

# The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVI — No. 19

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

A CORRESPONDENT recently inquired whether there were more Buddhists than Christians in the world. It is, of course, impossible to say definitely because accurate figures are not available in either case. But certainly the number of Buddhists must be very great; some estimates are as high as one-third of the whole human race. They are spread over vast lands of Asia, particularly Burma, Ceylon, Indo-China, Nepal and Tibet; and there are now many devotees in Western countries, too. In India, where it originated, Buddhism has comparatively few followers, but thousands will flock there this year to celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the death of their founder.

The reckoning is on the basis of the Singhalese traditional dating, 624-544 B.C., which is almost certainly inaccurate. The Buddha's true dates are unknown, but they might well be a century later than tradition accepts. Uncertainty abounds in Buddhism, as in all religions; supernatural stories have accumulated and it is difficult to discern the facts behind them. Yet, through the miraculous conglomeration, expert investigators would seem to have glimpsed the man: the prince, Siddhartha, generally known by his family name of Gautama, and later to be called the Buddha — the enlightened one.

## The Bo Tree

Enlightenment came to him — according to Buddhist legend — under the sacred Bo tree, where he had remained cross-legged and contemplative for many hours, despite a howling tempest. Cross-legged and immortalised in Buddhist art, with a strange fascination for Western, as well as Eastern eyes — a fascination that is equalled only by that of the Sphinx. The Bo tree is supposed to have been still standing in the third century B.C., when the famous King Asoka built a shrine alongside it. And there is a Bo tree in the sacred garden at Bodh Gaya today, with a magnificent temple commemorating the "enlightenment".

The accretions to Buddhism are ironic when contrasted with the basic core of the moral teaching. The faithful of the Southern school are prepared to adore sacred relics; in the North, the teachings have been almost completely transformed. Buddhism assuredly has many devotees, but its founder would probably disown the great majority of them. The man who did not believe in God has been elevated to the position of a god.

## Hybrid

For the basis of Buddhism is atheistic, even materialistic. Its philosophy has no place for a god, and posits no first cause; it starts from material existence here and now, subject to the law of cause and effect, and constantly changing; it ends with Nirvana — extinction, nothingness. In some ways, in fact, it anticipated scientific thought. On the other hand, many primitive notions were accepted (or, at least,

not rejected) from contemporaneous religion: transmigration, heavens and hells — though even these were incorporated in the material world of cause and effect, and there was no belief in the soul as known in Christianity. Like most new and revolutionary philosophies, Buddhism appears to have been something of a hybrid: noticeably different and possessing promising new potentialities, but still bearing signs of its ancestry.

## — VIEWS and OPINIONS —

# Buddhism

By COLIN McCALL

## Consolation

Its pessimism, too, is inherited. And though it is probably this aspect of Buddhism — together with its consequences — that has most appeal for a Western world in decline, I must

confess that I find it uncongenial. That life is evil, pleasure is evil: these are tenets that I cannot hold — cannot accept as valid. Nor am I an exponent of meditation (except perhaps for brief periods). Life need not be and, surely, is not for all people, miserable — a "vale of tears". Equally surely, however, it *has* been for many; and millions of them have found comfort and consolation in Buddhism.

They could certainly have done very much worse. If ever there was a religion of love, that religion is Buddhism. Of all the great religions, its moral teaching must be rated the highest. Prof. T. Rhys Davids rendered some of them as follows:

For never in this world does hatred cease by hatred;  
Hatred ceases by love; that is always its nature.

One may conquer a thousand thousand men in battle,  
But he who conquers himself alone is the greatest victor.

Let a man make himself what he preaches to others;  
The well-subdued may subdue others; one's self, indeed,  
is hard to tame.

Let him speak the truth, let him not yield to anger;  
Let him give when asked, even from the little he has!

And the teachings have largely been followed. Buddhism is a religion of peace.

## Corruption and Refinement

If, indeed, "religion" be the right term. Originating as a philosophy — a way of life — Buddhism became corrupted into a religion, with Gautama the subject of idolatry. So it remains for millions of people today; but not for all. Refining processes have been at work; the mass of superfluous accretions has been drained away, and the pure essence remains. Pure it is, or as nearly pure as is humanly possible. For an increasing number of Europeans it offers, perhaps, a refuge from the turbulence of life. For me, it is too pure — humane, no doubt, but not human enough. Though it obviously has much to recommend it, I cannot give it my support.

## Involvement

Nor, I think, can any militant Secularist. Buddhism is a philosophy for this world, it is true; but it involves renunciation of this world in the process; renunciation, too, of the self, as far as possible. Desires and passions must be subdued, overcome—passionlessness is the goal: a state of freedom from wants and urges. It may be sound therapy for some troubled minds; it cannot cure the world's ills. Whether we like it or not, we are—as Donne so truly said—"involved in mankind".

## Review

By F. A. RIDLEY

"The Myth of the Eternal Return." By MIRCEA ELIADE. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN PARIS this book by a Roumanian author appeared here last year. Reviewers seem to have been overawed, as well they might, by the author's obviously immense learning and his copious bibliography. The present writer, while frankly admitting that he is not a specialist in philosophy, found the book impressive largely on account of its obscurity! This may be the fault either of the author, his translator, or the limitations of the present reviewer. Eliade is already the author of a number of books about that rather vague borderland between the occult hinterland of thought, and genuine philosophy. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return* he has written a treatise of the kind sometimes described as Teutonic; immensely erudite, but, at least to a lay reader unused to the refinements of metaphysical reasoning, unintelligible to the point of being impressive.

