

The Freethinker

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SOME TWENTY YEARS AGO, the *Daily Telegraph* published a number of articles on the "truth" of the Bible by a Prof. Yahuda, which caused a little stir among a number of clergymen, and not very long after were quite forgotten. Books proving that the Bible is literally true have poured from the press, and, of course, discerning editors know the value of any defence of God's Precious Word published in their journals in the little matter of circulation.

During the 19th century, particularly after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, it became increasingly evident that Science, much more than Biblical contradictions, was the real enemy of the Bible; and this was tacitly admitted by Christians when they did their best to discredit the theory of evolution and the proofs geologists brought forward as to the age of the earth and its teeming populations when they were all supposed to have been wiped out by the Flood—not a flood but the Flood—the one in which only Noah and the inhabitants of his Ark survived. That a few scientists sided with their fellow Christians was not really more astonishing than that a few also sided with the most extravagant claims of Spiritualists. And it may be as well here to point out that Science is "organised knowledge," the results in research and discovery made by men and women. Apart from their work, "Science" is merely a word; and when we are told in flamboyant headlines by such a newspaper as the *London Evening News* that "Science Admits the Bible Was Right," one can only answer that this is the usual Christian lie.

Where does "Science," as such, admit, for example, that the story of the Creation in the first chapter of Genesis is true? That a few, a very few, men who mostly teach a little science in theological colleges believe in the story of Adam and Eve and their Hebrew-talking Serpent may be true—but what has this to do with Science? Where are the proofs that Adam and Eve really lived in the Garden of Eden? Not a single scientist who ever lived has been able to substantiate the truth of the Creation Story; and it is not surprising that the *Evening News* preferred to begin its series of articles on the Bible from Dr. Werner Keller's book, *The Bible as History*, with "proofs" of the Flood.

We are told at first that Dr. Keller is a "brilliant German historian and scientist"—though no evidence whatever is produced to prove this statement. But it appears that he spent five years "on a survey of all known archaeological researches collected in the past 150 years which might prove or disprove the Old and New Testaments . . . his massive investigation left him convinced that, in its essential narrative, the Bible tells the truth." We have an idea that far more people will believe the blazing headline that "Science admits the Bible was right" than notice that what was really meant was that Dr. Keller only was convinced that "in its essential narrative" the Bible tells the truth. "Essential" is the operative word. And Science is represented by one man, Dr. Werner Keller—who, cele-

brated or not, appears to be quite unknown in this country. Who is he to talk for Science or, for that matter, for anything but his own opinions? In short, what are his opinions worth? The plain and sufficient answer—nothing at all.

The first article printed from his book by the *Evening News* contains literally no proof that Noah's Flood took place. It is a rehash of some very well-known descriptions of excavations proving that floods had taken place in Ur, near the Persian Gulf—but what these had to do with Noah is carefully avoided. No one denies that floods regularly took place "B.C.," just as they take place "A.D." Where in this article does Dr. Werner Keller prove the Bible was right when it makes God

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Does Science Prove The Bible?

By H. CUTNER

Almighty say, "Every living substance that I have made will I destroy from all the face of the earth. . . ." "And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die"? The famous archæologist, Sir Leonard Woolley, is quoted, but where do Woolley and Keller prove that, "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land died. . . ."?

In actual fact, all Woolley proved was that, in all probability, some flood or floods had taken place in the district about 2000 B.C., and not one scrap of proof was produced that the story of Noah as related in the Bible is true. And, of course, if the people for whom Keller's book is written knew their Bible, they would realise this. Unfortunately, about the only people who really know the Bible, and say so, are Freethinkers. I suspect some of our Bishops and a few Christadelphians also know "Holy Writ," but very few of either are prepared to defend the story of the Flood as it is therein related. Our Bishops are much more at home at expounding Jesus Christ as a first-rate Sunday school teacher in the matter of ethics, while Christadelphians prefer to talk volubly on "Christendom Astray"—whatever that means, for I have never been able to find out.

The story of the Flood in the Bible is contemptuously treated by almost every scientist who has examined it, and dismissed as a fairy tale. Let us admit, however, it is a most interesting and well told fairy tale.

