

The Freethinker

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THE CONTEMPORARY EVOLUTION of old-fashioned British imperialism into an international, a cosmopolitan, organisation embracing many races, colours and religions is one of the most remarkable achievements of our time. It is nowadays a far cry from the predatory imperialism of such "pioneers of Empire" as Clive and Hastings to the current Republic of India. One must agree with a remark made, rather surprisingly, over the radio recently to the effect that the sooner the Commonwealth based on voluntary co-operation entirely replaces the old coercive imperialism the better it will be. Since that *enfant terrible* of the BBC, Mr. Gilbert Harding, made this now celebrated remark last autumn, recent events in Cyprus and elsewhere have underlined its force and timeliness.

All progressives must welcome the current substitution of international democracy for the old coercive colonial regimes. Secularists in Britain must in particular welcome the religious implications inherent in this new political departure. The fast-developing British "Commonwealth of Nations" conforms increasingly to the ideal pattern of a secular state. Within its boundaries are to be found religious cults on terms of complete equality before the law. The basic principle of international secularism lies in the essential equality of all religious and anti-religious cults before the law and in the civic functions of the impartial State. This principle, which would have delighted the heart of our illustrious founder, Charles Bradlaugh, is now written into the constitution not only of America and Russia, but equally of the majority of autonomous states within the Commonwealth. The creation of a secular constitution in the Republic of India, traditionally the most religious country in the world, is one of the most remarkable extant examples.

A Muslim Theocracy

The old British "Indian Empire" has been partitioned into two separate states — Hindu India, or Bharat, and Pakistan, the "Land of the Pure" — that is, of the Indian Muslims. The long agitation conducted by the Muslim League for a separate Islamic state was finally successful. Yet only a year or so before the British finally withdrew in 1947, I was told by a former Muslim Lord Mayor of Calcutta that in his opinion the Muslims had very little chance of securing their coveted state after the then pending withdrawal of the British! However, Allah evidently looked after his own. Since then the overwhelmingly Muslim state of Pakistan has existed more or less happily as a separate political entity. Now, on March 23rd, 1956, it has been officially constituted as an independent Republic inside the British Commonwealth, a step taken some time ago by its giant neighbour Bharat.

India and Pakistan

Though the republican form of Hindu India and of Muslim

Pakistan is identical, the actual content of the two states is entirely dissimilar. However superstitious the Indian masses may be in practice, India is legally constituted as a *secular* state in which all religions are equal before the law. Pakistan is, however, a *religious* state, a Theocracy by definition (Land of the Pure). The "Pure" are the Muslim followers of Mohammed. The whole Islamic set-up is exclusively medieval both in name and fact. The official title of the state embodies the descriptive adjective *Islamic*. Pakistan is an *Islamic* republic, its basis is religious, not political. Thus a new Muslim state is added to the world with approximately 100,000,000 inhabitants.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

Elizabeth by the Grace of Allah

— By F. A. RIDLEY —

Totalitarian Islam

Nor is this all, for Islam is, in modern phraseology, totalitarian religion, claiming absolute control over, not only the spiritual and ethical, but also over the political and economic activities of the "Faithful", of an all-embracing character which only the R.C. Church ever claimed in the West, and which few Catholics dare claim nowadays. Islam is the creed of "submission", absolute submission to an absolute god, Allah, the autocratic Sultan of the Universe. Any *Islamic* state recognises the Koran as the eternal word of Allah dictated to Mohammed as the infallible source, not only of ethics and theology, but of politics and economics and law. The culture of Islamic states is based ultimately on the Koran, and a vast system of legal casuistry has been evolved steadily over 13 centuries by the light of Allah's infallible revelation, as immutably prescribed in the unerring text of the Koran. The dead hand of Islam throttles any society that submits to it, perhaps even more effectively than any other religion. Misguided people, apparently including some ill-informed 19th century Rationalists, who described Islam as "liberal" in contrast with Christian obscurantism, have obviously never made any close study of probably the most totalitarian of all recorded religions. Any competent study of Muslim "Institutions" is concerned, not only or even primarily with theology, but with *jurisprudence*, the "science" of applying the theological dogmas of Islam to any and every aspect of human existence in an Islamic community.

Medieval Theocracy and Modern Secularism

The incorporation of a totalitarian Muslim theocracy which is *in* the modern secular world and the British secular commonwealth but emphatically not a *bone fide* part of such a world, is bound to become a source of future trouble. This is so particularly in the relations of the Islamic state with its giant neighbour India, which has long and bitter memories of Muslim "aggression" during the last thousand years, including its actual conquest by the Muslim Moguls. Even if the Muslim and Hindu advocates of a "Holy" or preventive war are restrained by their governments, still, the creation of an intolerant confessional state

based on exclusive religious dogmas bodes ill to anyone, not least to a British secular commonwealth based on radically different principles. In itself, the creation of a powerful Muslim theocracy, akin to those already existing in backward feudal states like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, is a reactionary step in the modern world. Many modern secular states, founded on the separation of Church and State, have had bitter experience of Muslim fanaticism, the Soviet Union most recently in central Asia. It is pertinent to recall at this point that no branch of the World Union of Freethinkers exists today in any Muslim land! Even Hindu India has its Rationalist Association, and a very gallant one! But there is no such movement in any of the citadels of the Koran! How long such an intolerant Muslim theocracy will continue to acknowledge even nominal allegiance to a Christian Queen remains to be seen.

Queen by the Grace of Allah!

