lost Tribes — the imperishable honour of being the British "Race".

To deal with the innumerable books which detail the "wanderings" of Ephraim-Israel, all of them pure imagination, would bore the reader. But if the gentleman who asked us to deal with the British-Israelite theories will indicate anything he wants answering in detail, and let us know in which books I can find some unanswerable proofs of British-Israelism, I will do my best to deal with them. In the meantime, I can only say that sometimes I am more than amazed at the kind of lunacy for which Christianity is so often responsible. Religion has a lot to answer for.

THE N.S.S. IN THE WEST INDIES

READERS will be interested to hear news of N.S.S. activity in the West Indies, where a Fyzabad (Trinidad) Branch already exists and does much valuable work under the Presidency of Mr. John Jules. Another member, Mr. J. I. Prosper, is at present on the island of Grenada with the object of forming a branch there to fight — as he says — "for truth, freedom and common understanding among the peoples of the world". The Pioneer Press has supplied literature to help Mr. Prosper in his efforts "to dispel ignorance and superstition which together becloud reason". He does not underestimate his task but he thinks he can get the necessary support to start a branch.

This Believing World

The reviewer of M. Daniel-Rops' "Jesus in His Time" in *The Observer* has, we notice, renamed our own Reverent Rationalist. He (or she) calls him "the religious-minded agnostic" who will, after reading this book, "come away hungry". We are quite sure he will. The Reverent Rationalist or the Religious-minded Agnostic appears to hate any picture of "Jesus of Nazareth" which does not put that eminent Reformer in the best possible light, not as a God, but as a Man. Of course, M. Daniel-Rops' Jesus is a Roman Catholic God — and after all, can anyone imagine a better God than that?

★

The Vicar of Bolton, Canon Norburn, is a very lucky man. Not so very long ago, in the heyday of Christian faith, we shudder to think what his fate would have been. He has the temerity to say that Adam and Eve never lived — to deny the Solemn, Inspired Words of God's Holy Book! Has he considered what such blasphemy must lead to? Does he not know that if there never was a Garden of Eden with Adam, Eve, and the Hebrew-speaking Serpent, that there could never have been the Fall of Man? Has he considered the implication of such dreadful blasphemy? Without the Fall of Man, there would never have been a Saviour — that is, the Saviour who died for us all on the Cross. What answer has this unbelieving Canon to say to that?

★

No wonder Bolton is shocked to the utmost — that any Christian should thus take away the Hope of Everlasting Life from the Faithful is something too awful to contemplate. We can hardly refer also to his other blasphemy — that Jonah was never swallowed by a whale, when even the least knowledge of the Bible would have shown him that our Lord himself believed every word of it; in fact, he would have believed that Jonah swallowed the whale on exactly the same evidence. Canon Norburn can thank his lucky stars that Freethought has civilised Christianity, and so he has been saved the fate of immersion in boiling oil — a fate he might have had otherwise.

★

Roman Catholics never hide their love of censorship, and how ready they are to boycott anything and anybody who doesn't acknowledge the Pope. But that this kind of thing is part of Christianity is proved by a recent case in Carmarthen, where a licensee complained that people who supported "an extension of drinking hours" were afraid of being seen by "deacons or other members of religious bodies". In spite of the opposition of sundry men of God, particularly the Wee Frees, his application was granted.

★

But everybody knows that drinking after ten o'clock, or playing games on Sunday, is mortal sin, and Swansea is shocked that its town council may allow bowls, tennis, and even golf, on Sunday in certain parks. Letters of protest from religious bodies have poured in — hitting or rolling a ball on the Sabbath Day will only aggravate an outraged God; and as one opposer said, playing games on God's Holy Day "is something which was against the Welsh idea of a Sunday". It looks as if the Welsh idea will lose.

★

Swansea has also had a broadside from the Vicar of Clapham South. He is horrified that there is no service in Welsh there, and — much worse — a vicar was appointed to Aberdare who could not even *speak* Welsh. We shudder to think of the Lord's feelings when the unlucky parson wafts up to

Heaven supplicatory prayers in the hated English tongue. We understand that the Bible has been translated into 600 languages. Goodness — does God Almighty understand the lot?