Chapter two of Keller's book deals with the "lost world of Abraham's youth"; that is, some archæological discoveries proved that there really had been a town called "Haran" from which Abraham is said to have "departed" when he was 75 years old. This proves that there really has been an Abraham—according to Keller. Supposing that all traces of London's old Fleet Prison were lost in the course of the next 2,000 years and suddenly rediscovered. This would, of course, prove in 4000 A.D. that Mr. Pickwick must undoubtedly have been an historical personage because in his "memoirs," the *Pickwick Papers*, he is

shown to have been imprisoned there. How could Mr. Pickwick be a "pious legend" when we can prove that there actually was a Fleet Prison, a future Werner Keller would angrily ask? Many arguments proving that the Bible is "right" or "true" are, of course, ludicrous—but this particular one, because there was a Haran proves the existence of Abraham, seems to me to be the silliest of all. In giving "Israel" an "authentic" history, the Bible writers, compilers, and editors, were obliged to retain towns and places known to the people they were writing for. There is no need to deny that countries like Palestine and Egypt existed in Biblical times; but Abraham and all or nearly all Bible heroes are myths all the same. Who are the scientists who attest the story of Abraham as related in the Bible as being literally true? There are none.

Then we are told of the "dreadful fate" of Sodom and Gomorrah as if that proved the Bible was "right." Just as there have been floods in the course of the Earth's hundreds of millions of years' existence, so, of course, there have been volcanic upheavals which have engulfed peoples and cities. The picture reproduced in the *Evening News* to make the "people" believe the Biblical account of the destruction of the two cities—on the strength that one small picture gives a better idea of what happened than a volume of written description—is one of John Martin's Biblical series, and very good pictures they were. He used his vivid imagination to the full, and mid-Victorian Christians were brought up to believe that the horrific events he depicted took place exactly as he painted them. No doubt whatever that there are still relics of that bygone age who

believe John Martin as much or almost as much as the Bible itself.

That some tragedy like the destruction of two towns somewhere took place can be admitted, for there was nothing miraculous about it; but when we are told that Lot's wife "became a pillar of salt" and find people like Keller wanting others to believe it, it is time to draw the line. But does he himself believe it? Was Science here "admitting that the Bible was right"? The truth is that Keller has thrown this particular story overboard. All he does is to show that in the district some hills are made of pure salt and, as some blocks of this salt look like statues, therefore Science proves the Bible is right! For sheer impudence this takes some beating.

But it can be beaten in the way that Keller tries to bolster up the story of Joseph—a story that has no historical foundation whatever. It has long been known that some of it was "pinched" from a piece of Egyptian fiction called *The Two Brothers*. Keller brings this fiction in to support his infantile theory that Science admits the Bible was right! Science! !

The irony of it is that ever since World War I, the Germans have been nearly always depicted as "atheists." Our brilliant newspapers have now to go to a German to bolster up the Bible at all costs. 150,000 copies of his book have sold in Germany, and it is being translated and sold in a dozen countries. And it will sell in thousands here. The Bible is still the world's best money-maker.

(To be concluded)

"In God We Trust"

(A Public Protest by JOSEPH LEWIS, Editor of the *Age of Reason* and President of the Freethinkers of America.)

I AM SHOCKED beyond words at the report that the United States Senate has passed the Resolution making the phrase "In God we trust" the official motto of the Government of the United States of America.

It is too childish for words and is an insult to all enlightened Americans. It is a victory for the pressure groups of the fanatical religionists. It is, in my opinion, and in the opinion of many eminent legal minds, a flagrant violation of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. If there is any way by which we can take this matter to the courts for a proper adjudication we shall do so.

The members of Congress do not believe in this motto. They do not "Trust in God." I would like to make an investigation to determine how many members have locks on their doors and how many have life and fire insurance? How many send for a physician when they are ill? President Eisenhower owes his life, not to God, but to medical science.