But why have a Christian Queen at all as head of the Commonwealth? Why should the head of a multi-religious

and multi-racial international federation adhere exclusively to one religion — and to a minority sect within even that one religion? Why not make the Queen as impartial in religion as the Federation over which she presides? She cannot very well be a Catholic in Quebec, a Buddhist in Ceylon and a Muslim in Nigeria as well as being both Anglican and Presbyterian in the British Isles! So why must she be *any* of them? Her Majesty, we suggest, has a personal interest in the secular principle of the separation of Church and State. Actually, if the Head of the Commonwealth *has* to have an official religion, then Islam can put in quite a strong claim! There are perhaps more Muslims within the Commonwealth than Christians, and certainly there are far more Muslims in Pakistan than Anglicans throughout the whole Commonwealth. If "Elizabeth by the Grace of Allah" sounds ridiculous, it represents, after all, the *reductio ad absurdum* of an absurd principle, that of the official establishment of any religion in the modern secular world.

The Ghost Shortage

By G. H. TAYLOR

THERE is a serious shortage of ghosts in both Britain and America, the latter a potential importer, supplies permitting.

An important film producer, Alfred Hitchcock, conducted a month's search for a haunted house which he required for a jolly party gathering in New York. Failing to find one, he employed an advertising agency but without success. The City officials were then brought into the search but they, too, sought in vain.

He then had recourse to the American Psychic Research Society, who told him there were no ghosts left in the district. Chrome and concrete are apparently not a suitable habitat for ghosts.

Mr. Hitchcock (according to a report in *News Chronicle*) finally settled for an abandoned, cobwebbed place at No. 7, East 30th Street. His men were then set to work "spectrefying" the building to make it a suitable substitute. They put in drapes and old paintings, behind which they installed mechanical spectral voices. Workmen brought in loads of dust, and gradually the place took on the correct atmosphere.

We have recently in this country had the sobering experience of seeing one of our best authenticated ghost haunts, Borley Rectory, debunked. If this sort of thing continues it may be necessary to launch a nation-wide S.O.S. (Save Our Spectres) appeal.

We have consulted a leading official of the Ghosts' Union on the matter. He deplored that the advance of civilisation had brought with it a lamentable lack of respect for spectres. Time was, he recalled with nostalgia, when the nightly visit of a ghost to a lady's bedroom was greeted with the proper display of fear. She would draw the clothes tightly round her head and make herself as small as possible, presenting the appearance of a compact shivering heap. Given a welcome such as this, he said, the ghost was prepared to stay all night. The modern habit of flooding the room with light by a switch under the pillow was most discouraging, particularly if accompanied by "Did you shut the cat up?" or similar disrespectful greeting.

As for the manufacture of ghostly voices, he declared indignantly, this profane mimicry was aimed at lowering the prestige of spectral sounds to the level of American stamp machines which talk to their customers. The next innovation would be a penny in the slot for the voice of the

ninth Earl making an eternal curse. The rattling of chains was another phenomenon earmarked for reduplication, and the Union had already a sub-committee of the chain-gang sitting on the problem.

He further deplored the existence of Freethinkers, who were encouraging the modern trend of education, which would, if not arrested, eventually result in a ghostless civilisation. So long as this trend went on, he concluded, the ghosts' strike which had begun in New York would extend throughout the civilised world.

The First Scientist

ALMOST everything that distinguishes the modern world from earlier centuries is attributable to science, which achieved its most spectacular triumphs in the seventeenth century. The Italian Renaissance, though not medieval, is not modern; it is more akin to the best age of Greece. The sixteenth century, with its absorption in theology, is more medieval than the world of Machiavelli. The modern world, so far as mental outlook is concerned, begins in the seventeenth century. No Italian of the Renaissance would have been unintelligible to Plato or Aristotle; Luther would have horrified Thomas Aquinas, but would not have been difficult for him to understand. With the seventeenth century it is different: Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas and Occam, could not have made head or tail of Newton.

—BERTRAND RUSSELL. (*History of Western Philosophy*)

If miracles were ever established by evidence — and if the Freethinker's case is demolished at the outset — what is the use of discussing whether there is evidence enough to prove a miracle? There is not a single miracle told of Jesus Christ that has not been told of others, and in every case conditions of belief were identical. The question for the Freethinker to discuss is not whether there is evidence enough to establish a miracle, but what are the conditions that lead people to believe in miracles.

—CHAPMAN CONNELL

—NEXT WEEK—

CONTROVERSY: —

WAS MALTHUS MISTAKEN?

Aff. G. Dickinson

Neg. G. I. Bennett

Faith of a Scholar

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

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

(Concluded from page 98)

