

# 75th Birthday Number

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# The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

THE FIRST NUMBER OF THE FREETHINKER appeared in May 1881, and this month therefore marks its 75th year of existence. There can be few weekly journals anywhere which can boast of a life-span of 75 years, and still be as hale and as hearty as THE FREETHINKER is today—a journal which has championed and upheld the Gospel of Freethought and, far more hated, the Gospel of Atheism.

But it has often done more than this—it has championed many causes denied a hearing in other journals, and has consistently been educational, not merely negative. Year in and year out, it has published scholarly articles on Science, Evolution, Comparative Religion and Literature,

and no paper in the world has had more devoted readers. George William Foote died 41 years ago, and it is easy to forget what he did for THE FREETHINKER in particular, and for Freethought in general.

He was 31 when his journal was launched—but young in years though he was, he had already made a big name for himself not only as an accomplished writer, lecturer, and debater, but he had been the editor of *The Secularist* and *The Liberal*. Born in 1850, coming to London in 1868, Foote's great ambition was to have a journal of his own; and in 1875, he and George Jacob Holyoake came together and the first number of *The Secularist* appeared on January 1st, 1876. But Foote was nothing if not independent, and he and his co-editor soon parted. Let us admit that young Foote did not have too much respect for his elders and betters, and he had no scruples whatever in attacking, when he thought fit, the great Chief himself—Charles Bradlaugh. Later, he made handsome amends, and Bradlaugh never had a more doughty champion than G. W. Foote.

*The Secularist* had a hard struggle before it died—it has never been easy for a Freethought journal to pay its way. Without the revenue advertisements could bring in, it is impossible, unless it has a huge circulation; and that has always been difficult to attain. There were at the time other Freethought journals, the "big gun" being Bradlaugh's *National Reformer*. Most, if not all, of them suffered from a solemnity which was forced upon them through the desire not to hurt the feelings of Christians—and no doubt also because of the consequences which might follow a violation of the Laws of Blasphemy—though many Freethinkers felt that a more light-hearted attack against Christianity would rope in more converts.

Whether it was thought that Foote was too cultured and literary—it was always his ambition to be known as a "literary" *Secularist*—or because of his age, the man approached to bring out a gay and a more or less

humorous Freethought journal was the brilliant ex-Wesleyan minister, Joseph Symes (1841-1906), who appeared to have just the needed style, as his many hard-hitting pamphlets against the Bible had already shown. But for one reason or another, Symes was unable to leave Birmingham, where he was living; and eventually it was G. W. Foote who became the first Editor of THE FREE-

THINKER, which duly appeared in May 1881 as a monthly. (A facsimile of this first number was given away during May 1931 to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary.) It was not long before it appeared weekly.

There were a few features which immediately caught the notice of the first

readers of his journal. There was always a splendid leading article which dealt with, as far as possible, some topical event interesting to Freethinkers. And there were two others which were more or less new and which Foote used in his characteristic manner and which really made the paper. These were "Acid Drops" and "Sugar Plums". Nothing quite like them had ever appeared in a Freethought journal. Bradlaugh's direct and factual style did not lend itself at all to the biting, acidulated, and very scornful comments on current events in the religious world which distinguished "Acid Drops". And Foote contrived to make things which happened in the Freethought movement interesting in "Sugar Plums".

But more than that. Foote's lifelong friend was Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, whom he first met when he arrived unknown in London from Plymouth, and whose literary tastes were almost equal to those of Foote himself. Later, Wheeler gave in the pages of THE FREETHINKER some magnificent articles on all sorts of subjects, delving into Anthropology, for example, with the same scholarship he showed when writing more of the by-ways of Freethought and Christian literature than any other previous Freethinker. It is indeed a tragedy that so many of his essays, packed with first-hand knowledge, are buried in so many early and forgotten volumes.

If Foote had been content with his own biting satirical essays, stories, and paragraphs, and those of his clever contributors, he would have easily achieved the object he aimed at in editing THE FREETHINKER. Unfortunately, he appears to have been induced to reproduce some of the "comic" drawings illustrating books and articles of the French Freethinker, Leo Taxil, whose *Bible Amusante* and *Vie de Jesus* long achieved an extraordinary popularity among anti-clericals in France. They were, however, very poor drawings, and few of them appear at this day to be even funny, their only excuse for publication.

Be that as it may, what with one thing and another, and

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

## *The Freethinker*

By H. CUTNER

particularly a special Christmas Number of THE FREETHINKER, Foote had to face two charges of blasphemy. Young, ardent, and undeniably courageous, Foote faced his accusers fearlessly, and delivered two magnificent speeches in his own defence which were more than remarkable. It may well be doubted whether any speeches in such a defence could beat them.

But he had to face an implacable Roman Catholic judge who, no doubt, was only too pleased to find a Freethinker in the dock before him. Judge North gave a splendid exhibition of the kind of judge England would have had all over the country if Popery had been in power here. Intolerant, savage, and callous, he sentenced Foote to 12 months in prison—not the more or less “home from home” prison which can be found here and there in England now, but that infernal cage which could then easily break the heart of anybody, even the most inhuman “lag”. For a sensitive and highly cultured man like Foote, it was Hell. And it no doubt embittered all his life thereafter.

His second trial was before a gentleman and not a cad like North. This was Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, and unlike North, who constantly interrupted Foote, he listened

with patience and courtesy to a great defence. The jury disagreed, and Foote was not tried again.

It must be added that many of the country's distinguished literary and other men signed a petition for his release, and it was contemptuously rejected by Sir William Harcourt, who was a good Christian and was the Home Secretary at the time. Foote had to serve his sentence, though in the latter part he was lucky to have a sympathetic Governor in his prison. On his release he was given a splendid welcome.

It is necessary to stress all this because it gave THE FREETHINKER a much publicised notoriety and unfortunately not always of the best. But it was better for the paper to be hated than ignored; and two very prominent authors of the day certainly noticed THE FREETHINKER. One was George Meredith, then at the height of his reputation as a great novelist and poet; and the other was Mrs. Humphrey Ward (the niece of Matthew Arnold), whose *Robert Elsmere* created a literary sensation. Their reactions were very different but at least they noticed, in their different ways, not only his journal but the more or less despised Freethinker himself.

(To be concluded.)

## Foote's Library

IN FEBRUARY 1916 the firm of Dobell, of Charing Cross Road, published a catalogue of books for sale from the library of the late G. W. Foote. Many interesting items included the correspondence with George Meredith the poet, some presentation copies of privately printed tracts by George Bernard Shaw, and letters from Robert Browning and Thomas Hardy. In his foreword Mr. Percy Dobell wrote as follows:

“In offering my customers the following books, all collected by the late G. W. Foote, I am placing before them the library of a man of letters. Mr. Foote's lecturing and editorial work has for more than a quarter of a century been so much in evidence that to the general public he was little more than the man of action—the sledge-hammer propagandist. This was one side only of the man, for were there nothing else to show than this list of books it would be sufficient proof that he had a literary side to his character, far removed from the many controversies in which he took so prominent a part.

“Mr. Foote's literary output was considerable, but being printed for the most part in papers of limited circulation it is practically an unknown quantity to the student. His lectures on Shakespeare, it has been stated, are to be collected and published in a volume. He studied Shelley closely and wrote a good deal relating to him. “Thorndale” Smith was another favourite author mentioned in his correspondence with my father, about whom he would have liked to have written. His literary sympathies, in fact, were very wide, ranging from the Elizabethan dramatists to present-day writers. He had a keen critical faculty, and when Thomson withdrew from the *National Reformer* was able to be of very material assistance to him by throwing open the pages of *The Secularist*, *Progress* and *The Liberal* to the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. Thomson and Foote were for some time on intimate terms, taking long walks together, and discussing religious, political and social problems. Foote communicated to Mr. H. S. Salt many of the facts embodied in the latter's life of Thomson. Foote's personal friends and associates were greatly attached to him; the two or three books in this catalogue which J. M. Wheeler presented to him bear touching inscriptions, and Foote's regard for Wheeler was equally touching. The

following quotation from a letter of Foote's to Mr. H. S. Salt reveals a heart capable of great depths of feeling: “Your reference to J. M. Wheeler touches me deeply. I am inexpressibly glad that you “often think of him with affection”. His was a heart of gold, and his mind was of no mean order. But it is the heart—is it not?—that speaks the last word in memory. I miss him now as I did the day after he died, and shall miss him until (perhaps) I too am missed myself.”