If they—the members—trust in God to the extent that they do not protect themselves from the uncertainties of life and the dangers in society, then they are not fit to be members of Congress. They should stand up and be counted. What has happened to our boasted motto of *Liberty and Equality to all*? Has it been abandoned?

In war, why do we have armies to protect ourselves? Why not "Trust in God"? The answer was made by none other than Napoleon Bonaparte himself. He said that "God was on the side of the heaviest artillery." And our own beloved Abraham Lincoln said "Friends, I agree with you in providence, but I believe in the providence of the most men, the largest purse, and the longest cannon."

In 1776 our forefathers retired the gods from politics, and enunciated the grand principle that "All governments

derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." The monarchies got their authority from God. They were the "divine" institutions on earth.

We are no longer children in the affairs of life, and this act of Congress will make us the laughing stock of the civilised world.

Science has determined that the age of the earth alone is over six hundred million years, and if tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes, misery, disease and all "the ills that flesh is heir to" is the result of God's handiwork, we can well do without the help of this mythical deity, in our efforts to ameliorate the conditions of our fellow-man.

It is quite apparent that the chaplain of the Senate failed in his efforts, when, in his prayers, he asked his God to give the members of the Senate sufficient intelligence to perform their duty! I cannot conclude this statement more appropriately than by quoting these words of the great Robert G. Ingersoll:

"Standing in the presence of all history, knowing the experience of mankind, knowing that the earth is covered with countless wrecks of cruel failures appealed to by the great army of martyrs and heroes who have gone before; by the sacred dust filling innumerable graves by the memory of our own noble dead; by all the suffering of the past; by all the hopes for the future; by all the glorious dead and the countless millions yet to be, I pray, I beseech, I implore the American people to lay the foundation of the Government upon the principles of eternal justice. I pray, I beseech, I implore them to take for the corner-stone Universal Human Liberty—the stone which has been heretofore rejected by all the builders of nations. The Government will then stand, and the swelling dome of the temple will touch the stars."

—NEXT WEEK—

REPORT FROM FINLAND

Christianity and Women

By F. A. RIDLEY

IT WAS SUGGESTED by J. S. Mill that the best yardstick for measuring the progress and current status of civilisation is its attitude to women. This standard can equally be applied to religion, and here Christianity reveals itself as probably one of the most backward of the major religions recorded in social evolution. As students of comparative religion are aware, the evolution of religion reveals two successive major types of religious belief—the personification of natural phenomena as human deities (sometimes all too human!) and the metaphysical deity associated with a more or less definite ethical code. Judged by their relationships with women, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the “weaker sex” has fared much worse, suffered much more, and in general occupied a position much inferior under the “higher” religions to that enjoyed, if that is the appropriate word, by women under the nature-cults of paganism.

Amongst pagans goddesses had equal status and popularity, and not infrequently displayed superior prowess to their celestial male counterparts. In the *Iliad*, the great epic poem of Pagan Greece, Athene was the goddess of wisdom, in which she excelled her male colleagues on Mount Olympus, not a very difficult matter perhaps, as the behaviour ascribed to the Greek gods frequently fell below the current standards of their worshippers! In the “higher” religions, contrarily, wisdom was, and still remains, the attribute of a male deity, and in practice all the “ethical” religions have always insisted upon the inferior status of women—Buddhism and Christianity, with their ascetic contempt for women as the inferior sex, the permanent subordinate of man, the god-given Lord of Creation, Judaism and Islam with their open recognition of the right of polygamy for men but not for women.

As Mr. Charles Seltman has recently shown in a well-informed book, *Women in Antiquity*, perhaps the most important change in the status of women in respectively pagan and Christian times is to be found in the relationship of women to the practice of athletics. Among pagans, particularly the ancient Greeks, women participated in races and even combats on the same footing as men. Among the Spartans, who for military objectives cultivated physical efficiency most systematically, women took part equally in the rigorous physical training provided by the State. Athletic and even military prowess was not at all regarded as derogatory to women, and one reads of army corps of professional women soldiers. Christianity has always frowned on “masculine” sports for women and the only Christian woman saint to achieve fame as a soldier was Joan of Arc, whom the Church promptly burnt as a witch! Nor was physical prowess in any way inconsistent with intellectual eminence among women in antiquity. Such names as Sappho, Cleopatra and Hypatia still recall a period where women were often the mental, as well as physical, equals of men, a fact recognised by the great writers of antiquity. In his famous, if somewhat bawdy, comedy *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes (fifth century B.C.) represents the women as the initiators of peace and progress, and brighter than their warlike stupid menfolk.