Up to this point the reasoning of Prof. Taylor has been subtle and ingenious, however unconvincing. But now he suddenly relapses into the familiar and oft-discredited argument from purpose in nature. "Numerous insects", he writes, "instinctively deposit their eggs on a particular kind of leaf which will supply suitable nourishment for the coming generation of grubs, though the insects themselves will die before the eggs are hatched!" The adaptation here he argues is "prospective" — to a remoter future. The life of organic nature, he goes on, is pervaded throughout by prospective adaptations of this kind, and he proceeds for many pages to give alleged examples of such evidences of "teleology" throughout nature, concluding that there is therefore a directing Mind or Vital Force behind it all. The learned Professor's arguments seem strangely confused on this issue. Of course, there are adaptations in nature (though to call them "prospective" is to commit the pathetic fallacy in its most extreme form); if there were not then nothing could exist. If the insects referred to by Prof. Taylor did not deposit their eggs on the one leaf which would nourish the coming generation, and if all other forms of life did not act on the same principle, then neither Prof. Taylor nor his present critic nor anyone else would be here to argue the point. Adaptation, order, purpose, "design" are the very conditions of existence, and the whole evolutionary process is based on trial and error selection and rejection. This is surely the very foundation of evolutionary science, and it is astonishing that Prof. Taylor does not see that to argue that there is adaptation in nature is merely to argue that there is life. To express wonder at the fact of adaptation is to behave, as Cohen points out, like the curate who praised God because death occurs at the end of life and not in the middle, while to introduce a directing mind to explain adaptation is to abandon science for superstition. Prof. Taylor goes on to make fun of materialists who publish essays deriding Christianity with the object of helping their readers to escape from error, his point being that this is a contradiction of their position of determinations by the past since the event (the conversion of Christians) lies in the unrealised future. But as an illustrious namesake of the Professor, Mr. G. H. Taylor, pointed out some months ago in *THE FREETHINKER*, in all such cases the determining influence is not the future event but the past thought of it. And this thought, like all thoughts, is causally conditioned by physical occurrences in the brain. No refutation of materialism is thus involved.

Prof. Taylor is too intelligent not to see that the existence of purpose in nature even if conceded would lead us legitimately to infer only the reality of many separate designers with conflicting aims. We arrive at polytheism and not at the God of the Unitarian let alone of the Christian. To establish that God is one and is good, Prof. Taylor, like Kant, falls back on the argument from moral values. He first demonstrates that all moral judgments are absolute in the sense that whatever ethical theory we adopt we must always end up by telling persistent objectors to it, "You ought because you ought". Most atheists are utilitarians in ethics, holding that goodness consists in the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Point three of the aims and objects of the National Secular Society, for example, affirms that "morality . . . aims at promoting the happiness and well-being of mankind". But, says Prof.

Taylor, suppose someone asks the utilitarian "Why should I promote human happiness when I should prefer to go on as I please without bothering about the effects of my conduct on the general happiness?" And to that question the utilitarian can really only reply, "You ought to promote the general happiness because you ought, because it is the highest good". There is force in this contention, but the conclusion which Prof. Taylor draws, namely that "there exists something of absolute worth in the universe applicable at all times and in all stations", does not follow. All that does follow is that there are numerous codes of ethics which have been evolved through social intercourse in a completely natural fashion and that the "ought because you ought" retort must be used to critics of all of them, whether the codes be primitive or developed. The cannibal can give rational justification up to a point for his belief that it is right to indulge in human sacrifice, but he is eventually driven to Prof. Taylor's "absolute" like the rest of us. This, however, does not prove his ethic is "absolutely right at all times and in all situations". We can, of course, say that some codes are objectively better than others just as we can say that some systems of physical health are better than others, our criterion in both cases being the consensus of rational civilised opinion. But even this is partly relative since there is a wide divergence of ethical viewpoint even among the most cultured peoples. Prof. Taylor maintains that the existence of a moral law implies the existence of a moral lawgiver. But as we have seen, there is no one absolute moral law, and in any case a moral law is simply an account of how human beings ought to behave according to the prevailing ethical system. There is a familiar confusion here between the judicial command and the natural description. An apple which falls from a tree does not obey the law of gravity as a man who pays his wireless licence obeys the law of the land. By its fall the apple simply exemplifies the "law", and the same applies to so-called "moral laws".

Prof. Taylor attacks the naturalist view of ethics on the ground that it lacks "authority". "There can be no good reason", he argues, "why on the secularist premise I should not lie whenever I honestly judge that it would be convenient to do so!" To this there are two answers. First, the social conscience (Freud's "super-ego") inherited from the dawn of history and evolved originally as a matter of sheer necessity, operates inevitably in all such cases. Secondly, the situation is in no wise improved by introducing God as the supreme ethical authority, for the question then arises, "Why should I obey him?" Indeed, in view of the Almighty's immoral actions as revealed in nature and scripture, it would be rational to *disobey* his commands. Prof. Taylor here did himself a grave injustice. From my own knowledge of his character I am certain that he did not refrain from lying merely because he feared God's disapproval. Ethical principles remain valid whether or not a God guarantees them, and so the concept of deity is again proved superfluous.

Prof. Taylor's little work is a brave attempt to provide theism with a rational basis. In this it fails, as I have tried to show, but I nevertheless recommend it to the attention of all Freethinkers because it advances the best case that can be put for orthodoxy and because it is a model of clarity in exposition.

This Believing World

The BBC actually had to apologise the other week for a prodigious blunder. It said, in answer to a quiz question, that "St. Peter was the first Pope", much to the disgust of the Protestant Alliance, which protested that there is no proof of this whatever, and no proof that the saintly Apostle was even a Roman Catholic. The Controller of the Light Programme replied that they took this dreadful mistake quite seriously, and regretted it was broadcast. So we now have the BBC official authority to say poor Peter was *not* the first Pope. We wonder what the Corporation would answer if we pointed out that Peter was a "myth", that is, he never lived at all?

★

Believers in "flying saucers" were enthralled the other week at Cheltenham, when a local broadcaster, Mr. A. Constance, gave a lecture in which he submitted that they are all "genuine", that their occupants were superior beings who can materialise or dematerialise at will, and that they have come to this world because "it is going to blow itself up". In all this, he was supported by the Rev. E. P. F. Stubbs—which should be enough to satisfy all sceptics.