I think it unfortunate that the learned author should have so concealed his subject matter under a mass of metaphysical speculations and historical illustrations that one cannot see the wood for the trees. For the "myth", or, as I would call it, speculation; of "eternal recurrence" represents a recurring theme in the history of philosophical literature. Without presuming to follow our author into the vast labyrinths of Egyptian, Babylonian and Iranian cosmogony, the idea of eternal recurrence has a recognisable history in the annals of European thought, quite independent of theological speculations which take up so large a part of our Roumanian author's book. "Eternal Recurrence" appeared in Europe as a concrete speculation among the Eleatic philosophers (5th century B.C.), and was bequeathed by them to later schools of Greek philosophy. Aristotle, as well as Plato, appears to have toyed with the idea of recurrence in his famous statement, "All the arts and sciences have been lost and found a great number of times". Later, the Stoics almost raised the concept of the Eternal Return to a metaphysical dogma. Marcus Aurelius appears to imply it in his celebrated *Meditations* (c. 180 A.D.), and there is a story handed down from classical antiquity that another Stoic, Posidonius, always ended his lectures with the remark that his audiences would see him still carrying his little stick to the platform on innumerable occasions in the future.

Stoic philosophy, with its concept of the eternal return of infinite recurrence in space and time, was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the rise of Christianity, which came to power in the Roman world during the 4th century. Christian eschatology is entirely inconsistent with any circular theory of human destiny. In Christian theology the human soul passes at death into a final fixed and unalterable state, Heaven for the blessed, Hell for the damned. Eliade appears to hold that an exception to this was actually constituted by a Calabrian abbot of the 12th cen-

ture, but here he appears to be in error. What this famous medieval heretic, Joachim of Flora, actually appears to have taught, was that human evolution was successively divided into three sequential stages which Joachim described in theological terminology as "The Kingdom of the Father, the Kingdom of the Son and the Kingdom of the Holy Ghost". However, the last named actually represented the final stage in spiritual evolution, so that no question could arise of any Eternal Return, by any circular movement of the universe and of human history.

When the totalitarian censorship of Christianity and its static dogmas lost its grip on modern Europe, independent philosophical speculations reappeared; the cycle of recurrence itself recurred once more! In the 18th century the Italian philosophical historian Vico played with the idea, and in the present century Spengler's *Decline of the West* approached very close to the classic conception that "all the arts and sciences have been lost and found a great number of times". In Spengler's *magnum opus* each civilisation repeats the basic experiences of its predecessor. Perhaps the best known modern thinker to adhere openly to the old Greek idea of an everlasting cycle was Nietzsche in *Zarathustra*. However, the most consecutive, and most curious, statement of the Eternal Return came from a most surprising source: in 1871 there appeared in Paris one of the strangest books ever written, *Eternity under the Stars*, by Auguste Blanqui. Then serving a prison sentence for his part in the famous Paris Commune, he was one of the most famous revolutionaries of the 19th century, as well known in his day as Marx and Bakunin. Eliade omits to describe this astonishing book, perhaps the most systematic presentation of the old Greek theory of the eternal cycle in modern literature.

In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche enshrined Eternal Recurrence in epigrams, but Blanqui's treatise is systematic and his arguments are worth recapitulating.

"Blanqui", declares a recent biographer, "proceeds from the hypothesis of an infinite universe and of a finite number of component elements which can enter into a finite number of combinations, each repeating itself endlessly throughout infinite space and time. Thus, he [Blanqui—F.A.R.] declares, ever since the world has been the world nature has been producing daily millions of solar systems, slavish copies of our own with regard both to material and to personnel. Hence it follows that in the course of *Eternity under the Stars*, what I write in a dungeon . . . I will write during eternity upon a table, with a pen, with clothes and with other circumstances which are identical".

As his biographer aptly comments, "There is no progress. Everything that we may call progress on our planet is only a repetition of what has already happened on billions of other planets, and considering the possibilities of the various combinations, it stands to reason that the double of the same person on another planet might at a given moment make another possible decision which would give his career another turn". As Blanqui says, "Let us not forget that what one might have become here, one *has* become somewhere else. In other words [and other worlds—F.A.R.] there is a mathematical possibility, nay, a certainty, that on some other planet, either now, a million years before, or a billion years hence, somewhere there is, say, a field of Waterloo where Napoleon triumphed, or a Paris Commune which Blanqui himself led to victory."

Since Marcus Aurelius appears to have held some such view, one understands why some people find such depressing!

It must be regarded as a serious omission that Eliade has missed out of his heavily documented volume perhaps

concluded on page 148

# Welsh Pioneers of Freethought

By DAVID SHIPPER

THE INQUIRY from a reader for information about Free-thought works in Welsh (THE FREETHINKER, 30/3/56) prompted me to spend an afternoon in the Welsh Section of the Cardiff Reference Library. It proved most rewarding to me and may be interesting to others. The Welsh Assistant Librarian, Mr. W. J. Harris, was very helpful to one whose knowledge of Welsh is limited, and I am indebted to him for most of the translations.

An early Welsh Freethinker was John Jones (Glan-y-Gors, 1764(?)–1821, whose book *Seren tan Gwmmwl* was published in 1795. The title means "A Star under a Cloud" and the work owes much to the influence of Thomas Paine. Like Paine, John Jones was loved by the people but hated by the clergy, and the Welsh Methodists replied to him in a pamphlet entitled *Gair yn ei Amser* ("A Word in Season").