In the western world Christianity soon put an end to the “free world” of antiquity and to the freedom enjoyed by women under the classical culture with its goddesses and female athletes. Orthodox Christianity is founded on the fable of Genesis with the Fall of Man, a Fall in which woman played the role of Devil’s Advocate with disastrous results to the whole human species. In point of fact Eve has proved to be the curse of her sex, which has been

immeasurably degraded under Christianity by comparison with her previous status in the pre-Christian world. The “Age of Faith” was a long nightmare for woman. The ascetic ideal of monasticism degraded her to the sinful role of the perpetual source of temptation to the male, while adultery, regarded very leniently by ancient philosophers, was given the rank it still retains in Christian morality as the supreme sin, the “sin against the Holy Ghost.” This attitude is not found in the Gospels, nor, incidentally, do the Gospels even mention the transgression of Adam and Eve. The old Hebrew fable of Eve was resurrected by the author of the Pauline Epistles, certainly the most influential anti-feminist who ever put pen to paper! A very important factor in the degradation of women in the Age of Faith is the destruction of the cult of athletics, universal in the Græco-Roman world which dated its chronology by the great athletic festival of the Olympic Games, which were actually suppressed in 394 by the Christian Roman Emperor Theodosius, who concurrently introduced the death penalty for what a Christian contemporary described as “the new and inexpiable crime of heresy.” Theodosius, incidentally, owed his title of “the Great” to these two notable feats. Henceforth the motto of pagan culture, *Mens sana in corpore sano* (a healthy body in a healthy mind) was submerged beneath a millennium of monastic asceticism and sex frustration. It was an ethical revolution which had incalculable results.

The elevated status of woman in the terrestrial world of antiquity reflected itself also in the celestial world, that shadowy projection of the world below. In later antiquity the Egyptian goddess Isis, Queen of Heaven, Divine Mother, Star of the Sea, was for quite a while one of the most formidable competitors of Christ for the adoration of the ancient world. Her victory, Mr. Seltman argues, would have permanently raised the status of women, just as the victory of the Persian masculine god Mithra would have lowered it perhaps even more than Christianity was to do. Christ eventually ousted both his Egyptian and Persian rivals. But while the Church took over the cult of Isis and transformed it into the cult of Mary, it unfortunately also took over the Mithraist contempt for women, and consequently its exaltation of the Virgin Mary in Heaven was accompanied by a deterioration of the status of her sex. It was even doubted whether women had “souls”! And the language used about their bodies by monkish writers would nowadays defy print. That the medieval Age of Faith witnessed simultaneously extreme asceticism in theory and extreme licentiousness in fact, is only to be expected by any student of human psychology!

Beginning with the Renaissance, which witnessed both a galaxy of brilliant women and a more liberal attitude towards the sex, one may say that the “Rights of Women” movement, in all its aspects, has now been on the upgrade for several centuries, and has now obtained general recognition. Mill’s criterion of the level of civilisation was actually made during an age named after a woman, though Queen Victoria was actually no friend of the movement! This movement at present appears to have gone much further in the Communist East, where complete sex equality extends even to the military sphere, than in the capitalist and Christian West, where more marriages are believed to be held together by the fear of alimony than by God’s Holy Word! Again, as in pagan antiquity, athletics are closely allied with the current emancipation of woman. Let

(Concluded on page 245)

This Believing World

One of the questions recently dealt with by TV's "Brains Trust" was the case in which a Communist and Atheist was ordered by a judge to see that his child received some religious education at school. Was this right? It must be conceded that the speakers did not shirk the issue, and were not afraid to mention such words as Agnostic and Atheist. One of the team, the well-known biographer, Mr. Hesketh Pearson, even went a little further. He saw no harm in letting children read the Bible for, in his own case, he was obliged to; and he found that there was nothing like a good knowledge of the Bible to lead one to — Freethought! The Question-Master hastily went off to the next question.