After all, in God's Holy Writ we are told and must believe that Elijah went up to Heaven in a fiery chariot, and by this time he must have got there; and "our Lord" himself, in the fullness of time, ascended to Heaven, and as every Christian knows, is sitting on the right hand side of himself or of the Lord—which, is not easy to disentangle from the holy account. So Mr. Stubbs and Mr. Constance must be right about flying saucers.

★

We were delighted to learn that three Nigerian brothers were not brought to God through the saintly efforts of Billy Graham—according to an article in *News Chronicle*. It was the Lord himself. That is as it should be. And so thoroughly was one of the brothers converted, that he now spends his time preaching to cinema queues and race crowds. If we dare add a suggestion—why not give some of the punters a holy tip straight from God Almighty? There is nothing better than such practical Christianity, and a good win coming from Heaven, with prayers for similar tips, would bring more punters to Christ than any specials, naps or doubles from Captain Coe or Newmarket.

★

But (also according to "News Chronicle") lots and lots of our boys and girls are devoting their lives to Christ. In Morden, Surrey, there is a Sunday school with 2,000 children and 176 teachers; in one Cambridge college, out of 300 undergraduates, 100 are regular communicants; in 1955, Rome made 12,000 conversions in Britain; more young men now want to be Anglican clergymen than since 1911; and so on. It is all very intriguing, especially as the *News Chronicle* writer gloomily admits that only ten people in every hundred can be found in church on Sunday. They have "broken with organised Christianity". Which is, after all, quite a good thing.

★

The well-known TV personality, Miss Jeanne Heal, looked positively bewildered the other evening when she discussed the absorbing topic of "immortality" with a parson and a Salvation Army officer. She herself, while fully believing in Christianity as far as baptism and going to church are concerned, felt very hazy about living for eternity, whether in the bosom of Jesus or not. But the parson and the S.A. officer had no doubt whatever. They both constantly experienced God Almighty in their lives, and the parson had the additional proof that immortality was promised by "our Lord" himself in the holy written word.

That was enough for both. They knew now they would live for eternity, though it is only fair to say that Miss Heal seemed as bewildered as ever. For, from a BBC report on religion, she learnt that even among the most religious believers, there was the haziest idea about immortality, most Christians being utterly indifferent to living afterwards always and for ever with Jesus. They actually preferred this world and wanted to live in it as long as possible. It is all very, very sad, especially for parsons.

★

There is at the moment some awful disappointment in psychic circles. It was once thought that a real live poltergeist had appeared at last—one that could be caught in the act so to speak—in a house in Battersea; and even our national newspapers scented some terrific news. According to a *Psychic News* investigator, a message was received from the naughty spirit that all would be ended, there would be no more baffling tricks, raps, noises, and above all, no more breakages of valuable china. To the consternation of the victims, the poltergeist did not keep his (or her) promise and the seraphic phenomena still continue.

★

But what makes this particular poltergeist so remarkable is that so far not a single incident has been—according to *Psychic News*—"authenticated". The investigator spent hours on end in, and paid several visits to, the house, and nothing whatever happened; and he is so very surprised. But this does not mean that "nothing abnormal" did not happen, only that poltergeists sometimes hate performing before strangers. In other words, there really are poltergeists. Otherwise, without these and other spooks, what could *Psychic News* write about?

Twelfth Man for Celtic

THE CONNECTION between religion and football may not be very strong in England, but in Glasgow, where there are strong contingents of home-bred Protestants and immigrant Irish Catholics, football partisanship is characteristically inflamed by local religious fervour. I remember my father's gales of laughter as he described to me, when a boy, how on one occasion during a match between Rangers and Celtic he noticed on the terraces some Celtic supporters praying to the Virgin Mary for victory. My youthful astonishment has through the years given way to pained surprise at the lack of sportsmanship in bringing the Virgin, and even God himself, into the game to turn the scales in favour of one side. After all, the Rangers team contract to play the Celtic team, *not* the Celtic team plus God Almighty. It is easy to assess the unfairness in having this powerful unseen Player—the Almighty One—on the Celtic side, with Rangers not even informed of the fact.

It has been known that in order to "keep the peace" at these matches supporters entering the turnstiles have been "frisked" for concealed national flags and other "provocative emblems". The real difficulty, however, is to lay hands on the hidden Deity which the Celtic fans bring to their team's aid. The balance could only be redressed, we suggest, by giving the Rangers another Deity to help them. Therefore, the Rangers management care to apply at THE FREETHINKER offices, a plentiful and varied assortment of gods of all descriptions and sizes, drawn from all manner of primitive and pagan sources, will be laid at their disposal, each and every one guaranteed to be no less efficacious than the one used by Celtic.

J. GORDON

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Central London Branch N.S.S. (Tower Hill).—Every Thursday, 1 p.m.: Speakers — J. M. ALEXANDER and others.
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every week-day, 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, April 8th, 7 p.m.: H. CUTNER, "G. W. Foote—His Life and Times".
Manchester Humanist Fellowship (64 George Street).—Saturday, April 7th, 3 p.m.: Annual General Meeting.
Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant, High Street).—Sunday, April 8th, 7 p.m.: E. A. SEELEY, "The Progressive League".
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, April 8th, 11 a.m.: PROF. H. LEVY, "Nuclear Weapons and Ethical Principles".

Notes and News

We referred some weeks ago to a local press controversy on Christianity which was being carried on by Mr. J. L. Shepherd, of the N.S.S. Executive, in the *Express and Independent*, Essex. The controversy was still in full force in mid-March, letters covering 500 to 1,000 words on both sides, and heavy headlines such as "Pray for Mr. Shepherd". In one issue he had no fewer than half a dozen opponents. Mr. Turner, also of the West Ham Branch, has joined in the series, which is quite evidently creating much local attention.