The pervasive influence of Paine was revealed three years earlier when the Cardiffians hanged and burned a fully-clothed effigy of the great revolutionary. *Cardiff Records*, edited by John Hobson Matthews in 1900, gives the following entry of costs involved:

December 29th, 1792.				
FOR THE USE OF TOM PAIN				
Hat and Oilcase	...	£0	3	0
Fales Shirt and Cravvet	...	0	2	6
Gloves and Hose	...	0	4	2
Shoes	...	0	7	6
The Carpenter Wood and Labour	...	0	5	0
Black Ribbon	...	0	0	4
To making the effegi of Tom pain	...	1	1	0
To 3 days' serving the publications	...	0	6	0
		£2	9	6

It is accompanied by the (surely) reasonable request that "If the magistrates will give an order for the payment of half the above sum it will be very sufficient.—B. Williams".

The event was commemorated in song:

In 1792;  
Tom's *Rights of Man* was then taboo —  
Worse hated he than Cain.  
His figure they did not disdain  
To dress with much ado;  
They hanged and burnt poor Tommy Paine  
In 1792.  
The Corporation said they fain  
Would pay the bill when due,  
It came to nearly £2.10.0 —  
They thought one half would do;  
They hanged and burnt poor Tommy Paine  
In 1792.

(The "hangman", incidentally, received two payments of 5s. each.)

E. Williams — better known by his Welsh name, Iolo Morgannwg — (1747–1826) once played a joke on the Law by displaying a notice in his bookshop window at Cowbridge, bearing the words: "*The Rights of Man Sold Here*". Two police officers arrived and asked for copies of the book, then banned, and Iolo gave them each a Bible, saying it was the best book on the Rights of Man! There are a number of English and Welsh studies of Williams (see below), and they reveal a man of independence and courage.

1798 saw the publication of Thomas Roberts's *Cwyn yn Erbyn Gorthrymder* ("A Complaint against Oppression") in which he attacked the clergy, bishops, attorneys — and doctors — in no uncertain terms. An illustration at the start of the book shows a supercilious clergyman looking disdainfully at a poor old lady and a small boy. Rhyming verses by John Jones (Glan-y-Gors) read, in free translation:

CLERGYMAN: "Heaven is not the place for the poor,  
Unless he brings a tithe to my door."

OLD LADY: "I see your view of the highest bliss,  
Is, make the best of the world that is".

For English readers, I would recommend *The Influence of the French Revolution on Welsh Life and Literature* by the Rev. David Davies (Penarth), to which is added a bibliography and illustrative extracts of the subject taken from Welsh sources by Mr. Bob Owen (Croesor, Llanfrothen). This book contains a great deal of fascinating information and was published by W. Morgan Evans and Son, Carmarthen, in 1926. Two books on E. Williams are: *The Life and Works of E. Williams (Iolo Morgannwg)* by A. Emrys-Jones (J. Heywood, Manchester, 1889) and *Recollections and Anecdotes of E. Williams* by Elijah Waring (R. Barrett, London, 1850).

In Welsh, the biography, *Bwygraffiad "Iolo Morgannwg"* gan T. D. Thomas, Caerfyrddin: M. Jones, 1857.

The delicious full title of John Jones's best-known book is *Seren tan Gwmmwl, Neu Ychydig ar Frenhinoedd, Esgobion, Arglwyddi & a Llwyodraeth Lloegr yn Gyffredin, Wedi ei Ysgrifennu er Mwyn y Cwmry Uniaith gan Glan-y-Gors, Bardd* — "A Star under a Cloud, Some Observations on Kings, Bishops, Lords, etc., and the Government of England, Written for the Monoglot Welsh by John Jones, Poet". (Vaughan Griffiths, London, 1795.) *Toriadd y Dydd* ("The Break of Day") by the same author, was published by W. Baynes, London, 1797.

Welsh Freethought seems to have declined considerably in the last century and a half, and I know of no recent works to compare with the above. But the spirit of Iolo Morgannwg and Glan-y-Gors cannot be completely dead and I should welcome the support of Welsh Freethinkers in trying to revive it.

## "The Churches of Christ"

SOMEBODY has been good enough to send us a beautifully printed pamphlet with the above title — exactly why, I have not the slightest idea. Many churches, for example, are certainly beautiful examples of architecture, and as such, are well worth visiting, just as one visits museums. As for the 600 Churches which distinguish Christianity, all desperately anxious to save your soul for Christ Jesus, all disagreeing with each other as to the best methods for success in this inspiring work — of what *practical* use are any of them? This pamphlet talks about the "Word of God" as if there really were such a thing. What is it? The Bible? Do not all Christians constantly squabble about this Word of God — squabble about what it means, and what it teaches, to say nothing of its complete opposition to history and science?

This particular pamphlet really comes from Texas but is "edited" for England by a William Steele of Scotland. May we gently ask him how he proposes to get the 600 Christian Churches to agree with one another? Could he rope in even the Roman Church alone?

The truth is that the Churches of Christ have miserably failed except for believing Christians. Anybody who reads the Word of God without laughing at its primitive nonsense may become some kind of a Christian. But who else?

H.C.

"Newton banished God from nature; Darwin banished him from life; Freud drove him from the last fastness—the soul".—

Gerald Heard

## This Believing World

A vicar recently sacked his Mothers' Union because they went on an outing during Lent. We heartily applaud his action. Either Jesus is a Man of Sorrows or he is not. And if any Mothers' Union goes out to enjoy itself when the mothers should be weeping and wailing, they have only themselves to blame. No laughing, no amusement, no enjoyment, no good eating—only the most heavenly misery should be the rule of Lent. Serves the Mothers' Union right is what we say!