“All the tributes to Foote's memory bear testimony to his love for his books, which he selected with great care and valued highly. Every book was bought for the purpose of adding to his knowledge, and there is abundant evidence in the volumes that they were read—many having a sheet of paper inserted with notes of the principal contents, doubtless to serve as reminders when reviewing, or for points in lecturing.

“My father and Foote were on very friendly terms for thirty years or more. Foote, whilst living in London, frequently calling upon my father for a chat, and in search of the books of which he was in need. Their mutual admiration for ‘B.V.’ and his writings, and reverence for his memory, drew them together. Bradlaugh did great public service, and one phase at least of his work was continued by Foote—both saw a great change in the public attitude towards the vexed questions with which they were concerned, so much so that for the last few years of his life Foote was able to give a good deal of the time to literary subjects. Such men as Foote are rare, and it is pleasant to know that he was recognised and encouraged in his work by, among others, George Meredith, Robert Browning, and Thomas Hardy. If the character of the books a man collects reveal somewhat of his individuality, then these I now offer are such as one can well conceive to have been the mental companions of a broad and liberal-minded man.”

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# Seventy-Five Years of Militant Freethought

By C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

A CENTURY in earth history is a brief passing moment; but in the life of man it is a long period during which much may happen, and in the three-quarters of a century during which THE FREETHINKER has held high the standard of emancipation of the mind great changes have occurred. Free thinking must be free to all who have the wish and will to enquire and meditate; hence it requires a system of universal education which is planned neither to create a priesthood and a congregation nor an army and its officers nor the servile creatures of an omnipotent state. Such a liberal institution was the dream of the enthusiasts of the French Revolution. After 13 centuries since the suppression of the schools by Justinian, after a millenium consecrated to ignorance and superstition, a challenge was at last issued defying the powers of Church and despot.

Great Britain was late in establishing a system of national education; for nearly seventy years Anglican and Nonconformist warred for the control of the country's youth and a compromise was not reached till 1870, 76 years after Prussia had created a scholastic system based on militarism.

What, then, was the Christian position in this country at the time THE FREETHINKER first appeared? The following references may give some idea. "The Bible is none other than the Word of God that sitteth upon the Throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High," declared Dean Burgen.

When Bishop Colenso, author of a very successful arithmetic book, also applied simple calculation to the problem of housing the animals in Noah's Ark he was denounced by a committee which included Gladstone.

Eleven thousand clergymen signed a declaration of faith which held that "the punishment of the cursed, equally with the life of the righteous, is everlasting".

Such, briefly, was the clerical position attacked by THE FREETHINKER. The power of the Churches was to all seeming supreme. It was not till 1888 that Bradlaugh succeeded in passing his Oaths Act, so that in the law courts the Freethinker had either to take the oath, or he could give no evidence and became the target of abusive attacks from the bench. And what is the situation today? Several recent publications have made it clear.

In 1938 the Church of England published a report on Doctrine, which Joseph McCabe termed "The Passing of Heaven and Hell". That Hell which Ignatius of Loyola described so vividly (no doubt inspiring the later Father Furniss to compose his lessons for children) is now, for Anglicans, merely the "exclusion from the Fellowship of God", and Heaven, which as pictured by Dante in his *Divine Comedy* Goethe considered insipid, is now deprived of locality. In 1946 the same Church produced a volume *Toward the Conversion of England*, a rearguard action, in which it admitted that a Mass Observation study had shown that only 10-15% of the population of these islands, or in any case of one of them, attended any sort of divine service with any regularity or frequency, and a further 25%, giving a little more than lip-service, appeared at intervals for special occasions; whereas 10% by conviction rejected supernatural religion. A similar study, "Puzzled People" of a London borough, brought to light the fact that 40% either did not believe in any religion or had no use for an institution based on one; this proportion rose among the young to 49%. Furthermore, the British Broadcasting Corporation includes in its annual report

statistics, Listeners' Research, the figures of which, as far as they concern the attention paid to religious broadcasting, bear out the above conclusions. Generally it may be claimed that half the population of this country has, to all effect, left the Churches, and that one in ten is a Free-thinker by reasoned conviction. And mark well! not more than one in ten is prepared to inconvenience himself to the extent of attending a Church service save for "hatch, match and despatch", though some may listen more or less somnolently from the depths of an easy chair to the BBC Light Programme services. (I wonder how many with intention listen to that revealingly named "Lighten our Darkness", a very dim will-o'-the-wisp?)

I need not remind readers of THE FREETHINKER that the radio was closed to any form of religion (or to any criticism of orthodox religion) other than the doctrines and forms approved by the Church Established (by Lord Reith?) until 1946. This ban was relaxed after the Governors of the Corporation had received a deputation of Members of the two Houses of Parliament, headed by Earl Russell, the influence of which was shown in a number of outspoken broadcasts. A second deputation, led by Lord Chorley and Mr. Reeves, was similarly received in 1951, with similar results. At the same time, however, be it noted, Roman Catholic services became heard on the air, and every year since, more and more time is allotted to Father Agnellus Andrews, the R.C. officer on the BBC staff, to the profit of Rome and the expense of the ordinary listener.

Seventy-five years of education have taught the masses to listen-in, as well as to peruse the columns of the *Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Pictorial*. When secondary education became a care of the State after 1907, by, presumably, some oversight, the undenominational Bible instruction which was obligatory in the primary schools was not so in the more advanced ones, and the subject was not inspected by the Board of Education. It was, admittedly, usual to place a weekly lesson for each class on the time-table, and the head teacher was expected to profess in public a belief in Christianity, to declare frequently that this is a Christian country. The 1944 Education Act put this "right"; religious instruction is now obligatory in all grades of school; is now inspected, and the morning assembly must have a due heavenly leaven.

As the work on doctrine showed, the Anglican Church (and its ancient foes, the Nonconformists, conform more and more each decade) has largely given up any serious attempt to defend the Bible—the labours of Canon Streeter, Bishop Gore, Archdeacon Charles and Bishop Barnes have not been without effect. The cry today is that the sole firm basis of morality is religion, which means, of course, the Christian brand. The statistics to which reference was made at the beginning of this article are, so the pious clerics reiterate vehemently, borne out by the rise in crime, particularly of juvenile crime. What short memories these divines must have! The demoralisation and depravity of slum youth seventy years ago was beyond anything to be met with today. Arthur Morrison's *Mean Streets* and *A Child of the Jago* may be out of print, but the picture they gave provided an enduring record to which these defenders of child morality should refer. Moreover, as we of THE FREETHINKER know well, thanks to Mr. McCabe, when the statistics of crime are analysed, wherever the religious beliefs and unbringing of the criminals are given, it is found that the unbeliever is seldom met with in this

company, and that out of all proportion to their section of the population are the criminals who claim to be of Roman Catholic persuasion and upbringing. Hence the howl of dismay from the pious and the conventional when Mrs. Knight gave her broadcasts. Nevertheless, it is recorded that, of the letters received by the BBC concerning this broadcast, 45% were in favour of it.

If the gains in the past three-quarters of a century have been great for the free thought which is our aim, so have

been the losses for freethought, the militant spirit which inspires us. The inert indifference of which the Churches complain is equally our complaint. None sees a religion die, but one is dying before our eyes. Its spirit is dying, but its power is still very great. As the truth of its dogmas becomes more and more shadowed by doubt, so does the power and the wealth pass into that Church which is mostly solidly founded on human folly and weakness—the Church of Rome. THE FREETHINKER may not rest!