The Rising Generation

I—TIME SCALES

THERE ARE STILL SOME children who think the world started with a bang in the first chapter of Genesis. The following suggestions are devised for a child of, say, ten, whose father, for the sake of convenience, we shall presume to be forty.

The materials required are a foot ruler and an atlas.

Mark off a quarter of an inch as representing the lifetime of the child. His father's lifetime will then correspond to one inch. The year 1956 A.D. then indicates that it is about 1,956 years since the Christian god Jesus Christ was supposed to have appeared on earth. To get back to this time on our scale, measure out four feet, across the table. A distance of 12 feet across the room will then give some idea of the time distance between ourselves and the supposed creation of Adam by the Bible god.

Scientists have, nevertheless, found that mankind existed on the earth long before that. We need another length now, and the dining room will not accommodate it. Imagine a full-sized cricket pitch, wicket to wicket. Imagine thirty of these pitches end to end stretching for nearly half a mile. This gives us an idea of how long man has been on the earth, in proportion to the boy's life of a quarter of an inch.

Jesus Christ now begins to look almost like a contemporary. In fact, if the father were to stand behind the boy, and the grandfather behind the father, the great-grandfather behind him, and so on, it would only need a line of about sixty ancestors to get back to the time of Christ.

Before man appeared, animal and plant life existed. Whereas man is not more than, and perhaps less than, a million years old (in a very primitive form) living matter goes back about 500 million years or more. We are now completely out of our depth without the use of an atlas. We need our ruler, with the boy's quarter-inch at the end, to stretch about 190 miles. An approximate distance would be London to Plymouth on the map, as the crow flies, or Glasgow to Manchester.

Finally, the earth existed for a long time before any life evolved at all. We cannot be precise but 4,000 million years is the latest estimate. We need a map of Europe to form some idea of this, and a line from London to the Crimea will tell us roughly how old the earth is when compared with the boy's quarter-inch.

The ages of ten and forty can, of course, be adjusted to requirements in individual cases. It is only necessary to adjust these: all other measurements remain stable. For example, if the boy is 15 his life becomes three-eighths of an inch; if the father is 45 he takes one and one-eighth inches, and so on.

G.H.T.

THE "BEST OF CAUSES"

"You carry on a brave battle for the best of causes, personally profitless as you must know it to be, and my good wishes are with you".—George Meredith in a letter dated July 6th, 1887, to G. W. Foote, then Editor of 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.

P. HINDE.—See note on the "Best of Causes", current issue.

CAN ANY READER tell us of the existence of any Freethought works, apart from pamphlets, in the Welsh language?

S. PHEL.—*Religion and the Modern Mind*, by Prof. W. T. Stace of Princeton (1953, London, Macmillan) is basically atheistic but, while dismissing all religious dogmas, it retains the mystic's illusion of "fusing" himself with the whole of humanity. If this also is dismissed, then Stace leaves nothing for religion at all.

G. S. KANE.—It is mentioned in *Hebrew Records*, by Dr. Giles, that Jews did not allow their sons to read certain parts of the Old Testament till they were thirty years of age.

NOTE.—The initials J.L.B. at the foot of a note on the *Screwtape Letters* (January 13th, page 10) did not refer to the Rev. J. L. Broom, to whose article on the subject the note was written as an additional comment.

W. MILES.—You obviously have not read our article on prophecy. Merely repeating Fundamentalist claims is not argument.

E. F. CROSSWELL.—The three indispensable books on Spiritualism are *Is Spiritualism based on Fraud?* by Joseph McCabe, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism* by Hereward Carrington, and *Searchlight on Psychical Research* by Joseph Rinn. It would be little use meeting an opponent without knowing these books. Ingersoll's *Lectures and Essays* will provide you with an ample "alternative moral code".

[MR. CROSSWELL, through this office, would like to contact other Freethinkers in the Slough district.]

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

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, April 1st, 7 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "Irrational Intellectuals".

Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Coopers Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool).—Sunday, April 1st, 7 p.m.: A Lecture.

"Ethics in our western world has hitherto been largely limited to the relation of man to man, but that is a limited ethics. We need a boundless ethics which will include the animals also".

—ALBERT SCHWEITZER.

Many an author's literary reputation has been founded on the stupidity of his readers.—F. A. RIDLEY.