★

We recently received a letter from Mr. F. P. Wortman, Associate Editor of *Progressive World*, the organ of the United Secularists of America. Mr. Wortman lives in Albany, Georgia, in "the Bible Belt, mostly Protestant, and somewhat backward . . . orthodox and quite superstitious". "I am alone and marked", he says, but thanks to "a liberal editor who supplies me with 60,000 readers, I have carried on a Freethought campaign for over five years, pulling no punches". His fundamentalist Protestant neighbours are not, however, Mr. Wortman's worst worry. "Catholicism", he tells us, "is making hay in this country". "It is difficult for you English to understand to what extent the war-mongering, witchhunting hysteria has corrupted so many

avenues, especially those of education and communication". Mr. Wortman's mail is tampered with and he has had to keep his name off outgoing letters, merely giving street number for return. "It seems", he continues, "as near as we can determine that the tampering is done on railway mail cars"; and "We have learned that the railway clerks throw mail into rivers as they cross. Fishermen pick up bundles. It is impossible to fix responsibility". Books by H. G. Wells have been burnt in New York! Mr. Wortman suggests that "it will be best" if we address envelopes to him "simply as 'Householder'", etc., rather than put his name on them. Ironically, Mr. Wortman's letter to us bore the United States purple 3 cents stamp featuring the Statue of Liberty and the words "Liberty" and "In God we Trust".

★

MENTION of fundamentalism reminds us that a good deal of it still lingers on in parts of the British Isles. It would seem to be strongest in certain areas of Wales. In Merthyr Tydfil, for instance, the town General Purposes Committee refused to recommend that a deputation on behalf of Sunday cinemas be received by the Council. After pressure from the Trades and Labour Council and the Sunday Cinemas Association, the full Council referred the matter back to the Committee with a recommendation that the deputation be received. The deputation has secured 12,000 signatures in favour of Sunday opening. Freethinkers in the district who are prepared to help the Sunday-opening campaign should get in touch with N.S.S. member Mr. D. Shipper, 66 Tudor Road, Cardiff.

"Dai the Singer"

SOMEWHERE in a graveyard at Ross in Herefordshire lies a brave Freethinker of the late eighteenth century. He died in the barn of a local inn, where the friendly landlord had allowed him to shelter and be safe from his persecutors and the police who were hunting him down. He was David Davies (of Llancarvan in the lovely Vale of Glamorgan), and was known throughout South Wales as "Dai Cantor", meaning in English "Dai the Singer".

Charged with being a Chartist and in distributing Thomas Paine's great work for social progress, *The Rights of Man*, he was imprisoned again and again, and humiliated and ostracised by the powers of the day. Then, finally hearing that he was to be arrested again, he left South Wales for Herefordshire, and was given asylum by a kindly innkeeper at Ross.

Weary and worn, he languished there for some weeks, when the police tracked him, and went to arrest this dangerous seditionist who advocated the rights of man. They were too late, for their victim had died in the night.

Thus did die alone and helpless in the darkness of that barn one of the greatest fighters for human liberty that Wales has ever produced. The purveyors of superstition and human bondage were overjoyed to hear of their victim's death, for the press reported that "Wales would now be cleaner by the death of this dangerous seditionist who had spread the devilish doctrines of Paine amongst the more ignorant classes of the Welsh towns and villages".

Right down to this day, the Welsh press refer to David Davies and his friend Iolo Morganog with derision, a derision that is instilled by fear. A fear that the Welsh people will some day learn the true facts of David Davies, Iolo Morganog, Shone Sgarborfawr, Jack Clan-a-Gors, and a host of other pioneer Freethinkers of the past; for the light they shed cannot be put out by lies and obscurantism. Truth can be hidden but not destroyed. PAUL VARNEY.

The Margaret Knight-Ashley Sampson Letters

VII

BUCKSBURN, ABERDEENSHIRE,
January 2nd, 1947.

DEAR ASHLEY,

Best wishes for the New Year. Who would have thought, when we sat and argued on the dresser at Hatfield, that we should still be hard at it in 1947! I have by-passed some of your arguments in the past because (to be frank) I really couldn't take them seriously, or because the point didn't seem fundamental. I didn't realise I was creating the impression that the said arguments had knocked me endways! So just this once I'll let nothing get by me, though I sit at this typewriter till the small hours.

To begin with your four-point summary on omnipotence.

1. "Why are we to assume that God, being omnipotent, will create so badly that he will come to despise elements in his creation?" Why indeed! I have never assumed anything of the sort. By using the terms "omnipotent" and "create", you are begging the whole question at issue.

2. It may be true that all malignancy is the result of frustration. If so, it would seem to follow (I agree) that if there were an omnipotent God—who by definition is never frustrated—he would necessarily be benevolent. But "if P then Q" is not the same thing (as you know) as "P exists, therefore Q exists". My point all along has been that the fact of evil is incompatible with the existence of a God who is both omnipotent and benevolent.

3. "Most forces produce a reaction"—or, as you say later, "it is obvious that things produce their opposites". Therefore divine love may be expected to produce pain and evil, just as sex love produces sadism.

This is surely a most dangerous argument. For we must be precise—the opposite of "love" is not "pain" or "evil", but "hate". Are you really wanting to suggest that God hates his creation? If so you have abandoned divine benevolence as thoroughly as any rationalist could wish!