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But is it quite true. The Bible may have the greatest circulation of any book in the world — but who reads it? That is, who reads it from a "devotional" point of view to find God or Jesus or both, and to feel divinely holy afterwards? How many people in this harassed age of ours find comfort in Zephaniah or Revelation? How many would prefer spending a couple of hours trying to find out what Paul meant rather than see Arthur Askey or Jack Benny or even Diana Dors? Reading the Bible with genuine understanding *must* lead to Freethought, as Hesketh Pearson cleverly brought out. And on the Lord's Day, too!

★

We always read with more than interest when a theologian talks about the "Light of Reason" as did recently the Rev. W. E. Sangster of the *Sunday Times*. His point is that, while Victorian philosophers believed in "inevitable progress," real Christians have always believed in man as "fallen," that is, "with a bias in his nature towards evil." The two World Wars, if nothing else, prove how right theologians were, and the only cure for the disease of original sin must be, according to Dr. Sangster, more Christianity. Yet the fact remains that all the nations in the two wars were Christians or Theists of some kind; only a very small proportion rejected religion.

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Does this matter? Not in the least. If Christianity utterly failed to destroy man's nature with a bias towards evil in nearly 2,000 years, we must still have "Faith." We must, as Jesus insisted, "become as little children" for, unless we do, we "shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." This is Dr. Sangster's great remedy against our inherent (or is it incurable?) evil, and he calls it "The Light of Reason." Is it any wonder that Christianity has been such a signal failure in the light of reason?

★

Another great discovery which it is hoped will boost up Jesus again is the discovery of a Coptic version of the Gospel of Thomas. As it dates from about the middle of the third century, some Biblical scholars are delighted to find that it is full of new sayings of Jesus never before published. From the way this Gospel is described in our newspapers, it appears that it is little known — which is quite true. The Roman Church has always made it difficult to learn something about the non-Canonical Gospels — particularly this one, which purports to be written by Didymus Judas Thomas, the "doubting" Thomas of the (true) Gospels.

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There is a very good reason why the Gospel of Thomas never received the favour it deserved from the early Church Fathers. Thomas was the "missionary" who was sent to India but why was he called "Didymus"? Because he was considered to be the twin brother of Jesus himself

—"Didymus" meaning "twin." And in the Acts of Thomas we get him going with Jesus after the Resurrection to India, Jesus dying in Kashmir. As Mr. A. K. N. Ahmad points out in his *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, "The best proof of the presence of Jesus in Kashmir is the existence of his tomb in Srinagar." The idea that Jesus is buried in India instead of flying to Heaven after the Resurrection must have convulsed the early Church. But is not one story quite as true as the other?

★

Although some statistics give us the "miracle cures" at Lourdes, we do not remember any giving us the number of pilgrim deaths which have taken place there since the shrine was first opened. However, here are two from the *Irish Standard* — a Mr. T. Cooney, aged 52, and a Miss M. Broderick, aged 27, both died while on the pilgrimage. The *Standard* makes no comment, but we should like to ask one simple question — would any Pope go to Lourdes if he were seriously ill? Did the present one?

From Rumania

THE FOLLOWING appeared in the "Answering Your Questions" column of the August issue of *Rumania Today*, the monthly magazine published in Bucharest: "Article 84 of the Rumanian People's Republic Constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and the free practice of all religious beliefs in our country. Religious hatred and any act hindering the activity of the Church and its believers are severely punishable by law. Most of the servants of the denominations are State employees, and the Ministry of the Cults (religious denominations) grants all denominations subsidies for new buildings, repairs and the maintenance of Church buildings. Fifteen religious denominations practise their faith in the R.P.R., viz.: the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Hebrew, Baptist, Unitarian, Moslem, Armenian, Pentecostal, Old-rite Christian, Serbian Orthodox, Lutheran-Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist and Evangelical Christian.