Notes and News

WE are sometimes asked why THE FREETHINKER does not cater for the young. Two considerations make it impossible on anything like a satisfactory scale. The obvious one is shortage of space, but there is also the question of pictorial illustration adding to costs of production. Mere reading matter, unrelieved by illustration, is a poor way of appealing to the young mind. However, in this issue we make a beginning with a feature, "The Rising Generation", in which we speak, not directly to children, but to parents. It would then be for the latter to use the suggestions in the particular individual cases with which they are dealing. We must, however, warn against *compelling* the child's interest where, for the time being, that interest may be lacking.

★

WE are pleased to report that THE FREETHINKER is now on display in the General Reading Room of the Govanhill District Library, Glasgow. This latest success rewards the efforts of Mr. J. Humphrey, who tells us there was only the minimum of delay after he had presented a sample copy and signed the application form. There are still some libraries in the Glasgow district to which THE FREETHINKER could profitably be added if pressure is maintained. Another recent success was at the Public Library of Slough, Bucks.

★

THE FREETHINKER has received a letter of appreciation from the League against Cruel Sports (Nottingham Branch) in respect of our attitude towards their purposes in contrast with that taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury. "One interesting thing", writes the League's Secretary, Mr. Dilthey, "is that the Archbishop's attitude to hunting is exactly the same as his attitude to atom bombs—one of complete indifference".

★

THE West London Branch, N.S.S., are winding up a very successful indoor season on Easter Sunday, March 31st. On that evening they are giving a rather unusual programme which should be of special interest to all Freethinkers—a gramophone recital on "Atheism" by Robert H. Scott of California. This is the famous broadcast which Mr. Scott succeeded in putting over the air a few years ago and which caused such a tremendous outcry amongst the godly. Mr. Scott knows his subject. He speaks well and the records are clear. They will take about 40 minutes. The meeting will be held, as usual, at the Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, at 7.15 p.m.

NATIONAL DISASTER!

A DREADFUL CALAMITY struck England on the afternoon of March 24th, when the Royal Horse failed to finish the Grand National when in sight of victory.

Lord Rosebery expressed the sentiments of us all when he described it as "One of the most terrible things I have ever known". The noble Lord has lived through some stirring events—the battle of Stalingrad, the American floods, the Turkish earthquake and other small bubbles on the surface of things. But the Royal Horse collapsed in an apparently exhausted condition fifty yards from the finish, and this was one of the most terrible things he had ever known.

Perhaps Mr. Malenkov, who was in the same stand as the Royal Party, will now get his perspective right as to what constitutes a national disaster.

G.H.T.

The Margaret Knight-Ashley Sampson Letters

VI

KENSINGTON, LONDON, S.W.7.

December 15th, 1946.

DEAR MARGARET,

Please let me begin by wishing you and Rex a very happy Christmas. You won't, I'm sure, be observing the religious festival! But may you at least have an enjoyable Saturnalia and a good feast in the mundane sense!

Now — which has happened? — has your letter to me, or mine to you, failed to arrive? Because you speak of having “knocked the bottom out” of my theory of Deity and I (to say nothing of one or two people who are interestedly watching this correspondence) thought I'd knocked the bottom out of yours!! How odd that each should have thought he or she had defeated the other on so crucial an issue! Indeed I must confess that, if you *had* defeated me on God, I would have had to throw up the sponge. For one can't defend the Christian religion if God as a God of love has gone — can one? You must call me to book *at once* when you do anything of that kind again and I'll remember to do the same in regard to you; but, for the moment, I'd better summarise the argument by which I rather hoped you'd been caught. I can't give it in the same words; but at least I can reduce a whole letter to a paragraph. Here goes:

(1) Love is an absolute condition of creation and attraction is at the root of the whole creative life of Nature. The same is true on the human plane. The man who creates loves what he creates; and, if there is anything in it that he comes to despise, it is because that element was unworthy of his love. (I'm talking here of creating — not of making, begetting or inventing.) When, then, are we to assume that God does *not* love what He creates — that, being omnipotent, He will create so badly that He will come to despise elements in His creation? (2) You, as a Freudian, should hold that all malignancy is the result of frustration. I have read tomes explaining that, if only frustration could be removed from the human plane, there would be no evil in the world other than physical pain. Who, then, frustrated God the omnipotent — when He dwelt alone? For it seems to me, far from denying that God can be both omnipotent and benevolent, you ought to be teaching that, because He's omnipotent, He *must* be benevolent.