## Man's Descent: How, When and Where?

By G. H. TAYLOR

RELIGIOUS EFFORTS to disprove the evolution of man have been made almost continuously since the time of Darwin, and there has recently been quite a spate of American anti-evolutionist literature.

The claim that science cannot find "the missing link" between man and his anthropoid ancestry is hopelessly unscientific. The expression, "the missing link", is, in the first place, utterly misleading in being over-simplified. For "link" read "links"; for "missing" read "massing"; and we have a truer picture. No such animal as the missing link is needed to establish the truth of man's descent.

The sea of controversy into which every important discovery falls concerns such questions as to what place it belongs in the genealogical map, what the status of the new specimen is (i.e., whether it is a new genus), and whether it lies on or near the exact line of descent (assuming that the direct line could ever be disentangled and picked out with certainty, which seems quite likely).

Sometimes the controversy centres on whether the find is ape or hominid, hominid or "true" man. These controversies are often hailed with ignorant delight by religious people, who are only too pleased to see the scientists at variance with one another. Yet the very fact of uncertainty is itself evidence of man's descent. If every find were indisputably ape or indisputably man, there might be some ground for supposing some final distinction by divine fiat between the two. It is precisely because simian and human characters are so inextricably mixed that controversy arises.

What anthropologists today have to decide is not "Has man evolved?" but "When, where and how did man evolve?"

Obviously the question When? depends on the anthropological definition of man. It is equally true to say man emerged 25 million years ago, one million years ago, or fifty thousand years ago, according to what we decide to call "man". Dr. Robert Broom, a foremost authority, has said the "human line" arose from 25 to 30 million years ago from a primitive anthropoid, a little lower on the scale than *propliopithecus* (a fossil found in Egypt). On the other hand, if we are looking for factors anatomically similar to ours in respects of thumbs, brain case, neck and teeth, we shall not go further than *Cromagnon*, a caveman who migrated across the N. African coast into Europe about 50,000 years ago. He was probably the mental, and certainly the physical, equal of ourselves. Widely strewn relics, of great interest to palaeontologists, indicate his migratory habits, and in his art work there is evidence of a rudimentary religion or, what is perhaps the same thing, magic-ritual. Tall, upstanding *Cromagnon* is sometimes termed First True Man. With the extinction of intermediate types the terms "man" and "ape" now have a distinct meaning. The further we recede in evolution the more the distinction becomes a matter of arbitration.

Where did man emerge? The more liberal among Chris-

tians have, till recently, been able to thank the scientist for the small mercy of putting the "Garden of Eden" in Asia—the right place, even if the wrong Garden. Even this solace is now taken from them, South Africa, during the last ten years, having given up such important evidence of the cradle of man that it is now highly favoured as his probable birthplace.

It is conceivable, however, that whatever beginnings may also have occurred in Asia or Europe would never come to light, having been buried by great glacial ice sheets, both before and during man's emergence. The last glaciers to penetrate to South Africa were near the close of the "Republican Dynasty", and this part of the earth is now the most rewarding in the treasure hunt for fossils. A discovery at Taungs in 1924 (*Australopithecus*) has since gained in prestige as being on the actual line of descent in the "intermediate" zone between man and ape.

The biggest controversy on the question as to how man has evolved has been whether he did so by a series of gradations or quite rapidly. The conjecture was that without steps and gradations with collaterals, man was sprung full-fledged from the loins of some hairy monkey or ape. A sudden remodelling of perhaps even a monkey ancestor.

This does not, as at first sight it may appear to, cut out the intermediate mixed forms. It merely supposes that these latter co-existed with the sudden emergence. The problem may be put thus: Has our ancestry undergone a laboured, unsteady progression from a primitive anthropoid, or did recent man exist contemporaneously with half-way forms, having already appeared abruptly in some period of mutational instability?

As near to hand as Kent, London and Bury St. Edmunds, human bones have been found in strata which make them at least as old as fossils usually regarded as "links". The late Prof. H. H. Woollard pointed out that, owing to the preconception of gradualness, it has been customary, on a genealogical map, to have the smaller brains anterior to the larger, even though found in the same period, and this without the support of evidence from palaeontology (the study and classification of remains and other evidences apart from actual fossils). Woollard, however, used the Piltdown fake as part of his data.

However, the geneticist must here have some say in the matter. If the present upright form, big brain, small face, chin, characteristic gait, and long legs which distinguish man, were sudden acquisitions, the breaks which carried such leaps must not be wildly outside the limits permitted by existing knowledge of heredity and genetics. Yet, if it could be shown that so-called human characters are already present in some degree among Primates, then possibly the assemblage we call human could be separated and so give the appearance of "true man" with only a minimum of graded evolution.

Where shall we seek such characters at an admittedly

prehuman level? The answer is in one of the most interesting groups known, the *Tarsius spectrum*. Prof. Wood Jones (*Man's Place among the Mammals*) relates recent man directly to the lemur monkey of Malay. In *Tarsius* we find a mosaic of reptilian, primitive mammalian, monkey, anthropoid and even human characters. It goes back to the Eocene and would mean that human features were in the Primate germ plasm from the start. If the theory were substantiated—as now seems unlikely—man would have had a long pedigree independent of the apes.

We should still have to account for the similarities between man and ape. The answer of Wood Jones was by parallel evolution, man and ape being unrelated species undergoing the same structural modifications, thus creating a deceptive appearance of kinship.

He was not ambitious for the theory, and it is surely economical to suppose that the many characters shared by man and ape indicate a common heritage, while our few resemblances to *Tarsius* may mean, on the assumption that hominids and anthropomorpha both come from a creature with lemuroid or tarsioid features, that man has retained certain archaic characters dropped by the ape. In any case, Prof. Le Gros Clark has said that the lemurs and their allies branched off from the basal Primates in the very early Tertiary, and another branch was *Tarsius* before the separation of the man and ape group from the monkeys.

What chance would a human, or almost human, set of factors have of coming without having to be sorted out in the course of a lengthy evolution? The chances of such advantageous breaks can be calculated mathematically. The make-up of the mature individual in inheritance is resolved on Mendelian lines into the genes strung like beads along the chromosome. Having decided which of them (a) are required for the emergence of True Man, and (b) are already present in the Primate stock, or could have arisen by mutation (the way in which a gene alters its contribution to the hereditary composition), it is possible to estimate the chances of pro-human assemblages appearing in the same animal, and similarly estimate whether they could be perpetuated through their recipients.

The theory that man "skipped apedom" and thus avoided the encumbrances of beetling brows, a slouching gait and a chinless head, has, in spite of a later theory of Osborn somewhat akin to it, lost support, and most investigators today accept the inevitability of gradualness. Nevertheless, what is arguable is that after a slow and laboured "assemblage of parts", there followed a comparatively rapid stream of evolution which finally resulted in man.

## Joseph Mazzini Wheeler

By VICTOR E. NEUBURG

ONE OF THE MOST notable contributors to THE FREETHINKER in its early days was Joseph Mazzini Wheeler, and he became the paper's sub-editor in January 1882, a position he held for the remainder of his life.

Wheeler was born in London on January 24th, 1850, the same year as Foote himself. While still a young man he began contributing to *The National Reformer* and later to the *Secularist*, *Secular Review*, *Secular Chronicle* and the *Liberal*.

During the whole of his literary life, Wheeler was associated with G. W. Foote; the two men had met in London in 1868 when they were 18 years of age. It was the success of THE FREETHINKER in the early 'eighties which drew him to London from Edinburgh, where he had been working as a lithographer. Most of Wheeler's work was signed with his own name, but he also used pseudonyms, amongst

which are "Lucianus", "Hero Jewel" and—probably—"The Scoffer". Several articles by him appeared too in Foote's short-lived periodical *Progress*. All of his work bears witness to the extraordinarily wide range of his reading, and to his very considerable literary ability.