★

Those true Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, appear coyly to prefer any other name in some of their voluminous literature, for the term does not occur in *Permanent Governor of All Nations*, a pamphlet of which 5,000,000 copies have been printed. Nor does it blazon out the beautiful truth that "Millions Now Living Will Never Die", which heralded the late "Judge" Rutherford's all-conquering appeal to Christendom. That the present pamphlet is filled with incredible nonsense will not make its pious supplication less attractive to those Christians who believe in miracles, devils, and gods; but that money can be found to print such hopeless bilge is surely a tragedy. Religion has much to answer for.

★

We are told in it that one of the Psalms says, "The truth of Jehovah endureth for ever", and that this proves that Christ Jesus, "the immortal Son of Jehovah", is "the one exclusively ordained of God to be the permanent governor of all peoples and nations". In actual fact, of course, Jesus never governed anything or anybody—but by constantly repeating such marvellous truths, the heads of Jehovah's Witnesses manage to extract huge sums of money from the piously gullible. Religions, especially the more fantastic ones, can always be depended upon to filch hard cash from the faithful.

★

The Mayor of Lambeth is quite angry that his famous borough, known all over the world as the Lambeth Walk, should be called "pagan" by the Rev. F. E. Poad, who is in charge of the Lambeth Mission. The reverend gentleman complains that the Christians (or pagans) in Lambeth prefer pools to piety, "and the chance to win £75,000 for God", appeals to them far more than the limitless riches of God". Well, in the first place, God hasn't to bother his Divine head figuring out a treble win (or whatever it is called) on the pools, as his riches must be "limitless". He has an infinite store of hard cash to draw upon when he likes—quite different from the average punter, who has to consider, for example, whether to spend his money on a packet of fags or on the pools.

★

The people who (more or less) attend Divine Service at Mr. Poad's Mission are generally old age pensioners, who probably find a few hours in church or chapel save them coal and gas at home. Here again God has the whip hand with his "limitless" riches, for he can burn as much coal or gas as he likes—it is all "infinite" with him. However, we can leave the battle to Mr. Poad and the Mayor of Lambeth—but if Lambeth is really "pagan", what are our Archbishops doing about it?

★

Twenty elders of the Church of Scotland recently resigned as a protest against the sex talks given to young couples by the Rev. F. W. McCaskill of Leith. You can buy openly the frankest books on sex, even in the land of Rabbinic Burns, that great apostle of chastity; but you must never even hint that such a thing exists in a church, angrily claim

our Christian elders. Perhaps they are right—for is not "our Lord" the greatest anti-sex champion the world has ever seen?

★

Although given a "U" certificate, it is a fact that the now famous film, "Richard III", is packed with "gory scenes", which keep both children and adults breathless—much to the disgust of the Rev. B. R. Bax of Hinckley. He thinks they must have "a disturbing effect" on children. Yet Mr. Bax will allow children to read any unexpurgated passage in the Bible, like those which insist on the death penalty for entering a "holy place", or touching a "holy thing"; or passages which detail the burning to death of numbers of people who "complain", or the slaughtering of the men and women of Midian, or the massacring of a whole nation—all of which and many more similar incidents can be found in the Holy Word. Are they not also "gory scenes"?

### REVIEW

(concluded from page 146)

the clearest and most striking statement of the theory of eternal recurrence to be found at any rate in European literature.

Blanqui, of course, wrote in the age of Newtonian physics. We now live in the age of Einstein. Without rushing in where angels fear to tread—on scientific *terra incognita*—and venturing to pronounce on so abstruse a theme, it at least seems clear that Eternal Recurrence is not, *ipso facto*, incompatible with a materialist philosophy. It appears to be one of those recurring speculations which periodically reappear, and which it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove or disprove. Perhaps some future historian, preferably a materialist who understands the philosophical implications of Relativity, will give us the definitive theory of one of the most interesting, and most grandiose, of human speculations. Such an analysis would, it may be expected, summarily discard the mountains of theosophical speculations with which Eliade overloads his learned pages. The theory of the closed universe which repeats its traditional patterns is one alternative theory to the theistic theory of creation in time. Whether true or false, it represents a *bona fide* atheistic conception of the universe, first adumbrated by the historic founders of atheism, the great philosophers of Ancient Greece. Whilst the Eternal Return may never become a proved scientific fact, this clear-cut alternative to theism and to special creation deserves, perhaps, more attention from atheists and materialists than it has so far succeeded in obtaining. We should rescue it from the Theosophists and similar mystics.

### THE WEATHER COCK

I tell you the tale of the gust and the gale,  
I work with the clangorous clock;  
I veer to and from with the breeze and the blow;  
In fact, I'm the church weather-cock.  
The structure that's under is straining asunder,  
The bleak winds of Truth make it lurch;  
Once a rock on the path, now it's plaster and lath—  
In fact, it's the Weather-cock Church.

ARTHUR E. CARPENTER.

### FACT AND FICTION

SECULAR POEMS

by C. E. RATCLIFFE

Price 2/- each

Post free

Proceeds to The Freethinker Sustenation Fund

# THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.  
Telephone: Holborn 2601.

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 8s. (in U.S.A., \$4); half-year, 14s.; three months, 7s.