(3) Your argument that a universe created by a God of love could not produce pain and evil flies in the face of certain obvious facts. Sexual love, for instance, produces sadism; the Life Force produces death and destruction (unless there is something working in opposition to it which I'd gladly accept for my Devil argument). You might say that sexual desire and sadism are merely two manifestations of the same neutral force; but my answer to that is that one is recognised as normal by psychology and the other as abnormal; and this brings me on to (4) that there simply cannot be a wrong until you've first got your right. We know what we mean by “right” in the human anatomy; and, if a child were suddenly born with three hands, we would say it was “wrong”, even though it would doubtless make a more useful citizen, because it would be a violation of what was accepted as “right”. No doubt, if every child for three generations was born with three hands, we'd say *that* was right and the two-handed child wrong; but what I'm trying to get at is that, in all these cases, we can't possibly say what is “wrong” until we've first got our “right”. “Wrong” is necessarily a second

movement in a process of thought. I seem to remember your asking me whether, in that case, I regarded evil as negative — to which I replied “Yes — in the same sort of way that there are positive and negative electrical charges”. It seems to me that, if it be true (as it obviously is) that things produce their opposites, then one of two things must also be true: *either* that it is their nature to do so, which looks to me like the defeat of logic and the end of this, as of *all* arguments; or that something has interfered with the process of creation; and on the latter I take my stand.

This also applies to whether or not I accept Christian dogma as a subject for rational discussion. I believe that the truths of Christianity (as I believe them to be) can be shown by (a) the pattern of history, (b) the lives of the Christian mystics, saints and martyrs; and (c) by reason. I believe that reason can and should be applied to the other two wherever the material which they provide is material *for* reason. For clearly the doctrinal residue, so to speak, of any emotional experience, *must* be submitted to the light of reason; and this has always been taught by the Church — whether individual books or teachers have heeded it or not. There's only one thing about this that I must still maintain which I did make a condition of contravening you — that I don't attempt to *prove* the truth of Christianity in the positive sense. My aim is to show that it can be rationally defended.

You really haven't answered my challenge that Christ was either what He claimed to be or a criminal lunatic. (By the way, you say “why criminal?” But I answered that in my letter. “Because He insisted on the unconditional surrender of the will of his disciples — and that they, too, should die for belief in Him”. “They shall put you out of the synagogues . . . they shall scourge you . . . persecute you from city to city . . . put you to death for my Name's sake.”) He was, of course, a *dangerous* criminal lunatic if His claims were not true. You say something about the Higher Criticism and His never having made these gigantic claims. Well, far be it from me to decry the Higher Criticism which has done a great work for the historical vindication of the Bible; but I think you're perhaps confusing the lukewarm school of Anglican Modernism which rationalised away the supernatural claims of the Gospel, with the really great men in this field, Loisy and Schweitzer. Those men accepted the obvious fact that Christ was either God or a lunatic and spoke of Him as “a deluded peasant”. The school of Modernism, so popular 20 years ago, is now dead among undergraduates in both Universities, so some dons at Oxford told me three weeks ago; and I doubt there are any in the Church under 30 today. You admit Christ possessed a “streak of madness”. I can only gasp and say *some streak!* It dominates the whole of His teaching. “Ye have heard how it was said old time . . . but I say unto you”, “No man cometh unto the Father except by Me”. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” . . . “Which of you convicteth Me of sin” . . . etc., etc. The Gospels are honeycombed with these gigantic claims and you can't possibly eliminate them all without destroying the whole thing. So much for His “streak of madness”; but there is the ethical challenge too, which you haven't answered. For if it be true that you gain ultimate victory by personal submission, that you receive back with interest what you give, that the meek inherit the earth, etc., *then there are laws stronger than the laws of Nature working against them and overcoming them.* From what realm do these laws

proceed and who dispenses them? Please don't "by-pass" this—it's crucial. For the laws of nature show that the stronger side overcomes, that what you give away you lose, that the strong rule, etc., etc.