Besides articles, Wheeler was the author of three books, *A Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers* (1889), *Bible Studies and Phallic Worship* (1892), and *Footsteps of the Past* (1895). The last was partially reprinted in 1931 with the same title; the omitted sections were issued in 1932 with the title, *Paganism in Christian Festivals*. It is perhaps the most important of Wheeler's books and shows that far from being a populariser, he was one of the pioneers in the study of anthropology.

In collaboration with Foote he issued *Crimes of Christianity* (1887); with the same collaborator he edited *The Jewish Life of Christ* (1885), and it is probable that the greater part of the work involved in preparing the notes was carried out by Wheeler. Published in 1894 was a pamphlet called *Voltaire*, with which he and Foote were jointly concerned. Wheeler was also the author of some pamphlets, probably not more than a dozen in number.

When Foote was sentenced to a year's imprisonment in 1883, Wheeler's health broke down. He was always extremely sensitive to the sufferings of others, and the condemnation of his friend led to a mental breakdown. After some months in a convalescent home he recovered, but several other attacks followed, and under one of them he died on May 5th, 1898. In the issue of THE FREETHINKER dated ten days later, Foote paid tribute to the memory of his friend in a front-page article, which concluded with these words:

"...I have neither time nor space to write now of Mr. Wheeler's great intellectual gifts, his wonderfully wide reading, his profound acquaintance with the whole subject of the evolution of human society, and his minute knowledge of religion, from Christianity down to the most savage superstitions. At such a moment it is character rather than intellect that claims our attention.... He was true to others and true to himself. He knew and felt that philosophy is barren without the fertilisation of love. He was one of the heralds of a new and more glorious day for humanity."

Wheeler's domestic life had been one of great happiness, and his small estate was bequeathed to his wife.

In one respect Wheeler's erudition was unique. His exhaustive knowledge of early freethought history was unrivalled. At the time of his death he was engaged upon a *History of Freethought in England*. It is not known what became of the manuscript. Numerous articles by him upon this subject were published from time to time in the columns of THE FREETHINKER, and their brilliance gives some indication of what the completed history might have been. His account, for example, of the English Deistic Movement is masterly; so too are his portraits of individual freethinkers like James Watson and Julian Hibbert. At the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897 he published an account of sixty years of freethought which is of permanent value.

There is a strong probability that the manuscript of his history was the basis for a good many of the articles which were published in THE FREETHINKER after his death.

The present writer possesses several books formerly owned by Wheeler. This fact is worth mentioning only because of the light that some of the MS notes throw upon his wide knowledge. *The Jewish Life of Christ*—obviously Wheeler's "working" copy—is copiously and carefully annotated in his own hand. There is also an extremely scarce freethought book occasioned by the Paine controversies, published in 1799, which contains a note on a subsequent edition and indicates the identity of the anonymous author.

**From EDEN PHILLPOTTS**

Britain's distinguished veteran playwright

*As a life-long Rationalist I am old enough to have appreciated THE FREETHINKER'S long and successful battle and wish you very cordially many happy returns of the day.*

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

**From PROFESSOR A. E. HEATH**

*I should like to include my name in the long list of those who will wish to send you a message of good will on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of THE FREETHINKER. It has played, and is still playing, a valuable and honourable part in the rationalist movement. My best wishes for its future success.*

A. E. HEATH

[We particularly appreciate this message in view of the fact that Prof. Heath had only just returned from hospital after a serious, but we are pleased to note successful, operation. If Prof. Heath's recovery has to be slow, we trust it will nevertheless be thorough, and we shall follow it with interest. His contributions to psychology, as well as to the rationalist movement, are widely known and appreciated.—ED.]

**From MARGARET KNIGHT**

*As a recent recruit to the N.S.S., I send hearty congratulations to THE FREETHINKER on its 75th birthday. It has lived to a hale old age at a time when many serious periodicals have failed to survive—an achievement which speaks volumes both for the appeal of the views that it maintains so robustly, and for the devoted and disinterested work of its staff and contributors.*

*THE FREETHINKER has worthily carried on the traditions of Bradlaugh and Foote. Long may it live to continue the fight against supersition!*

MARGARET KNIGHT

**From Dr. J. BRONOWSKI**

*I congratulate THE FREETHINKER on the work of reasoned and liberal enlightenment which it has carried on for seventy-five years, and I wish it equal success in the future in spreading the knowledge of a free, thoughtful and independent humanism.*

J. BRONOWSKI

**From ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON**

*I made the acquaintance of THE FREETHINKER nearly fifty years ago when I was a student. That was in the later part of Foote's editorship. I did not become a regular reader until 1915, when he was on the point of retiring. Soon afterwards Chapman Cohen took over, and I became a contributor.*

*It seems a long time ago now, and it was a very different world. The task of Freethinkers looked so simple then: we just had to riddle the fallacies of religion and go on riddling them till they exploded. I know now that it is not so simple, and that religion is only one part of a complex economic and political set-up which cannot in the end be dealt with piecemeal. Still, we cannot all do everything. I am not an economist or a politician, but I do know something of the dishonesty and imposture that calls itself religion; and it is good work to deflate it, leaving other departments to be attended to by others more qualified.*

*THE FREETHINKER has never pulled its punches or gone in for what used to be called "reverent agnosticism". That is why it attracted me from the first. I may not always have agreed with it, but never mind! We need militant atheists to set off the unscrupulousness of the Churches—strong in their coward's castle of radio monopoly. So here's luck to THE FREETHINKER and all Freethinkers.*

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

# 75th Birthday

**From ADRIAN BRUNEL**

Playwright and Film Director

*I remember THE FREETHINKER as a child and marvel that it is still going strong—without the backing of a Church, union, political party or other rich group. What courage and perseverance . . .*

ADRIAN BRUNEL

**From M. GOMPERTZ, B.A., Ph.D., etc.**

*Well over seventy years ago THE FREETHINKER came into my life and G. W. Foote's terse and vigorous English became for me a model of clarity and militancy. To me Foote and Freethought became indissolubly linked.*

*Foote's courage in publishing cartoons after his imprisonment for blasphemy was a challenge to the bigots and an inspiration to the younger generation. I once had the happiness to meet Foote and his conversation was as brilliant as his writing.*

*One Sunday while at college I heard him lecture in the morning on Clerkenwell Green (where there was nothing green to be seen) and in the evening at the Hall of Science, and I admired the man "this side of idolatry".*

*His articles were examples of vigour and brevity and required close and continuous attention to savour their quality, and there was never a useless word. His published lectures on Shakespeare were a delight to read and when heard have never been bettered on the stage. He possessed that "action and utterance and the power of speech to stir men's blood", so whenever I could hear him Foote could always be sure of a fascinated listener. So it was for thirty years till he died.*

*I met Chapman Cohen when we were both about 25 years old, while he was conducting a series of lectures in South Shields, and we became very fast friends.*

*He completed my education in scepticism and I owe him a like tribute to that paid to Foote.*

M. GOMPERTZ

[Dr. Gompertz was on terms of intimate friendship with the late Chapman Cohen for well over forty years.—ED.]

**From C. BRADLAUGH BONNER**

President of the World Union of Freethinkers

*It is my highly prized privilege to convey on behalf of the Freethinkers all the world over greetings to the courageous journal which has steadfastly and nobly upheld our cause for three-quarters of a century. We look to you as to a bright standard flashing out into a clear air. Long may you give us heart for the fray, no matter what winds blow!*

C. BRADLAUGH BONNER

**From M. L. BURNET**

Assistant Secretary, Ethical Union

*I salute THE FREETHINKER as a great opponent over three generations of obscurantism and entrenched reaction, thus preparing the ground for a more civilised and developed type of living. Freethought is relevant on two planes, the dignity of the individual which requires freedom for everyone to develop his own thought untrammelled by authority, and the social plane, the right of a society by the effective use of reason to create the highest form of society within its collective capacities. The fight for freedom of thought is one that by its nature can never be won outright and I therefore wish the journal a long and vigorous life in the future.*

M. L. BURNET

# Godwill Greetings

From **J. HENRY LLOYD**

Hon. Secretary of the Humanist Council

I am greatly interested to see that THE FREETHINKER has reached the advanced age, for a periodical, of 75. It happens to be only five years older than myself and this concurrent length of experience perhaps enables me to judge better than the present generation the great change in the climate of public opinion which has been brought about by the persistent challenge of such papers as THE FREETHINKER to superstition and irrational views of religion. The crudity of argument and frequent bitterness of earlier days have given place to greater respect for facts and soberer debate. The exploitation of credulity in the name of religion still continues, and with it the need for outspoken exposure of this abuse of human reason and responsibility, but Secularists will perhaps permit me to suggest that today our task is much wider than mere criticism of other views of religion. From this broader and more constructive standpoint I appreciate very much the support given by the National Secular Society and THE FREETHINKER to the united front represented by this Council. All good wishes for the prosperity of both.