Furthermore—to attack from the other side—I suppose this pronouncement about things producing their opposites is to be regarded as a "law of nature", though it is a new one on me (does black produce white, hot produce cold, and so on?). And whenever you invoke a law of nature to explain evil, you invite the question, "Did God make this law, or is he subject to it?"

4. There are three separate points here. (a) "There simply cannot be a wrong until you've first got your right." I agree that the ideas of right and wrong (or good and bad) are interdependent, in the sense in which the ideas of (say) hot and cold, or wet and dry, or fear and courage are. The statement that right precedes wrong doesn't seem to me to mean much—it's like saying that hot precedes cold, or fear precedes courage. But even if it were a significant statement, "so what?", as the Americans say. I can't see that it proves anything about theism. (b) "Evil is negative in the same sort of way as some electrical charges are negative". This, I am afraid, is a mere verbal quibble. The terms "positive" and "negative" as applied to electricity are purely conventional. All we know is that there are two different kinds of electricity, and that electrons of similar type repel, and electrons of different type attract, one another. The two types are called positive and negative for convenience, but they might just as well be called alpha and beta, or dexter and sinister, or anything else you like. A negative electrical charge is not just the absence of a positive one. (c) "Something has interfered with the process of creation." I'm sorry to keep repeating myself—but if

anything can interfere with a creator's activities, that creator is not omnipotent.

I think it will be best to deal next with the moral argument. (Incidentally, I can't help feeling that you are doing yourself an injustice when you suggest that it is only your Christian beliefs that restrain you from plunging into an orgy of lust and violence—but this is by the way.) The essence of your moral argument is that we accept the validity of certain moral laws, and that a law implies a lawgiver.

This sounds conclusive, but it depends on an ambiguity in the word "law". There are at least four senses. (i) Laws in the legal sense, e.g. it is unlawful to have more than one wife; (ii) Ethical laws, e.g., it is wrong, in general, to tell lies or to break promises; (iii) Natural laws, e.g., the law of gravitation; (iv) Logical and mathematical laws, which state relations between universals.

It is only in the first sense that a law implies a lawgiver. Ethical laws don't really fall in the same class as legal enactments. They are simply generalisations, stating that such-and-such types of action tend, on the whole, to produce objectively good results.

But why (you will probably ask at once) do I think that I ought to aim at producing objectively good results? Well, it does just seem to me to be part of the meaning of "So-and-so is good" that so-and-so is something that we ought to pursue. Some people, I know, feel a difficulty here, but if there *is* one we certainly can't avoid is by saying that we ought to pursue good because that is what God approves. The question then arises, "Why should we do what God approves?" and if we answer, "Because what God approves is good", we are back where we started.

Well, then (you will probably say) what do I mean by "good", and how do I know what things *are* good-in-themselves? Well, I can't define what I mean by "good", any more than I can define what I mean by "colour"—but I know it when I meet it. And it seems to me to be an ultimate ethical principle that certain states—such as love, the appreciation of beauty, and the disinterested pursuit of truth—are good in themselves.

But where did I get the ethical sense that enables me to discern these facts? No creature in the universe possesses it but man, and nature, apart from man, is indifferent to moral values. (I think this is a fair paraphrase of your question, "How did good get into the universe?") I can't explain the origin of the moral sense, any more than I can explain (for example) why man can do higher mathematics and the animals can't—except by saying, in a general way, that all "higher" faculties are the products of evolution. But it is certainly no explanation to say that there must have been a personal God who implanted the moral sense, and a personal devil who implanted the baser passions!

Finally, I would just remark that these moral arguments, even if they were valid, would not prove the truth of Christianity. At most, they would prove the existence of power, not ourselves, making for righteousness—not necessarily either omnipotent, or a creator.

And now for Higher Criticism. I hold no brief for the Modernist Churchmen—I agree with what I am sure is your view, that to reject the divinity of Christ and remain in the Church is a half-baked attitude. (Perhaps the lack of Modernist Churchmen that you noted in Oxford may be due to the spread of this view, rather than to the increasing hold of dogma.) But I am still puzzled about this "criminal

lunatic" business. It hardly seems possible that we can mean different things by "criminal"; yet to me it seems so obvious that if Christ did claim divinity (which is open to doubt) then he was *either* a criminal or a lunatic, but not both. (i.e., a lunatic if he was sincere in his claims, and a criminal if he wasn't.)

I agree that my phrase "a streak of madness" was ill-chosen. I should have said "phases of madness". What I meant to suggest was that Christ (like Cowper, Johnson and Mary Lamb, whom I mentioned) may only have been "mad nor'-nor'-west" and quite sane the rest of the time.

Now about rationalisation. I think we are slightly at cross-purposes about this. I am not wanting to equate rationalisation with "wishful thinking", in the narrow sense. My point is just this — that most Christian apologists have a firmly established belief in Christianity *before* they start looking into the evidence: and that this conviction produces an unconscious bias in their reasoning, with the result that (i) what purports to be an open-minded inquiry resolves itself into a hunt for arguments to support one side, and (ii) the arguments for Christianity are examined far less critically than the arguments against it.

I am not sure if I ever said that religious beliefs were "emotional in origin" — if I did, it was a loose phrase, and I withdraw it. In 99 cases out of 100, of course, they are originally accepted on authority, when the person is too young to be critical. But it is emotional causes that lead them to persist in the face of the evidence.

By "emotional causes" I don't just mean "wishful thinking", in the narrow sense—though I think it is usually wishful thinking nowadays. But in the past one of the chief emotional causes was fear: too much clear thinking might land one in hell!

As for Aquinas, I should just like to know where, and by what arguments, he "proves the rationality of the Christian revelation".