Rationalisation! Of course I do agree that millions of people rationalise a kind of sentimental Christianity—where God will never "let them down" and will finally receive them into everlasting bliss—whatever they've done; but have we got to accept this parody of Christianity (almost entirely in opposition to the true one) as our model? You people who regard Christianity as a rationalisation overlook far too many facts and hardly look at all outside our own century. I suppose you realise that for 1,800 years Christians (with a few remarkable exceptions) believed in a Hell of fire and brimstone—that those who broke the Christian moral law, unless they repented, were cast therein; and that even purgatory was a place of red hot poker. (I can argue with you, if you like, as I did once with Joad, that these things are not contained in the N.T.; but we'd better keep to the main issue at present.) Moreover, if Christianity is a rationalisation as such, it was a rationalisation from the beginning. This means that people made a comfortably and homely rationalisation that they knew was going to plunge them into persecution and deprivation *here and now*—loss of family and freedom—imprisonment and finally an excruciating death. Honestly, Margaret, the thing is so silly and becoming so hoary-headed and worn out—that I didn't know intelligent people any longer entertained the idea. I can only say for myself that I *know* Christianity can't be a rationalisation of mine—even if it's an illusion; because, if it's true, I've condemned myself already as an outcast and can only be saved by a miracle which Christianity gives me no right to expect. Dr. Johnson felt the same about himself. I just have not fulfilled the law—am always breaking it and only repent at fitful intervals and never, I suppose, entirely. Of course I don't believe in a Hell of fire and brimstone—so it hasn't sent me mad as it did Cowper. I should have thought that most rational beings, if they wanted to rationalise a faith, would have chosen something that would permit them to lie, avenge themselves, drink, gamble and fornicate, and be sure of salvation in the end. There were several of *those faiths* going in the Roman world when Christianity arose. How odd that they should have rationalised a faith that meant all the woes in this world that men could devise with torture and death awaiting them! And yet the early Christians didn't seem to be madmen. They overturned the Empire and won in the end.

You quote Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, but the quotation you make doesn't encourage me to expect much from it. Russell accuses Aquinas of (a) arguing to a fixed end, and (b) falling back on revelation when he had no rational argument to hand. I'm surprised at (a) since the whole of Europe thundered with the controversy of St. Thomas Aquinas' attempt to incorporate Aristotelianism into the highly platonic system of thought which had reigned in the Church since the time of Augustine; and (b) leaves out something important. *Aquinas had already proved the rationality of the Christian revelation.* He therefore had, by the laws of logic, every right to refer to it. In fact, Russell is doing exactly what he accuses Aquinas (falsely) of doing. He is omitting what does not suit his thesis—is "rationalising". Finally I detect a bit of rationalisation at the end of your own letter. For you say "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". Look again! For

you'll see that I said "*except in a sublimated form*". Do you see? You omitted what didn't suit your thesis; but I know how easy it is to do this unconsciously.

All the best to you both, as ever, ASHLEY.

(To be continued)

Royalty, a Religious Substitute

By COLIN McCALL

DR. BRIAN CHAPMAN, a lecturer at Manchester University, is of quiet disposition, but he has certainly exploded a bombshell in his attack on the British monarchy, published in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. And his first contribution to the paper was appropriately accompanied by a reproduction of David Low's splendid cartoon, "The Day After", which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* immediately following Coronation Day and caused an enormous sensation at the time.

The Stockholm Correspondent of the latter newspaper (writing on January 25th) quotes Dr. Chapman's "equally merciless picture in words", viz., "This mass orgasm can only partly be accounted for by the emotional sterility of the English in private. Its roots are deep in contemporary life".

Dr. Chapman does not think that a civilised country needs a figurehead to personify itself, and to provide stability and continuity. On the contrary, he maintains that the more civilised a people become, the more easily can they do without such personification. That the monarchy adds stability to public life in Britain is "historical rubbish", he says; to suggest that it is a symbol of the unity of the Commonwealth is much too strong. "The reasons for the Commonwealth's hanging together are primarily financial".