There are over 17,000 churches in this country (of which 2,000 have been decreed monuments of national architecture) and nearly 40,000 priests, pastors, monks and nuns. All religious services are held in the mother tongue of the congregations."

SHAKESPEAREAN QUIZ

- Who compared human life to:
 - "a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more"?
 - Seven ages, ending in "mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eys, sans taste, sans everything"?
 - "such stuffs As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep"?
- Who described death as:
 - "To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot"?
 - "The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn No traveller returns"?
- Who was:
 - "the noblest Roman of them all"?
 - Who described him as such?
- "Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep, Then dreams he of another benefice" comes in a famous speech. Which is it?
- "Nothing of him that doth fade, But doth suffer a sea-change Into something rich and strange."
 - Comes from what play?
 - Is the epitaph of which other English poet?

(Answers on page 348)

C.McC.

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

CORRECTION.—By a most unfortunate misprint Mrs. Knight was made to say the exact reverse of what she in fact said, in our report of the Caxton Hall meeting. The sentence, "The public were not getting more used to the idea that the Christian religion could be attacked" should read, "The public were now getting more used to the idea..."

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Kingston Branch N.S.S. (Castle Street, Kingston-on-Thames).—Every Sunday, 8 p.m.: J. W. BARKER and E. MILLS.
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.45 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, SMITH and FINKEL.
- Mercerside Branch N.S.S. (Pierhead).—Meetings most evenings of the week (often afternoons): Messrs. THOMPSON, SALISBURY, HOGAN, PARRY, HENRY and others.
- North London Branch N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead).—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY and A. ARTHUR.
- Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square).—Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY and R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
- Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bristol Downs).—Every Sunday, 6.30 p.m.: DAVE SHIPPER.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Sunday, October 28th, at the Marble Arch from 4 p.m.: Messrs. DAVE SHIPPER, ARTHUR, EBURY and others.

INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, October 28th, 6.45 p.m.: J. ARCHER (B.Comm.), "Why Religion Persists."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, October 28th, 7.15 p.m.: A. ROTHEIN, "Religion in Russia."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, October 30th, 7.15 p.m.: J. W. LESLIE (Secretary, British Esperanto Association), "Esperanto, A Living Language for a United World." With recorded illustrations.
- Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, October 28th, 6.30 p.m.: Miss E. LEES, "Psychic Research—the Open Door."
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street, City).—Sunday, October 28th, 7.30 p.m., H. CUTNER, "The Centenary Year of John M. Robertson."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, October 28th, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. B. RICKETT (Becket School), "The Inquisition."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, October 28th, 11 a.m.: R. S. W. POLLARD, J.P., "Impressions of Religion in China."

CHRISTIANITY AND WOMEN

(Concluded from page 343)

us hope that no Christian reaction will arise to interrupt a movement which is restoring to civilisation half of its potential citizens, in which Paradise, lost through the original sin of Eve, is now being regarded by her sex as a direct result of the decline of Christianity.

Notes and News

SPEAKING to the World Methodist Conference, Prof. C. A. Coulson urged the "outlawing" of atomic bombs (whatever that might imply) "not because it is a way to get peace"—apparently a relatively unimportant consideration—"but because it is an offence against the children of God to use a weapon of this type." Christians just cannot resist inserting their puerile propaganda into the most vital of subjects.

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A 34-YEAR-OLD R.C. priest, from Cardiff, was fined £50 by the Harwich magistrates for fraudulently attempting to evade duty on a silver gilt chalice, brought from Italy. Pleading "Not guilty," Father Fox said that the chalice was essential to him as a priest and mentioned that it had been blessed by the Pope, as a final proof of innocence. However, even such a potent blessing as that provided by a Pope, proved a failure and when the unfortunate clergyman asked for six months in which to pay the fine, the irreverent magistrates brusquely ordered him to pay within 14 days or go to prison for three months. Better to be a Catholic convert than a Catholic convict! Incidentally, we'd like to know which they have most of.