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

## TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Bradford (Broadway Car Park).—Sunday, 7.30 p.m.: Messrs. DAY, NEWTON and SHEPPARD.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every Week-day, 1 p.m.: G. A. WOODCOCK; Sunday, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. CAVANAGH and MILLS. (Platt Fields), Sunday, 3 p.m.: Messrs. CAVANAGH and MILLS.  
Merseyside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead). Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons) Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.  
Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.  
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 others.

### INDOOR

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, May 13th, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "John Stuart Mill (born 1806) — Revaluation in 1956".

## Notes and News

THE latest addition to the list of Freethought periodicals arrived at the office recently. It was the first issue of *The American Rationalist* — a handsome monthly magazine of 32 pages, priced 35 cents and published by Rationalist Publications (to be inc.) 2218 St. Louis Avenue, St. Louis 6, Missouri, which is the address of the newly-formed American Rationalist Federation. We commend the following passage from the first editorial:

Whether our friends call themselves Freethinkers or Secularists or Humanists is surely of much less importance than whether they are in sympathy with our aims. The history of the Churches is a warning against erecting foolish barriers because of some quibble about doctrine or the meaning of a label. We are not a sect and, unlike the Churches, we wish to stimulate individuals to think courageously for themselves. There is no hard party line for Rationalists to toe, but there is a common attitude — the rejection of supernatural authority and a readiness to submit to a rational judgment. In this attitude we can discover unity amid diversity.

The editor of *The American Rationalist* is Mr. Arthur B. Hewson. We send our best wishes to him and his staff.

★

A CONTROVERSY on Easter observance in the Leicester *Evening Mail* afforded a chance which was, as usual, well taken up by Mr. C. H. Hammersley — who, with Mr. Shepherd, must hold the current record for the amount of space he has been able to squeeze out of his local editors. He, too, received some excellent support as well as clerical opposition. One parson wrote, "I have decided to answer

his assertions in public in my church on Sunday next". Mr. Hammersley gave him the *mot juste*: "Why stop at that? . . . If the rev. gentleman has any evidence why does he not produce it in these columns instead of preaching to the already converted?" Mr. F. E. Papps has also recently conducted most ably a controversy on Sunday Schools in the Bromsgrove *Messenger*, and is endeavouring to arrange a local debate with an N.S.S. speaker present. In two or three northern papers controversy on some freethought matter or other is almost continuous.

★

WE gratefully announce that Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe is donating all the proceeds from the sale of his *Fact and Fiction: Secular Poems* (reviewed in these columns last week by Mr. Leslie Hull) to THE FREETHINKER Sustentation Fund, due to begin after Whitsun. This is a generous gesture on the part of our veteran author, and we hope all readers will take full advantage of it — not only for themselves, but for their favourite journal.

## Mrs Knight's Debate at Dundee

MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT defended the motion, "The Idea of God is Unnecessary" in a debate at the Unitarian Church, Dundee, on April 24th, her opponent being the Rev. W. B. Taverner. Mrs. Knight claimed that more crime was committed by those adhering to religion than by disbelievers. Her opponent maintained that God put us into this world to create good, and God's own works were good.

Our contributor, E. G. Macfarlane, who was present, reports that considerable enthusiasm was aroused in a full hall, especially during the public participation period, when several members of the audience expressed atheism and other unorthodox views which seldom get a public airing in this vicinity. Others frankly stated their opposition to religious bodies and their rejection of religious propaganda.

"Mrs. Knight", continues Mr. Macfarlane, "succeeded in pinning Mr. Taverner down to an admission that he had not given sufficient thought to what he meant by 'God is good'. . . . Mr. Taverner was plainly stumped and had to leave his audience with the impression that he had been discovered to be perpetrating a fallacy."

Mr. Macfarlane is prepared—given sufficient help in the Dundee area—to form a local Freethought organisation.

### NEXT WEEK

## 75th Birthday Number of THE FREETHINKER

— 12 pages —

### GOODWILL GREETINGS FROM

Eden Phillpotts                      Professor A. E. Heath  
Dr. J. Bronowski                      Margaret Knight  
Prof. J. D. Bernal  
and others

The Special Articles include: —  
"HOW I BECAME A HERETIC"  
by the REV. J. L. BROOM, M.A.

Price 5d. as usual

# Life on Mars?

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE QUESTION as to whether there is life on Mars is of interest in that it brings us to consider what are the conditions which make life possible on a planet. What requirements must nature fulfil in order that pieces, or biographies, of matter, will develop organic structure wherewith to display reversible responses to the environment of such complexity as to warrant a special terminology (e.g. receptivity, reactivity, reproduction)? What we know of the planet Mars provides a handy testing ground. Speculation received an impetus from the alleged discovery of canals on Mars (Schiaparelli, Milan, 1877), but no astronomers would today allow their validity. They are not even sure that the marks indicate natural channels (another translation of *canali*), let alone artificial constructions of such width as to be observable even with the best telescope at fifty million miles.

What are the elementary requirements of life as we know it, and how does Mars fulfil these?

Life requires water, which immediately sets a limit to the temperatures at which it can exist (i.e. between freezing and boiling points). It also needs oxygen, although certain bacteria get on all right with nitrogen. This, however, is inconceivable in more complex forms, and we come to another requirement, plant food. Food provides energy by being burned, and so oxygen is necessary: burning is the combination of oxygen with other chemical elements.

Water seems indispensable. It is the best solvent, and its high chemical stability precludes it from interfering seriously with the chemicals it has to carry. It is also an agent in assisting chemical changes in the body. These changes depend on a fair stability of temperature, again provided for by water. It is clear, then, that the temperature must not be such as to turn water into ice or into steam, unless some mechanism were evolved and naturally selected to provide a warming up or cooling down apparatus to fit the air for the lungs.