J. HENRY LLOYD

From **H. J. BLACKHAM**

Secretary of the Ethical Union

Sending congratulations to THE FREETHINKER on this first 75 years and my best wishes for very many more years of service to freethought, I ask myself what it is we look for in THE FREETHINKER. I think we want it to play the part of the enfant terrible, to ask the awkward questions which make the high and mighty trip up and fall down and find their level. J. S. Mill wrote in his diary: "A very useful periodical might be started which should employ itself wholly in criticising the bad or foolish sayings of persons of note. . . . Such a periodical would soon wield a great power if conducted ably, on principle, and without malice."

An enfant terrible can't expect to be popular. It may give offence, on principle, and for all that (or for that) be widely read. I hope you will give offence and be read.

H. J. BLACKHAM

From **HUTTON HYND**

Secretary of the South Place Ethical Society

Free thought is of little practical worth apart from free speech. It is one thing to have a free mind, another to be free to speak one's mind. To be effective, the man who is free to think (and he is free to think, anyway) must be free to speak — with tongue or pen. The free thinker is fairly safe; the free speaker or free writer is not so safe. Big Brother may be listening! The mike may be behind the mirror!

Happily, THE FREETHINKER, through its 75 years of existence, has been the Freespeaker—speaking with responsible freedom, and with humour. It has ventured to say things which needed to be said; and it can be as proud of things left unsaid as of things said. Ethical societies as well as Secular societies have been encouraged to speak up and speak out because this outspoken journal has made its regular appearance. Grateful thanks to editors, contributors, publishers.

Long live THE FREETHINKER as the Freespeaker!

J. HUTTON HYND

From **HECTOR HAWTON**

Managing Director of the Rationalist Press Association

On behalf of the R.P.A. I should like to congratulate THE FREETHINKER on reaching the ripe age of 75 without loss of its old vigour and with every expectation of being able to continue the struggle against superstition. The climate of opinion, as we are often told, has undergone many changes since the days of Bradlaugh, when THE FREETHINKER was founded, but it is a mistake to suppose that this is necessarily unfavourable to freethought and rationalism. Fewer people than ever accept the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and there is a large and informed public ready for our message if we can express it in such a way that it seems relevant to their present needs.

No journal could have survived to long as THE FREETHINKER if it had not been able to adapt itself to changing times without any sacrifice of fundamental principles. The practical difficulties that confront organs of independent thought due to the mounting costs of production are formidable, and heavy demand has to be made on the loyalty and co-operation of readers. But the influence that such journals exert is out of all proportion to their circulation. Small in comparison with the mammoth sales of the popular press, journals such as THE FREETHINKER act like vitamins on the intellectual life of the community and prevent it from hardening into a deadly uniformity.

Long may it continue to flourish. HECTOR HAWTON

From **PROFESSOR HYMAN LEVY**

We live in a society that needs materialist science increasingly for its development. Human understanding grows in the process. At the same time myth and mysticism play an important role in retaining power and social prestige in the hands of certain interested groups, institutions and classes. In this situation THE FREETHINKER has battled for 75 years on the side of truth. It will die when its task is fulfilled. For that reason—and for that reason only—may it never become a centenarian.

HYMAN LEVY

From **PROFESSOR J. D. BERNAL**

I would like to add my voice to others who are celebrating the 75th anniversary of THE FREETHINKER. The struggle for the liberation of the human mind has been an essential, and, indeed, a central, part of the advancement of humanity.

In the last 75 years THE FREETHINKER has courageously maintained that struggle and opened the minds of many to the possibilities of new knowledge. But that task is not over. Indeed, the work of THE FREETHINKER is needed now as never before. We live in an age of violent transition with enormous possibilities and dangers such as humanity has never before faced. In the realm of thought, many attempt to avoid facing these realities by a deliberate ignorance and here they are helped by the age-old institutions who are now, when the last excuse for it has gone, reviving obscurantism and preaching the sinfulness and impotence of man.

But it would be a mistake to attempt to meet this by the old methods of militant free thought. These may easily become as narrow and fixed as the dogmas they first set out to attack. Free thought should look forward and widen its front, using the experience of the past only as a guide to the future. The social relevance of thought needs to be understood. The ideal of the Freethinker of 75 years ago, the man whose thoughts

are his own, once liberated from the shackles of religion, is itself a reflection of the individualist competitive society of the time. It needs to give way today to a sense of social solidarity and responsibility and that not for maintaining but for changing society. The philosophies no less than the religions of the past all became, after a revolutionary start, ideologies of acceptance of the world of nature and society. They emphasised the impotence of man in the face of a cruel and pitiless nature and the duty of resignation. They enjoined submission to unjust social systems, plutocratic, feudal or capitalist, in the name of a superior justice which would provide spiritual satisfactions now and hereafter. They discouraged, where they did not actively suppress, any attempt to change the material or institutional framework of human existence. In the world of today and tomorrow these attitudes are not only senseless but dangerous. The powers that man has won through science, to control and transform nature, and the new consciousness of the evolution of social systems can be and have been used to destroy and enslave, and these actions have been justified in the name of religion and old tradition. The belief in the illimitable powers of mankind expressed through thought and in action is a liberating one. It implies, however, a responsibility greater than ever before assumed by man. No outer forces can be appealed to for help or blamed for failure. The new freedom of thought is no easy gospel and it will need as much integrity, thought and effort from the men of today as their forerunners showed 75 years ago.

J. D. BERNAL

## GREETINGS FROM LONG-TERM READERS

I first came into contact with THE FREETHINKER about the year 1900, and it helped me to freer and saner views than I had previously held. There was more fundamental brain work in its pages than in any other journal published in Great Britain. That compliment is still justified today, for the paper is still served by brilliant thinkers and writers in the interests of freethought and secularism. No other paper I know of maintains such a uniformly high intellectual level.

The founder of our journal, the ever admired and respected G. W. Foote, wrote that "Freethought is a belief in the desirability of a state of society in which a man may think about philosophy, religion, art, politics and ethics, and communicate his thoughts publicly to others, without incurring the penalties of stake and rack, imprisonment, exile or deprivation of livelihood, even though his thoughts lead him to conclusions contrary to the accepted orthodoxy in these matters".

ALFRED D. CORRICK

I congratulate THE FREETHINKER; in spite of all temptations it has remained a vehicle of freethought propaganda. It has not allowed its organisation to become submerged in any political party or to be converted into a book club. May it long continue to be an opponent of the cunning, unscrupulous and cruel activities of priestcraft.

E. H. GROUT

[Mr. Grout's first article in THE FREETHINKER appeared over thirty years ago.—ED.]

[The above messages are printed in the order received. More may appear in future issues.]

"In every country and in every age the priest (R.C.) has been hostile to liberty; he is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection for his own".—Jefferson  
"It is cheaper to corrupt than to conquer".—Thomas Paine

## Our Journal

By G. I. BENNETT

THREE-QUARTERS OF A CENTURY. . . It is a long time in which to have sustained with so slender resources the fight against the formidable phalanxes of sham, humbug and superstition. Such has been the grand achievement of our English FREETHINKER. And as at this time we look back and contemplate that achievement, we remember with thankfulness and gratitude the tireless efforts, the self-sacrificing devotion, the unwaning enthusiasm of those who have contributed, in their large or their small measure, to its success and kept its standard flying these 75 years past. That our journal will make its century will be the earnest hope of us, its readers, and of radical-thinking people everywhere.