★

In the 1956 Report of the Abortion Law Reform Association we read: "Our M.P. supporters are alert to the possibility of Parliamentary action, and in January 1956 Mr. Kenneth Robinson, M.P., asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he had considered the resolution passed by the Magistrates' Association on October 21st, 1955, calling for reform of the law of abortion; and inquired what action he proposed to take. In a written reply, Major G. Lloyd-George stated that he had noted the views of the Magistrates' Association, but could 'hold out no hope of legislation on this controversial subject.' In other countries, the subject is receiving serious Government attention. The U.S.S.R. entirely removed its ban on medical abortion in November 1955, and this year Poland and Hungary have introduced measures of reform."

★

WE are pleased to record that Mr. E. J. Hughes, an N.S.S. member, in standing as a candidate in a Falmouth Council election, made it clear to the electors that he was an uncompromising Freethinker. In fact, his letters in the Cornish press have already made that known.

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IN Risca, Monmouthshire, two applications for relief were made to Risca Finance Committee under the Rating and Valuation Act (1955). One was by Pontymister Works Athletic Club in respect of their sports ground and pavilion, and the second by the Vicar of Risca, for the Vicarage. The Committee showed their opinion of the respective needs of sport and religion by granting relief to the Athletic Association and refusing the Vicar. Or perhaps they believe God will provide?

★

AN article in a Catholic contemporary stresses the importance of Catholics combating Communism in the trade unions. It decries Karl Marx and contrives to give the impression that he was a diehard Tory in comparison with such great proletarian champions as Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI. It is the Catholic worker's mission, according to the article, to make Catholic teaching an everyday reality. "We can do it—and will do it—if we pray hard, attend regularly at union meetings, study the encyclicals and accept office when the opportunity arises." This and similar declarations of policy should be known to all non-Catholic trade unionists.

Operation Firm Faith

By ANDREW PEARSE

MANY READERS must have been somewhat puzzled and amused by the latest effort of the Church of England. Known as "Operation Firm Faith," it seems to be sponsored by the Bishop of Gloucester. It is an effort to create a sense of family religion as fulfilling a great national need. Efforts are to be made to get the family to go to church, such as the provision of baby-sitters in some places. A vast service in St. Paul's Cathedral, which has the blessing of the *Evening News*, was attended by representatives of every parish in the diocese of London. Apparently, every possible means is to be used to call attention to the movement to reimport religion into the life of the family. The Bishop of Gloucester, in a statement reprinted by the *Daily Mirror*, was more than a little concerned at the decline in the numbers of Sunday school children and in teachers for those who remain. Obviously, a critical point has been reached and a very determined effort is to be made to check the signs of dry rot.

Actually, religion can be a mixed blessing in family life. We doubt whether the Bishop of Gloucester has ever heard of Sir Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* or the study of Charles Hargrove, *From Authority to Freedom*. The two books are classics illustrating a notorious fact, that religion can divide and embitter family life when one section accepts certain dogmatic positions and the other rejects them. Again, times have changed and it will not be too easy to refurbish the traditional type of Sunday school. The education of the country has progressed enormously and the churches can no longer draw upon a quasi-literate population for unthinking support. Sunday schools, to be effective, would be forced to be as well staffed and equipped as are the day schools and we well believe this to be a possibility when we see it happen.

But we are inclined to think that Operation Firm Faith is not going to take the risk of competing upon these lines. There has been an immense effort during recent years to give a new life to a crude fundamentalism. The mission of Billy Graham was perhaps the most notorious example. It has been active in the universities among the less thoughtful type of students to such an extent that its presence there drew forth a protest from Canon Kemp of Oxford. A book is written along these lines and is granted immense publicity by the *Evening News*. Operation Firm Faith is just another denominational step in the same direction. Clearly a great deal of time, money and effort is being spent in order to gain as many adherents as possible for an outlook upon life rooted in these views.