The planet's heat will be determined by its closeness to the sun. Mercury, the nearest, is so hot that zinc would melt on its surface. Jupiter, Saturn, Pluto, Neptune and Uranus are too cold. On either side of Earth are Venus, nearer the sun, and Mars, farther away. The former is literally shrouded, or "clouded", in mystery. Perhaps Mars may be our sole possible companion, at least in our particular corner of the universe.

Temperature on Mars rises to 50 degrees F. in daytime, but at night falls to about 100 degrees F. below zero. Is it too much to assume that some tiny Martian creatures might once have grown the habit of burrowing at night to keep warm? Might they have propagated this characteristic? At the level of intelligence the intense cold could be artificially combated. What of the novelist who writes of future underground cities on Earth? The Earth's orbit is annually taking it three-eighths of an inch farther from its star, which is itself becoming colder. Will man, or superman, in some far-off generation, lie down to extinction, or will he explore the interior of the Earth for warmth?

For temperature Mars might be passed as feasible. It has also an atmosphere for its oxygen supply. Surface markings on Mars are dimmer when viewed obliquely. This is because there is more atmosphere to look through, just as there is more peel to cut through if we pass our knife through the orange to cut off a thin slice than when we cut directly towards the centre.

The natural tendency of any gas, however, is to disperse. A planet holds its atmosphere by gravity, and if this is

insufficient the atmosphere will leak away into space: the lighter the gas and the higher the temperature the faster the leakage. Hydrogen, the lightest gas of all, will escape quickest, helium next.

Is Mars able to keep its atmosphere from being dissipated? While our Earth maintains an atmosphere rich enough for life's needs, can Mars do the same? Newton discovered that any spherical body behaves, for gravitation, as though its mass were entirely concentrated at the centre. The size and mass of Mars being known, it is easy to estimate its gravitational effect. In this respect the Earth has two and a half times the gravitational pull of Mars. Therefore Mars has not the same hold on its atmosphere as the Earth has. The Martian atmosphere will be less dense, more rarified.

Contrarily, the big planets — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune — have a gravitational hold so strong that they have actually kept hold of too much; if even hydrogen cannot get away the atmosphere will contain poisonous gases (e.g. marsh gas), which make life impossible, even if the planet had sufficient heat for it.

The moon, of course, is too small to have an atmosphere. Any it ever had at birth must have been of short duration — possibly a few thousand years.

It is, further, not enough merely to have and to hold an atmosphere. There must be the necessary constituents in it.

The origin and history of Mars being the same as that of its sister-planet, Earth, there is reason to suppose that the Martian atmosphere fulfils this condition. Specks round Mars are taken for clouds, and an analysis of the sunlight reflected from Mars indicates the presence of oxygen and water vapour.

Next, are there plants to provide animal food? Dark patches, perhaps once seas, undergo interesting changes of colour. It has been supposed that as the polar caps disappear in the Martian summer and become green, and later brown, and then fade, this may indicate seasons, a theory which was helped by the discovery of the gas ammonia, a universal product of decaying vegetation, in the Martian atmosphere (by light analysis).

Even assuming life on Mars, we are not to suppose that a visitor from Earth could exist there without the greatest difficulty. It would presumably tax his respiratory powers to inhale sufficient of the looser atmosphere, while an expenditure of energy competent to carry him a yard forward on the earth's surface would conceivably lift the explorer off his feet, owing to the decreased pull of the planet. A 15-stone man would weigh 6-stone on Mars.

To conclude, the answer to the question "Is there life on Mars?" is probably in the negative, and for this overriding reason. While it is conceivable that, having once appeared, living matter could survive on Mars at the low temperature, it is hardly possible to suppose it could come into being in such conditions — perhaps a thin covering of hardy primitive vegetation maintaining a precarious foothold, but nothing more complex.

If, however, Mars just falls short of requirements, the universe is vast. The galaxy housing our sun also lodges 100,000 million others, and there are hundreds of millions of galaxies. Room for anything! Like causes give like effects, and that is all one can say. But to suppose that life must of necessity evolve towards *homo sapiens* wherever it occurs is mere parochial vanity.

# Calvinist Censorship in S. Africa

By "LEONARD MARTIN" (S. AFRICA)

ONE OF THE MOST curious of phenomena in the present-day Union of South Africa, under its Calvinistic Nationalist Government, drawn from only the Dutch-speaking, or Afrikaaner section, and representing a minority of the white voters, is the censorship.

Every civilised country that can be thought of has some system of official banning or other. Generally, it is aimed at one of the great natural urges, even if there is one, that escapes, namely, the pleasures of the table. For which relief, much thanks!

Even in that great republic of the free, and every man for himself, you will have to be very smart indeed to view a motion picture that in any way criticises the Roman Catholic Church, or depicts a mere male getting the better of any female! And that without official censorship, too! But what differentiates South African censorship of films, photographs, books or pamphlets from that common to most other countries is that the inevitable colour bar is dragged in as well. Let me give a few illustrations.

A film of a boxing, or any other match will be surely banned if the European is knocked out or otherwise defeated by a coloured man. Anything publicly depicting white and non-white associating on equal terms, at a dance or other social function, for example, will be tabu.

Documents, even from the United Nations Organisation, which in the slightest manner hint at equal treatment between European and native African will just be stopped by the Customs authorities, which, by law, often act as the censors.