Nor does the monarchy play the role of adviser, even if such were necessary in the modern state (which he does not believe). To what, then, must be attributed the "new magic of the monarchy": this new and primitive yearning to be dazzled by royalty? Dr. Chapman thinks that the Royal Family are "firstly, the direct beneficiaries of the English educational system". "The perpetual adolescence of many Englishmen is one of the disturbing phenomena in contemporary England", he continues, "and it is not adolescence of the uneducated but adolescence of the educated".

He recognises the relation of royalty to religion, and considers that the decline in orthodox religious belief has contributed to the recent increase in popularity of the monarchy. The Royal Family are "a religious substitute". And the new middle class makes an important contribution to the cult, wishing "to be reassured that their dislike of culture and their satisfaction with trivial things does not damage their claim to social importance". "This reassurance, it seems to me", adds Dr. Chapman, "is the function of contemporary royalty".

It is refreshing to read such a criticism of this outworn institution, especially from a man in Dr. Chapman's academic position. When politicians of all the main parties perpetuate the expensive anachronism and participate in its ceremonies; when newspapers of (nearly) all shades feature the Royal Family at every opportunity; and when radio, TV and cinema inflict them upon us *ad nauseum*, it is encouraging to know that there are still some republican sentiments about. When one remembers the great republicans of the past, it seems shameful that apparently no politician of standing dares or desires to utter such sentiments today. It is sad that Dr. Chapman's articles were

not published here as well as in Sweden and that we have to be content with a short resumé of them. But that is sufficient to confirm his candour and his courage. Free-thinkers will welcome his outspoken, yet reasoned remarks and hope that the full text will soon be available "for home consumption".

TRADE UNION LECTURE REPORT

MR. F. A. RIDLEY, President, N.S.S., addressed a meeting of the Barnsbury (Islington) A.E.U. Branch on Friday, March 16th, on "The BBC and Freedom of Speech". He dealt with many aspects of the Corporation's policy towards minority movements and showed that it vetoed any expression of Free-thought propaganda, or of philosophical or political opinion that ran counter to the line of the "big battalions". The Branch demonstrated its support of Mr. Ridley's views by unanimously adopting the following resolution to be sent to the BBC, the T.U.C. and the Islington Trades Council:

The Barnsbury Branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union calls upon the Islington Trades Council, and all Trade Union bodies to voice its protest at the continued suppression of minority opinion on the British Broadcasting Corporation's public broadcasts.

We feel that the broadcasting of unorthodox opinions, of religious, philosophical, and political nature should be encouraged to a much greater extent than is apparent at present.

The virtual monopoly of the established Churches in so far that religious propaganda is broadcast, is an affront to all democratic opinion. Likewise in political broadcasts.

It is only by the fullest discussion of controversial subjects that progress in thought and action can be maintained. We also suggest that in such matters as industrial disputes, the leading shop stewards in the dispute should be allowed ample time to put their case to the public over the air.

We welcome the stand made by the National Secular Society on this matter, and call upon all trade union bodies to support the Society in its campaign.

The Branch also asked for information to be sent to it from time to time concerning the National Secular Society's campaign for freedom of the air. S. SALTER.

N.S.S. EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

MARCH 7TH.—Present: The President, Treasurer, Mrs. Grant and Messrs. Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Tiley, and the Secretary. This was a special meeting for discussing the sub-committee's proposals for revised rules, which will be circulated to branches.

MARCH 14TH.—Present: The President, Treasurer, Mrs. Venton and Messrs. Arthur, Barker, Cleaver, Gordon, Hornibrook, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Tiley and the Secretary.

The views of branches on the venue for the Annual Conference at Whitsun were considered, and the E.C. decided to recommend Liverpool, where no N.S.S. Conference has taken place since 1937.

Tentative arrangements were considered for public propaganda in Dumfries and Bristol in the near future, and also for a visit of Mrs. Knight to Sheffield later. Application for two speakers by the Birmingham branch was granted.

The meeting expressed thanks to Mr. G. Stewart for the gift of Milton's writings on the Church from the library of Charles Bradlaugh.

The Conference Agenda Sub-Committee meetings were fixed and the next E.C. meeting was fixed for April 18th.