As regards your claim that I revealed my own unconscious bias by overlooking your parenthesis "(except in a sublimated sense)". I don't want to claim any superhuman impartiality, but — I didn't overlook it. I noticed it particularly, and thought that it clearly revealed (a) an uneasy consciousness on your part that you were being inconsistent, and (b) a desire to forestall criticism, if possible. But as the parentheses did nothing to *remove* the inconsistency, I didn't think it was necessary to refer to it.

And fifteenthly and lastly, now for prayer — on which I have certainly not capitulated! I think this fairly summarises your view: "We can't expect that we shall always get what we pray for, for God knows better than we do what is good for us. But if we 'watch carefully' we shall always find that, on the long view, what happens in answer to prayer is the best possible thing: though in our blindness we may not have seen it at the time."

Well — I hardly know where to start on this. You begin with a *post hoc propter hoc* — what happens *after* prayer happens as a result of it. Then — since nothing happens in which we can't find *some* good feature or consequence — you concentrate on these said good features and ignore the others, and thus convince yourself that what in fact happened was the best thing that *could* happen. Your logic is very like that of the savage, who is convinced that the witch-doctor's magic "works", because when he puts a spell on someone that person always falls ill, or has some misfortune, or dies — sooner or later! Or like that of the people who believe in astrology. A certain number of astrological predictions are bound to come true by pure chance; and by concentrating on those and ignoring the others, the believers convince themselves that "experience shows" that astrologers' predictions are fulfilled in a wonderful way.

But let's apply all this to the example you yourself give — that of the day of prayer which was followed (or, as you would say, "led to") the collapse of France and Belgium. You say that in the long run this contributed to Hitler's defeat by encouraging him to attack Russia. But can you seriously maintain that this was the best possible way to defeat him? Couldn't an omnipotent God have been expected to manage it without slaughtering twelve million Russians? As Peer Gynt said on a famous occasion, "God has a fatherly regard for my welfare; but economical, no! — that he is not!"

With best wishes once again from us both.

Yours sincerely,

MARGARET.

The Herring Call

IN NOVEMBER, 1951, "The Call" was broadcast over the Australian national stations. Composed by a Roman Catholic and backed by the Chief Justices (with the exception of the then Federal Chief Justice), and the religious heads of the Australian denominations, it, in short, called on the Australian nation to work harder, to beware of enemies internal and external, and to "fear God". Because of the prominent part played by Sir Edmund Herring, Chief Justice of Victoria, in its promulgation, it became known to sceptics as the Herring Call, and to others, because of its note of panic, as The Bawl.

In November, 1955, the national stations re-broadcast The Call, Sir Edmund speaking the prologue. In 1951 Australian wool was enjoying high prices overseas, to the great benefit of Australia; but in the next four years the price declined and Australia was forced to restrict imports from overseas, a proceeding which disturbed its economy. However, Sir Edmund did not denounce as external enemies those buyers who offered less for wool, nor did he say that no matter how hard the Australian toiler laboured he could not affect the price of wool. Anyway, another bawl was sent into the atmosphere.

Are they strange bedfellows, judges and ecclesiastics? To a degree, yes. Both wear regalia when on duty, and both are prone to denouncing the world and all its works; but there the similarity should end. And, of course, their prosperity depends on the nation's prosperity, so The Call is not unlike a cry from the heart.

Are the judges satisfied that there is no slacking and humbugging in the profession of law? Are wigs and feminine regalia only flimflam, hangovers from bow-and-arrow cras? Do lawyers stretch out cases, with the tolerance of the judges? Why do people who wish to be divorced have to play in an expensive farce?

As to the ecclesiastics, did they heed The Call? Since The Call was first uttered a Roman Catholic church was erected in George Street, Sydney, for continuous worship of a biscuit. Cardinal Gilroy, one of the signatories to The Call, performed the initial hocus pocus and relays of priests will mumble to the biscuit day and night for ever and ever. Results: Labour and material diverted from urgent works; the City of Sydney loses rates; and men and women who would be otherwise employed in gainful labour are lost to the workaday world.

If Sir Edmund is bent on reforming human society he will find a lot to do. He is well known in Australian public life because of his military career and his association with The Call. Why not campaign against astrology, which is the curse of Asia?

When some Australian periodicals and dailies revived astrology about a generation ago, they printed the warning that it was intended for amusement only. As the craze

spread the warning was dropped. Now many people believe in astrology "because it's in the paper". Journals which are masterpieces of the writers, artists and craftsmen of the printing industry are debased by this dangerous nonsense. [Australian Rationalist.]

CORRESPONDENCE

SPACE TRAVEL

I'm surprised that Mr. Ridley should fall for such nonsense as space travel. Our leading astronomers have declared that such an idea is absurd, and that homo sapiens is condemned to remain a *terre filius*. Most people are aware that a space rocket is propelled by the forcible discharge of its gases against the substance of the atmosphere, that a ship is steered by the resistance offered by the water against its rudder, that an aeroplane is guided by the resistance set up by the air against its ailerons and rudder, and that either element is essential for navigation. Granted that a rocket, once expelled by force out of the range of the earth's atmosphere, and once clear of the earth's gravitational pull, will keep on moving for ever, straight on, along the same plane, and at the same speed, in obedience to the known laws of force and motion, how is such a missile to be guided in airless space, and how decelerated? And, in such circumstances, if ever one did succeed in reaching the airless moon, would it ever manage to leave again? I am, of course, aware of the theory that outer space is not completely void, but contains hydrogen particles in extremely tenuous mass, but there is no evidence to show that these particles exercise any influence on any moving celestial body.