Of recent days certain comics, so beloved of the younger folk, have been stopped, as in other lands, because of the horrors and inhuman cruelties of some of the crudely coloured pictures, all of U.S. origin. Comics often form the only reading pabulum today of these children. They take the place of the lurid penny dreadfuls of sixty years ago. At any rate, these had to be read; whereas the comics can just be glanced at, the reading matter being brief and in the most dreadful Americanese. Comics showing white and coloured youngsters playing together? Fetch the smelling salts, constable.

This colour-bar aspect of censorship, which must be unique to South Africa, was brought home to me only recently in a peculiar way. From my local free library I had selected a book, written not so long ago, by a retired inspector of New Scotland Yard dealing with the night life of London, the last man, one would expect, to write anything improper or indecent or inflammatory. There was, as it happened, nothing in it that would be censored in any civilised country in Europe or America. The retired inspector emphasised that there was nothing at all romantic about the vicious underworld of London. On the contrary, he pointed out how sordid it all was. There was plenty about money, but just nothing of love, however much is included in that overworked word. Just the book to recommend to a young fellow, it would be thought; not to ban it. Yet a few months after I had had this little book I was surprised to read in one of our principal newspapers that it had been banned. I congratulated myself on now having its contents in my head, from which not even the Chief Censor himself could remove them.

Wondering why on earth this innocent, and even possibly useful, book had gone on the Index, I hit upon the idea that it might possibly be because of the colour problem,

which today is a kind of King Charles' Head in the land of gold, platinum, uranium, diamonds, coal, fruit, maize, drought—and the Nationalist Junta, backed up by the powerful Dutch Calvinist churches, which rules Parliament.

One of the principles on which the censorship appears to work is that nothing must be depicted, printed or said that lowers the status of the white man in the estimation of the non-whites. Whatever happens, he must not be shown to lose face—even if he does in actual fact, as when he is beaten in a boxing match or an athletic contest, or "falls" for a seductive woman of colour, however light. The last is a criminal offence, by the way, by a recent Act.

That would probably be the reason for the banning of the New Scotland Yard ex-inspector's little work.

"If *that* is the way in which the white man can, and does, behave in London"—(or Paris, Berlin, New York, Buenos Aires, or any of the large cities of the world)—"well, then he is not the paragon of all the virtues we are to believe he is", you can imagine a thinking non-white person saying to himself. The idol has feet of clay, after all.

It is, of course, no news to any intelligent man, whatever his colour, that these sordid sides of "all-too-human" beings are quite common, notably in cities of over a million population; but the censorship must see to it that anyone who wishes to read about it is prevented, or it might be "putting ideas into heads" that are better kept empty or stuffed with other ideologies about the god-like quality of a white skin.

In fact, any writings about the equality of mankind, especially those from Communist sources, which are included under "poisonous propaganda", are strictly kept from entering the country, or if already there, are banned. A recent draconian law has it that if anyone be found merely in possession of such a banned work—much less circulating it—he is liable to imprisonment, without the option of a fine.

So people owning libraries of their own are fearfully turning over their old books to see if one of the many books already banned is among them, and if there is, carefully dropping it into a street bin on a dark night, or giving it the treatment once meted out to martyrs by the Church of Love.

If it were not so serious an attack on precious personal liberty, what a subject for a Swift! And this in the mid-20th century, and all to bolster up an impracticable ideology.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY

In your issue of April 20th Mr. Cutner replies at some length to my letter criticising his previous statement in "This Believing World" that "Modern Christianity had abolished slavery". Towards the end he makes an admission which stultifies his whole argument, for he writes: "I might have said modern Christian states as better representing what I meant." The evolution of modern civilisation is not the result of, or because of Christianity, but in spite of and in opposition to it. It is not Christianity which becomes civilised but individual Christians. When we speak or write in opposition to Christianity, in particular, or religion in general, we are attacking the belief in the supernatural. There is no such thing as "modern Christianity". Religious explanations of existence are supernatural interpretations of natural causation and belong to the story of man's past mistakes. Christianity cannot adapt itself—or "submit to the laws of evolution, etc.", for by such a process it only succeeds in destroying itself. Insofar as it survives in modern

society it is an anachronism, a "primitive survival in modern thought". Mr. Cutner is supplying arguments for his friends, the "Reverent Rationalists", or for our Catholic and Christian opponents in the parks, who, only the other Sunday, were shouting at Mr. Arthur and myself: "Who built the schools?", "The libraries?", "The hospitals, etc.?" They will now be able to shout, "Why, it even says in your own paper that Christianity abolished slavery". If it is possible for evil to evolve into good, for untruth into truth, why trouble to fight Christianity at all? It is because it is a social evil that most Freethinkers have spent a lifetime in fighting it.

It seems to me rather foolish to be asked to give a list of Christians in modern states who are today writing books and pamphlets in favour of the reintroduction of slavery, since in all such states the system has been found to be economically unprofitable for the last hundred years. The argument that Christians, as well as non-Christians, fought and wrote for its abolition, seeing that the overwhelming majority of people were and are nominal Christians, is equally weak. The valid tests are these: What was the record of the Christian Churches (not individuals)? What does the Bible teach?—for, as Archdeacon Paley said, "There is no passage in the Old or New Testament by which slavery is condemned or prohibited." There are plenty supporting it. Father Huddleston may be morally right, but Eric Luow is following the divine teaching and that is Christianity.

Mr. Cutner asks, "Do Christians follow the clear and explicit command of Jesus to hate their parents, etc.?" Yes, I am afraid they do, for the whole monastic system, with all its attendant evils, is based on this command and the further teaching of this nature-hating fanatic, that we should "become eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake". How can evolution or society civilise such teaching! It can only supersede it, and when all this is taken away, it is Christianity no longer.