Assailing traditionalist and conformist opinion is in most respects a peculiarly unrewarding task, as George Meredith told our founder-Editor many years ago. One's contemporaries look with keen disapproval, if not with angry resentment, at one who would break their idols and images. And, however dispassionately one may seek to be the servant of truth, one can expect no applause, no encores, no commendation for turning the searching beam of criticism upon established beliefs and time-honoured customs and institutions.

There are more ways than one of persecuting heterodoxy, and if in these modern times you aren't brought to the stake for holding views at variance with those stamped with the seal of authority, nevertheless your bravado may call down abuse and misrepresentation upon your head, and all uncharitableness. You have but this consolation: you are a forerunner of enlightened thought and progressive reform. What you in your loneliness think and feel today the majority will passively accept tomorrow—or the day after tomorrow. Not that they will give you and your small band of pioneering spirits the credit for a changed climate of opinion, and improved social or legal conditions. They will, as becomes the masses, simply take these things for granted. But it is not for the plaudits of the multitude, still less for monetary gain, that men serve the truth and are impelled to humanitarian endeavour. One thinks of those who have lived and died for a noble cause—those of whom we have record and that greater number of whom we have no record. How many of them—poor men, most—gained any reward therefrom except that which comes from a sense of personal fulfilment, and of having played a useful, if unacclaimed, part in the world?

It has been the function of THE FREETHINKER since the day of its birth to play a useful—nay, a gloriously vital—part in the world, unrecognised and unacclaimed though that part has been. From the first it has sought to free men's minds from the age-old bondage of religious creeds, from a slavish and fearful adherence to outworn thought-forms, and to rouse in them righteous indignation of the social evils in their midst, to urge them to be quit of rituals, practices, and sports that are barbaric survivals of an unemancipated past. For the world of yesterday THE FREETHINKER had a stirring message, and it has a no less stirring message for the world of today.

On this 75th anniversary of our journal let us honour the memory of those now gone from us who made possible its three-quarters of a century of existence, through troubled times and changing scenes and many difficulties. Their efforts will not have been in vain if we worthily carry on the work they perforce left unfinished.

"God watches the sparrow fall but does not rescue it from the hawk".—Robert Hughes



# THE FREETHINKER

41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

Telephone: Holborn 2601.

FROM June 1st next all postal charges for printed papers are to be raised. Consequently, much as we regret it, the subscription rates for THE FREETHINKER will have to be increased to 7s. 6d. for three months, 15s. for six months, and 30s. for 12 months, home and abroad.

## 1881-1956

WHEN FOOTE penned the first words ever written in THE FREETHINKER he said he would not bore readers with a list of promises that might never be kept. His caution was justified: one after another, Freethought ventures into journalism had lived their brief but valiant day. But THE FREETHINKER soon made its presence felt, and today we are able to celebrate our three quarters of a century with a compound of memories and hopes.

Appropriately, our veteran contributor, Mr. H. Cutner, writes the first of two articles on the history of the journal with which he has been associated so long. We hope to publish several other reminiscent articles and notes, with priority to our older readers.

Memories and hopes! Let the memories stir our pride. Let the hopes inspire our endeavours.

F. A. HORNIBROOK and G. H. TAYLOR.

## 75 Years Ago

[From the first number of THE FREETHINKER, May 1881.]

SINCE WE REGARD all theological doctrines as sheer superstition we cannot draw any principles of thought or action therefrom. For us the "verities" of Christianity are all fables. Regarded as legitimate objects of thought, of hope, fear and reverence, we ignore them, and merely attack and ridicule them as monstrous myths which have filled the world with fantastic hopes and horrible fears; have lent themselves as instruments and sanctions of the worst form of cruelty and tyranny; have roused the world to most unnatural strife; drenched the earth with seas of blood; and burnt the noblest of mankind to ashes for daring to think and speak as reason dictated. Shaking off all theological prejudices, we turn to nature as expounded by science; to human society in its necessary elements and workings. From these we draw all our principles, freely availing ourselves of all that the world's workers and thinkers have secured and exhibited for the use of man. Whatever there is in human life which experience shows to be good and useful, that we adopt, and shall strive to elaborate and illustrate it, to render it better known, and more useful still. Whatever we may evolve by Freethought, from present or future materials and elements which may be of use to man, that also we shall recommend; as we shall recommend all of the same description found and exhibited by others.

G. W. FOOTE.

## On to the Centenary!

FOOTE and THE FREETHINKER will, I hope, never cease to live in the love and affection of those who knew him, as I did, as a man of matchless eloquence—a man who lavished his genius lovingly and ungrudgingly upon the pages of his paper. I venture to hope that the Freethought spirit in the coming generations will not let THE FREETHINKER die when Foote's successor ends his present editorial labours. Before we of the early FREETHINKER days pass on we ought so to stimulate the enthusiasm of our younger brethren that they will take good care to ensure

that the foundations will be laid, decade by decade, for the celebration, fifty years hence, of the Centenary of THE FREETHINKER, so that the world shall be better, and safer, and sweeter for the successors of Foote and Cohen.

To do this we must make more Freethinkers every year, and inspire ourselves, both young ones and old ones, with the fervour and courage and splendid idealism of the heroes and worthies who have gone before. Let us, then, march on to victory. The cause for which Bradlaugh laboured, for which Foote suffered his 12 months' martyrdom, will, surely, not fail to find its devotees and emulators.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

[THE FREETHINKER Jubilee Number, 1931]

## Chapman Cohen on Christian Feelings

IT WAS the unforgivable offence of THE FREETHINKER that it altogether rejected the demand that religious subjects should be treated with either reverence or respect greater than that which other subjects receive. We have simply nothing to do with the "feelings" that some people have connected with religion. That is, indeed, one of the things against which Freethinkers who know their business have to fight. A special treatment for religious "feelings" is in a modern society one of the foundation stones of religious privilege and religious tyranny. We have at the moment a Government that is afraid to repeal laws which prevent the people of this country spending one-seventh of their lives in an orderly, decent, and healthy manner, because an organised mob of religious bigots say that their "feelings" will be outraged by seeing other people doing so. Every man or woman sent to prison for blasphemy during the past hundred years has been formally condemned because he or she hurt the feelings of Christians. "Don't hurt my feelings", is the last cry of a religious intolerance that is today too ashamed to offer any intellectual justification for its existence.

Now I say quite plainly that not only ought people to be taught to laugh at the New Testament legends, but they are never safe until they are able to do so. It is the acid test of their mental liberation. They must be able to discuss Jesus Christ with the same freedom with which they discuss Lloyd George, and in the same language. The only things that matter in either case are sincerity of conviction, and correctness of conception. I have no concern whatever with the "feelings" of a man concerning the divinity of Jesus or the infallibility of Lloyd George. It is my conception that matters, not his. The non-believer who retains a special language, a special frame of mind, or a special mental attitude when dealing with Christianity is either a humbug or has not yet outgrown the Christian frame of mind. I repeat, the ability to laugh at Christian stories is the acid test as to whether a man is really liberated or not. He must learn to laugh at the Christian legends; and when he is able to do that, freely and spontaneously, he will not need even to trouble to laugh at them. He will then be in a condition for dealing with the Christian legends as he deals with the religious legends of the ancient Egyptians.

[THE FREETHINKER Jubilee Number, 1931]

—NEXT WEEK—

### POLITICAL CATHOLICISM IN GERMANY

By F. A. RIDLEY

(Just returned from Germany)

# Is Survival an Intelligible Notion?

By JOSHUA C. GREGORY, B.Sc., F.R.I.C.