CORRESPONDENCE

CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

In "This Believing World", March 16th, we read, "Whatever may be said against modern Christianity, it has at least abolished slavery...". The lying claim that Christianity abolished slavery has been put forward by Christian apologists for generations now, and rivers of ink and spates of words, in books, pamphlets, lectures and debates have been expended (apparently in vain) by Free-thought writers and lecturers, in order to demonstrate the undoubted historical truth, that both Islam and Christianity, both the Bible and the Koran, support slavery as a divine institution. It has been suppressed or mitigated under pressure from other factors—economic, cultural and ethical—against the determined opposition of organised Christianity.

Signed articles express the individual views of the contributor;

unsigned items are taken to convey the ideas of THE FREETHINKER and of the movement. LEN EBURY, Vice-President, N.S.S. [What the writer should have said was that slavery had been abolished in *Christian countries* as distinct from Muslim countries. Mr. Ebury's criticism is therefore justified.—Ed.]

EUTHANASIA

I fear that Mr. John Boden has misunderstood one or two of the points I raised in my article on euthanasia.

In the first place, I did not suggest—as Mr. Boden seems to imply—either that suffering is good for the patient or that the patient "believes or knows it is doing him good". In fact, I rebutted the idea, merely noting the case of two men (others there doubtless are) who appear to me to be exceptions to the general rule that prolonged physical suffering tends to destroy human personality.

My remark about dispatching at birth those born with a grievous physical handicap was really an aside from my argument for euthanasia, but I do not regret making it. I agree with Mr. Boden that there would have been no Helen Keller if we "put to sleep" at birth those found to be gravely disabled. But of the untold thousands of those terribly afflicted, most of whom must to their dying day live severely incomplete lives, does the rare occurrence of great talent or genius make it all worth while? It is a big moral question, and one that I fortunately born, should not like to answer affirmatively. G. I. BENNETT.

THE BOOK OF JOB

Mr. S. W. Brooks and myself appear to be talking at cross-purposes about the Book of Job. It would, in fact, take the patience of Job to sort out our respective differences! As I have Mr. Brooks's explicit assurance that he *did* read my original article on the subject, he will recall, no doubt, that my main point was that the canonical Book of Job is by no means identical with the original work which, as a result of probably deliberate mistranslations and, certainly, of rabbinical glosses, has "suffered a sea-change", so to speak, into Mr. Brooks's Job. Our Job is, of course, a religious book; that is why it is there! I can only repeat my advice to Mr. Brooks to try to get hold of a copy of Dr. E. J. Dillon's *Biblical Sceptics*, which contains an exact translation of the original Job plus an erudite commentary. It was to this original Job that my remarks exclusively refer. One cannot, surely, hold its author responsible for interpolations added to his text long after he was dead. As Dr. Dillon remarked, the "Biblical sceptics", Job and Ecclesiastes, owe their eventual inclusion in the canon to additions which they did not foresee, and which have deliberately falsified their original meaning. Dr. Dillon's book was published in 1895, and a separate translation of the original text of Job in 1905. F. A. RIDLEY.

OBITUARIES

WILLIAM GUELKE

WE record with regret the death (at the age of 80) of Mr. William Guelke. He was a reader of THE FREETHINKER and a staunch atheist to the end. There was no religious service at the funeral. He is survived by Mrs. Guelke to whom we offer our sincere condolences.

ALDERMAN JOHN JEFFREY

I REGRET to report the death of Alderman John Jeffrey of Tantobie at the ripe old age of 90. He had been an active Secularist for many years, and was well known in the area for his outspoken opinions. He met with the movement, in the days when Bradlaugh toured the North-East, and was later a staunch supporter and helper when Chapman Cohen was in the same area. He could always be counted to support my own activities. He did a lot to improve the lot and comfort of the aged, infirm, and destitute who were to be found in the old-time workhouses. He had been a member of Durham County Council for over 27 years, and was the oldest alderman when he retired. He was also a member and chairman of Stanley and Tantobie Urban Councils.

His regular work was in connection with the Trades Unions. Kindly and cheerful, he was always willing to do whatever he could to help humanity, and not least, to free their minds from superstition and inherited religious falsehoods.

An oration was delivered at the the cremation in Newcastle by the undersigned in response to a request made many years ago by John Jeffrey. Our sympathy goes to his family.—JOHN T. BRIGHTON.

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