I hope Mr. Cutner will now let the matter drop, for I hate to see my old friend appearing in such a strange rôle, supplying the enemy with ammunition to fire against us. L. EBURY.

### THE LATE T. COLYER

May I add my tribute to the late Mr. T. Colyer, an old colleague and valued friend for half a century. A fine comrade, who "fought the good fight" in the Best of Causes, he was also, I believe, founder of the London Co-operative Members' Organisation. C. E. RATCLIFFE.

### A REPLY TO CRITICS

It is temerarious, perhaps, to controvert such cogent arguers as your "rationalist" correspondents, but may I venture a further word?

God I should define as whatever spiritual reality may underlie the visible universe; and *Religion* as a man's actual and innermost (perhaps not fully formulated) attitude to the mystery of being.

The rationalist asserts there is no such spiritual reality. That is his "religion"; and he stops there. Well and good.

Freethinkers such as myself say that there may be such a spiritual reality. They do not dogmatically rule it out of the realm of possibility, but keep their eyes and ears open for possible hints of it—in a deed of heroism, the Moonlight Sonata, or elsewhere. why not? It enriches life. REX CLEMENTS.

### ESPERANTO

Mr. H. Cutner's article on "A New International Language" is interesting. It caused me to think that "Freewheel-thinker" would be a better name for him. As an argument against Esperanto, apparently, he says "... it has always been the individual who has taken it up, and never the governments of the world". Apply that argument to *freethought* and the *non sequitur* is obvious, is it not?

In Strasbourg I took part recently in a free debate on the Council of Europe and European unity in Esperanto. Ten nationalities took part and not one of us had a prepared speech. I could not help smiling when I compared our debate with what we had witnessed in the Assembly of the Council of Europe, the latter being a farce by comparison!

May I point out to Mr. Cutner that it is clearly stated in our propaganda for Esperanto that the language "is intended not to replace the national tongues but, acting as a second language for people of all nations, to facilitate both written and spoken communications between them".

I wonder what he intends when he declares that Esperanto can never "displace a language like English or French, so rich and varied in its literature". This, I think, displays (forgivable, of course) ignorance of Esperanto, which has a large and growing original literature, and one school of Scottish poets prefers to use Esperanto because of its greater flexibility and ability to express the finest shades of thought.

I am opposed to compulsion in regard to the teaching of Esperanto. Already it is taught in twenty or more British schools

and writing and speaking ability requires not "a number of years but a number of months."

[Our correspondent does not indicate how all this militates against the claims of Interlingue.—Ed.]

### AGENTS-PROVOCATEURS

From a news item in my local newspaper some months ago I learned that the police employ *agents provocateurs* to secure convictions against homosexuals. Now, from THE FREETHINKER review of Peter Wildeblood's book (27/4/56), I learn that zealous constables will play the aforementioned highly dubious rôle in person. Now, the authorities cannot hide the contradictions in all this. On the one hand they pontificate against the "hideous moral leprosy" of homosexuality; on the other hand they use their officers to pose as "perverts" in order to facilitate the roping in of suspects. "Whoso touches pitch must needs become defiled." Would the authorities expose "ordinary, decent young men" to temptations involving "incalculable moral harm" without any misgivings? Would they allow their officers to simulate flirtations with "vicious creatures" if they really thought that the mere presence of a "pervert" was "moral contamination"? When, oh, when, are we going to have some sound sense on this matter from official quarters? S. W. BROOKS.

### FREETHOUGHT JOURNALS

Now in the O.A.P. class, I have had to cut off all papers and magazines except my evening paper, the *Truth Seeker* and THE FREETHINKER, which would be the last to be cut off. It is the best of all. PETER T. LICKIE (Ontario)

### BRANCH LINE

#### DAGENHAM

Members and friends of the Dagenham Branch (N.S.S.) celebrated their first year of activity on Saturday, April 21st, at the Railway Hotel, Barking, with a dinner, social and dance. The toast of the evening, "The N.S.S. and the Dagenham Branch", was proposed by Mr. P. V. Morris, who congratulated the year-old Branch on its initial successes. The Branch Secretary, Mr. G. W. Warner, in responding, said that the local press had forecast the early demise of the Branch. In point of fact, the Branch had become the recognised vehicle of Freethought in the locality, and an invitation had been received from the Dagenham Town Forum for Branch members to take part in the discussion on "Religion and Reason in the Modern Age".

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE LIVERPOOL . WHITSUN 1956

### RECEPTION AND SOCIAL

The N.S.S. Executive Committee cordially invites delegates and friends to the above, at the

STORK HOTEL, 1 QUEEN SQUARE, LIVERPOOL  
at 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, MAY 19TH

### THE CONFERENCE

will be held at the

STORK HOTEL on SUNDAY, MAY 20TH  
at 10.30 — 12.30; 2.30 — 4.30. Lunch at 1 p.m.

### OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATION

SUNDAY EVENING, 7 p.m. LIVERPOOL PIERHEAD  
(If wet, in the Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street)

### WHIT MONDAY

Outing to Otterspool Park at 11 a.m.

WANTED — Books by G. W. Foote, Saladin and similar.  
No. 6, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

FRIENDLY informal international house. Plentiful food, company.  
Moderate terms.—Chris & Stella Rankin, 43 West Park, Eltham  
S.E.9. Tel.: ELT 1761.