[The author is described in "Who's Who" as Hon. Lecturer in the History of Science at the University of Leeds and *Membre Correspondant de l'Académie Internationale de l'Histoire des Sciences*. He was lecturer in chemistry at Leeds University for 17 years prior to his retirement and is the author of many scientific publications and articles in scientific and philosophical journals.—ED.]

THE WAYFARER in Borrowdale, as he looks up at Causey Pike, reflects that the mountain will still be there when he himself is no more. Then he tries to imagine his own extinction, and, like many of his fellows, fails. If he is not annihilated at death, he again reflects, he must survive somehow or other. This stirs a suspicion that his failure to imagine his own extinction drives him into an unintelligible alternative. Still, though his body, very disconcertingly, will not live on, an intelligible notion of surviving after death may be possible, even if it is merely intelligible without being convincing.

Whether the dead body moulders in the grave or is ashed in the furnace it does not persist as an organised entity. It does not in the residual bones or in the vanished parts that have commingled with the material world. Such distributary persistence is no survival of the body, for a distributed body has ceased to be one.

God who created man, the Koran insists, can restore his distributed body at the resurrection. This theological *tour de force* suggests a turn to something that does survive death without being scattered and reassembled. The alternative lies ready to hand in the notion of the mind or soul. If the soul does survive it must, it would seem, resemble the body in one respect: it must be, as it has been said, animistic. It must be, that is, an entity, an organised system, as the living body is. Such animistic nature does not guarantee survival, for death, as it does distribute the body, might scatter the soul or even annihilate it as thoughts perish or as consciousness, which lapses temporarily during dreamless sleep, may vanish for ever. A permanently non-conscious soul, even if conceivable or possible, would not survive as a *soul*.

Conscious experiences themselves seem to involve the soul in the animistic nature needed to make survival intelligible. The lapses of consciousness during dreamless sleep suggest an organised entity to connect the non-conscious gaps with the periods of consciousness. The connections between these periods themselves reinforce the suggestion. The notion of the subconscious, or unconscious, mind now lies to hand to meet it. This notion, in making conscious experience intelligible, ascribes to the soul, or mind, the animistic nature required for the intelligibility of survival.

The intelligibility secured by presuming an unconscious mind is, perhaps, most effectively realised in explicitly recollective memory. A man of seventy sees, more or less completely, a cricket match in being. He is remembering, as he is aware, an event that happened 56 years ago. He sees, visualistically, the batsman hit the ball high into the long field. He sees, fairly clearly, a tall fieldsman manœuvre for position, cup his hands, and hold the catch. That memory had been organised in his unconscious as the potentially conscious recollection that he now realises momentarily. The many potential conscious recollections organised in his unconscious point to the existence of his mind, or soul, as a systematically organised entity—to the animistic being needed to make survival after death an intelligible notion.

All matured conscious thinking seems clearly to depend on a continued experience in the past—on much know-

ledge, for instance, progressively acquired, and on much understanding progressively achieved. The unconscious mind, whatever else it may be, seems to be an elaborated mnemonic organisation of experience that underlies the flow of conscious experiences, and integrates them. Any conscious experience at any moment is but a tiny part of the conscious experiences that can occur in any single mind. Any fleeting recollection, for instance, is only one of innumerable possible reminiscences. Any consciously entertained belief, that unicorns do not exist, for example, is only one of many possible. Any conscious review, of the Aristotelian elements it may be, is a mere fraction of the whole possible reviewing. An underlying unconscious, an elaborate mnemonic organisation of a total experience, makes these little spurts of consciousness, and their connections with the whole experience of the mind, intelligible. This organised entity involves the soul in an animistic nature that makes survival at least intelligible.

The wayfarer's grope for intelligibility now receives a shock. The unconscious does confer an animistic nature on the soul compatible with survival, but it is clearly hypothetical. He has secured intelligibility, somewhat comically, by resolving himself into a mainly hypothetical being. *Mainly*—at any conscious moment his unconscious is vastly the major part of his mind, and during dreamless sleep the whole of it. The organised unconscious does involve the soul in the animistic nature required to make survival intelligible, but it is hypothetical.

The unconscious is undoubtedly an assumption devised to explain conscious experiences. These, however, seem so inexplicable without the assumption, and so reasonably explicable with it, that it seems perverse to insist on the hypothetical element. This brings comfort, and, in any case, hypothesis or no hypothesis, the unconscious does make survival an intelligible notion by conferring an animistic nature on the soul.

The intelligibility does not secure assurance. Death may disperse the animistic soul, as it does disperse the body. This may well happen if the unconscious depends too much upon states or processes of the brain to survive its destruction. If conscious experiences are localised in the diencephalon, as some have supposed, the soul can only survive maimed into a non-conscious being. If the whole unconscious depends too much upon the brain the soul cannot survive at all.

Still, the presumption of the organised unconscious, with its conscious consequences, does make the notion of survival intelligible, for there is then an organised entity to survive. Intelligibility, even without likelihood, is yet intelligibility. So the wayfarer has not been driven by his failure to imagine his own annihilation into a wholly unintelligible notion of survival.

It is, however, an uneasy intelligibility since an organised soul, like an organised body, may be dispersed. A suggestion by Mgr. Knox suggests a cure for this uneasiness: an immaterial soul, since it has no parts, cannot be destroyed by resolving it into them. This suggestion inverts any unintelligibility of survival into the meaninglessness of death destroying the soul.

Socrates argued, in *The Republic*, that the soul cannot be compounded because it is immortal. This inverts Mgr. Knox's argument from absence of parts to necessary survival. Berkeley inverted Socrates by arguing from the simplicity of the soul to its natural immortality, though God can annihilate this naturally immortal being.

The soul, or mind, presents itself as *differentiated* — openly, for instance, in its multiplicity of memories. This checks any facile inference to the necessary immortality of the soul from what Berkeley called its “uncompounded” nature, and Mgr. Knox calls having “no parts”. A “simple” soul, in either phrasing, or any other, seems to be too meaningless to make survival after death even plausible.

Belief in survival after death came early in human history. It seems, fairly evidently, to have been promoted by such delusions as dreams of the dead. Religion cherished it, and philosophy tried to rationalise it. The animistic version of the mind, via the organised unconscious, confers some intelligibility on the notion of immortality, but this plausibility falls far short of convincing truth.

## How I became a Heretic

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

THE TITLE of this article is perhaps something of a misnomer, for ever since I became capable of rational thought I have been a heretic regarding the fundamental claims of orthodoxy. I was, however, a very pious child, nurtured in the modified Calvinism of the modern Church of Scotland. I am told I attended (under compulsion, of course) my first church service at the tender age of two, and protested so audibly that I had to be removed ere the opening prayer had ended, so perhaps even then the seeds of revolt had been sown. This early reaction was, nevertheless, short-lived, and I became fascinated by the Church and religion, deciding before I was ten to become a clergyman. Indeed, I began shortly thereafter to conduct my own services at home, the back of an easy chair serving as a pulpit, and a dressing-gown as my robes of office. My congregation consisted of one unfortunate playmate, who also acted as a single-fingered pianist and as the “beadle” (verger to the English). My interminable sermons, however, often taxed his patience beyond endurance, and he would then command me with vehemence to announce the last hymn, a practice which might be followed with advantage in many *bona-fide* services! Parental authority abruptly terminated these childhood oblations when it was discovered that I was about to conduct Communion, using lemonade as the blood of Christ.

The onset of puberty, with the consequent emergence of reflective powers, effectively and rapidly undermined my youthful faith in the infallibility of the Church of Scotland and its doctrines. On becoming an adolescent, I put away childish things. First to go were the early books of the Old Testament, whose atrocities revolted my developing moral sense, closely followed by the miraculous elements in the New Testament. I still, however, attended church, partly from the depths of my new-found scepticism to mock the superstitious gyrations of the worshippers, but chiefly because I had fallen in love with a young lady in the seat behind. The long prayers afforded excellent opportunity for frequent backward amorous glances. I was even persuaded to become a Sunday school teacher (my beloved being one already) but this appointment came to a speedy end when the minister discovered (a) that I was offering monetary bribes to my class for correct answers, and (b) that I was narrating Grimm's fairy tales to my pupils instead of their Biblical equivalents.