A rocket approaching the moon (or other planet) would be compelled by the moon's gravitational attraction, combined with the power of the rocket's forward impetus, to keep on circling the moon for ever as a satellite, unless it could be guided to the surface and decelerated, which does not seem a practical proposition, in the absence of the resistant medium of an atmosphere. As for the outer planets, such an idea appears to be ridiculous; the human span of adult life would hardly suffice for the journey.

F. S. HOUGHTON.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The thing I have most against the capital punishment laws as they now stand on the books is that they are a mere implementation of the old eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth laws of the Bible. Any law mixed up with theological considerations is bound to be unjust and ineffective.

The prime consideration of the state in its handling of its criminals should be reform and transformation of the individual criminal into a useful member of society, if that is possible.

I am in favour of keeping capital punishment. But I say that the whole attitude towards the subject of crime in all its ramifications should be re-studied. The individual that shows promise of and capability for becoming a useful member of society should be helped to become one. The individual who clearly will never be of any benefit to society should be eliminated quickly and unostentatiously. For this I propose the gas chamber. Other types of crime should become capital crimes, besides murder. The state would then rid itself of the great expense of supporting a large number of criminals in long prison terms. With the non-reformable prisoners eliminated via the gas chamber, the prisons would then become reform schools concerned only with keeping their inmates under control while their rehabilitation is in progress.

MERRILL R. HOLSTE.

EVOLUTION

The more rational of your readers will have noticed in Mr. Cutner's answer to my letter that he has sought to obscure the issue of the Haeckel falsifications, by the questionable method of introducing such red herrings as Billy Graham, Christian Scientists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. For good measure, there is a hilarious claim that all the Germans except scientists like Haeckel were Christians! This is solemnly claimed with the assurance of one who has doubtless personally interviewed the whole eighty million of them!

And if Brass's evidence is to be discounted because someone with an axe to grind claimed that he was a liar, your readers will know how to treat Mr. Cutner's evidence.

Mr. Cutner would have us believe that the only falsification in scientific diagrams was that made by the transfer from the scientist's mind to the drawing board of the artist. But this is, to say the least of it, misleading.

Readers with long memories will remember the two-page illustration in one of the London illustrated magazines, of a full-grown male and his spouse, in natural surroundings, and dignified by the

appellation "Hesperopithecus". There was a full description of this happy pair by a "professor" out of one of our "great universities". The model for this monument of evolutionary genius was — one tooth — discovered in 1922. The tooth was later found to belong to a pig. But the artist no doubt had trouble with one or two "inaccuracies" which "were bound to occur".

A dog's dinner of bones was "reconstructed" by "artists" no doubt with a few inescapable "inaccuracies", and became Piltown man, answer to the prayer of Keith, from a "great university". The whole thing, as every music hall comedian knows, was a great joke.

And so the wreck of the "Hesperopithecus" and the "bones of contention" from Piltown are conveniently forgotten, and the poor artists have to bear the brunt of the blame.

In the light of this, I think biologists who are teaching in "religious" and "theological" colleges have more sense than Mr. Cutner would credit them with. After all, if "biology professors" from "great universities" can't distinguish between pigs' teeth and fully-grown males, one can't blame the stick-in-the-mud religionist for staying where he is.

If Mr. Cutner would read R. E. D. Clark's book — which I trust he will — he would find out that Darwin lived in mortal terror of ever being convinced that his "hypothesis" was wrong since, from his youth, he had been trying to escape from the possibility of there being a God who would hold men responsible. So Mr. Cutner's argument works both ways. If the theory (Mr. Cutner has admitted that there is no mathematical demonstration) of evolution be proved correct, then I am of all men most miserable; if Mr. Cutner be wrong, what then? Or is the good man infallible?

R. MCKEOWN.

THE ROLE OF "THE FREETHINKER"

I am interested in your reply to a correspondent giving reasons for not attacking the Fundamentalists. I quite agree. THE FREETHINKER is not the proper medium for these "kills", because the onlookers are mainly on our side, and the "kill" is primarily for the onlookers' benefit.

The main role of THE FREETHINKER should be (what it actually is) the provision of ammunition for individual Freethinkers in their verbal and epistolary battles with the opposition. THE FREETHINKER cannot get into the front line because the enemy keeps out of its way and has to be chased or sniped. The real front line is where our people bring the Christians into open combat in local or national press controversies or public discussions. THE FREETHINKER keeps the supply lines working. LIFELONG SUPPORTER.

THE ETHICS OF HUNTING

It has become a habit in Europe that anything archaic and primitive is immediately associated with Africa. So Mr. Ridley in his article (March 9th) could think of nothing more rational to say than "the witch doctors of darkest Africa". Atheists who claim to be humanists should avoid saying and writing such sneering things about a people.

Organised hunting and fishing (for food) there are in Africa, but never in my part of Africa have I heard of, or seen performed, such an archaic and stone-age rite as "fox-blood sprinkling" as carried out in England in 1956 by men with centuries of civilisation behind them. In this case Britain should be tutored by Nigeria to abolish this fox-hunting rite, which is more primitive than any "juju sacrifice" ever heard of in Africa. A. N. ELLIOTT.

RATIONALISTS

Re J. Dowling's letter in your March 9th issue, to me, 'twould be a thousand pities, for many reasons, if H. Cutner discontinued to express his views in your columns respecting "Reverent Rationalists", or other so-called "Allies". I'm sure many will join me when I say "Carry on! Cutner!" C. E. RATCLIFFE.

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