Thereafter my scepticism proceeded untrammelled, and became reinforced by widespread reading. The final death blow to whatever traces of orthodoxy remained in me was dealt by the prefaces of Bernard Shaw, especially those to *Androcles* and *Major Barbara*. Through an aside of Shaw's I was led to Tom Paine, and I shall never forget the mounting intellectual excitement which gripped me when I first devoured the brilliant ironical pages of *The Age of Reason*. Another powerful literary influence at this time was Dr. C. E. M. Joad, the opening chapters of whose *God and Evil* seemed to me then (and indeed still) to form one of the most unanswerable indictments of belief in a personal God ever penned. Joad himself certainly failed to

refute his own arguments in that work when he became a Christian. One day while browsing in a Glasgow newsagent's I noticed a copy of THE FREETHINKER on the counter. The title appealed to me, and I forthwith purchased the periodical. The hard-hitting contents delighted me, and shortly thereafter, in answer to my request, a collection of Cohen pamphlets and books were delivered at my home. Though at that period I could not go all the way with Cohen in his rejection of every form of theism, the incisive clarity of his thought, coupled with his dry wit, made a profound impression. Finally, no catalogue of my literary “suasions” could be complete without mention of the volumes of the Thinker's Library, particularly Bradlaugh's *Humanity's Gain from Unbelief*.

About this time, the local branch of the Christian Endeavour movement, hearing that I was an incipient clergyman, invited me to deliver an address on “The Bible in Modern Life”. I accepted immediately and, reinforced by *The Bible Handbook*, advocated a rigid censorship on all those parts of the holy book which were immoral and incredible. Curiously enough, my speech was received with acclamation by some of my hearers, but after a few more visits to the Endeavourers (one of the girls having again aroused my sexual instincts), I was asked by the earnest spinster in charge not to return as my heretical opinions were corrupting the simple faith of some of the younger members.

However, I was still determined to become the pastor of some denomination, though all of an orthodox persuasion were obviously now impossible. Learning of Unitarianism through a vicious attack on the movement by a Roman Catholic author, I decided I had found my spiritual home, and after three years' study at Oxford became an ordained minister. The beauty of the Unitarian Church lies in the fact that because it has no creeds or dogmas to which one must conform, one can profess almost any belief or none, and still remain within its fold. Almost, but not quite; while my probationary sermons attacking the morals and even the historicity of Christ were received with complete equanimity by the authorities, an address in which, with youthful iconoclasm and exuberance, I advocated free love and the abolition of marriage, caused considerable consternation and heart-searching among the powers that were. Oxford, in the years immediately following the second world war, was a very serious centre of learning, full of ex-servicemen determined to graduate as quickly as possible and putting easygoing theologians such as myself to shame by their assiduity. For a time I acted as treasurer of the University Socratic Club, whose president was (and I believe still is) Mr. C. S. Lewis. The greatest guns of orthodoxy exploded frequently at these meetings, but the flag of heresy was kept bravely flying by the visits of such redoubtable sceptics as Mr. A. D. Howell Smith and Prof. A. J. Ayer. While still at Oxford I sent off my first contribution to my favourite weekly, THE FREETHINKER. To my delight (and surprise!) it was accepted, and there followed a most interesting and, to me, valuable controversy.

Since these idyllic student days, my religious outlook has become more and more heretical and indeed I now, very presumptuously no doubt, like to regard my views as being even to the left of those of many unbelievers, since I am sceptical of the truth of all beliefs and isms, including atheism (though, of course, I much prefer to be dubbed an atheist than a theist). Let me conclude this rather egotistical spiritual odyssey by stating that I believe the primary task of freethought in the world today must be simply and solely to strive to eradicate for ever the blight of Christianity. This is, of course, a tremendous undertaking, but vast strides have been made in the past century, and its realisation would result in the triumph of tolerance and the most widespread freedom of speech and action, resulting from the end of such abominations as Sabbatarianism and the censorship of the mind. For 75 years THE FREETHINKER has pursued this noble ideal, and in sending my heartfelt greetings may I express the profound hope that it may long continue to assail superstition, fear and ignorance in its own inimitable manner.

## FILMS **Invisible Film Star**

READERS who like to admire the mysterious but wondrous workings of providence are recommended to see a double-feature programme recently shown in the London suburban cinemas, the two films being the British (Ealing Studios) production *The Feminine Touch* and the American (Republic) *Stranger at my Door*. In neither case can it be said that God plays the lead, but in each he has an important, though necessarily invisible, minor role.

*The Feminine Touch* is a story of nursing — and love. The not entirely novel love theme involves a seemingly always hungry doctor and a most attractive blonde nurse, who robs the “fridge” to feed him. They have a tiff because the lady thinks that her future husband has killed the love for God in a small girl patient who is doomed to an early death from a heart disease. The child has been thinking, and thinking very reasonably, about the problem of evil, not so much in relation to her own case — though that provides argument enough against beneficence — but in that of a little boy who, she has discovered, is dying from a head tumour. The doctor hastens to assure the little girl that God cannot be held responsible for Tommy’s illness and, as the boy is taken to the operating theatre, doctor and girl silently pray for his recovery. The operation over, the doctor returns with the glad tidings that Tommy is going to be all right. “Oh, thank you!” exclaims the delighted little girl; but the doctor will have none of it. It is not he who deserves the thanks, it is . . . The holy name is not spoken but the meaning is clear and, presumably, the problem of evil is solved: God mustn’t be blamed for the tumour (God knows who must!) but he must be thanked for its removal in the surgery.

It is fair to add that this is only one sequence in an otherwise quite pleasant film. In *Stranger at my Door*, there is more religion. It concerns a Western bank-robber who takes refuge on the small ranch of a “preacher” and tries to seduce the latter’s wife. The clergyman firmly believes that, with the help of God, he can reform the renegade and, in the end, his faith proves justified: the robber crawls to the partly-built church to die. There has been quite a bit of shooting and suffering in the meantime; and the sheriff has accidentally shot the preacher’s young son, but here again God intervenes with a timely miracle. We should never forget that it is far more dramatic for someone to be seriously ill and recover miraculously than to have no illness in the first place. More dramatic but less sane.

C.M.C.

## This Believing World

Another Christian revolution is taking place with regard to dancing on Sunday. At one time, England’s precious Puritans objected to dancing altogether, just as they used to object to the theatre, a pack of cards, and a glass of beer. “Christian opinion” eventually became divided on these matters, and dancing was allowed, but not on Sundays. In St. Albans, the city council has decided to allow the Market Hall to be used for dancing on Sundays, and a regular flare-up is the result. The dear old Puritans in the town are aghast, and Councillor H. Child has had roundly to tell them, “We are in 1956, not 1906” — which shows what St. Albans was like even fifty years ago. Thank God, those blessed days have passed for ever.

★

Strange how some parsons at least are beginning to find out how often the blatant infidels were right in their criticisms of the Church. For example, we have the Rev. J. Hornby writing in the *Sunday Pictorial* telling his Bishop — the new Bishop of London — actually “to scrap Sunday schools altogether”. And why? Because “they know neither how to teach or what to teach”. Mr. Hornby rightly laughs at the usual Sunday schools admonitions — “God will not love you if you are naughty”, or the “frightening ideas of Hell”.

★

Sunday schools were always a waste of time and effort, to say nothing of the incredible though pious drivel which is often taught there; but Mr. Hornby’s own ideas on religion — are they any better? He wants each Sunday to be a “day of joy” celebrating the Resurrection of Christ — an event which has about the same historical value as Aladdin’s wonderful lamp. You can almost always find a parson ready to throw over some particular Christian nonsense only to substitute for it something even sillier.

### 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.

FRIENDLY informal international house. Plentiful food, comfortable atmosphere.  
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