Reasons are not very far to seek. The age is one of vast social change with far-reaching economic repercussions. Since 1945, the country has passed through the revolution of the welfare state and the times are growing ripe for further progress and reform. Every effort has to be made to recruit new bastions for the support of reaction. Religion lies to hand and is at once drawn in. It is not necessary to do more than to give some study to the social and political implications of the Methodist and Evangelical revivals to understand that an emotional religion is always one of the surest backgrounds for reactionary politics. Those concerned with salvation in the next world will not be over-concerned with social progress in this one! Bible study is less dangerous when it is carefully controlled and conditioned than is the study of economics or politics. The cold war inside the churches against Communism is just another example of the same thing. On the side of the Church of England, it is a decaying business and it is only too ready to allow its own reactionary divines to seek the

support of social reaction in order to try a little more dosing with "the opium of the people"!

But we must confess that we are astonished at the effrontery of this body, particularly in London, in putting itself forward as the interpreter of family life at its highest. We do not refer to its wobbling and unsatisfactory teaching on marriage and divorce. Nor do we refer to the curious outlook of the bishops on contraception and family limitation. But we do refer to the fact that the business dealings of this community call very obviously for the strictest enquiry. *Reynolds News* of September 30th was the first paper to print the fact that a member of Parliament is about to ask two very trenchant questions concerning the overdraft of £300,000 which has somehow been accumulated by London diocese and about the number of sites of redundant churches sold in London together with the disposal of the £490,000 admitted by the Church to have been received at price value. The reporter from *Reynolds News* asked a number of questions from the Ven. Archdeacon Hodgins, the diocesan financial expert. We are not trying to say at the moment where the truth lies but we were astounded to read a paragraph where this venerable archdeacon, presumably a strong supporter of Operation Firm Faith, contrasted morals to "realism" and came down heavily upon the realistic side. We have never read a more blatant example of the casting aside of moral causation by a divine of the established Church and we were, quite frankly, disgusted at the sight.

We look back to the period when the Church controlled a good deal of family life. It was a period of long hours, sweated labour, the worship of profit, and the subjection of women. People were no more moral sexually than they are now but, as Michael Sadlier's two novels, *Fanny* by *Gaslight* and *Forlorn Sunset*, remind their readers, economics controlled the situation and one needed money to be vicious in comfort within a society which kept up a proud façade of middle-class prudery supported by the Church. One by one, the real vices of society making against family life have been mitigated or removed. The welfare state and economic planning have trimmed the sails of the crude profit-hunter. Women stand upon a level of equality with men within society. But these great reforms were not brought about by the concern of the Churches for family life. In fact, most parsons and churchpeople opposed them tooth and nail because they might challenge their pockets. They were brought about by social and political movements of a radical kind which for the most part kept clear of the churches because they knew the type of society supported by them and the degradation of working-class family life which their support helped to engender.

We advise anybody who is concerned with the stability of family life within the nation to keep clear of rackets like Operation Firm Faith. The stability of the family lies rather in a scientific approach to society and in the creation of a social background within which the family may enjoy unmolested the fulness of life and its potentialities. We are sorry for the Bishop of Gloucester, but his concern is merely that of any other tradesman who is going bankrupt as the unfortunate heir of an old-fashioned business which cannot be modernised. Yet we are more than curious about the service in St. Paul's Cathedral! It seems rather strange to introduce the family which one desires to see firmly established upon a religious foundation into a world of overdrafts and of Members of Parliament who ask searching questions about the way that the business is managed! If the devout and elderly Bishop of London was present at

the service, we wonder whether his mind was running on banks or Bibles! Was he counting heads anxiously to see if new customers had been brought in? Was it a case of "feed my sheep" or a reversion to the good old ecclesiastical practice that the aforesaid animals should be given a thorough shearing? We wish to see the family as a happy and co-ordinated unit. But we are quite sure that they will find these ends not with Operation Firm Faith but in an atmosphere of co-operation and good will, facing the world without fear or favour, seeking a firm faith in the creation of a just and righteous society where human need can be satisfied and human opportunity used for the good of all.

Fred Hoyle at Conway Hall

By G. H. TAYLOR

THE ATTENDANCE of a large number of students helped to swell the audience at Conway Hall on October 12th to such an extent that all seats were filled long before the start, giving a scene reminiscent of the Margaret Knight meeting here last year. Probably some 600 people were present in all, a sign of the great popular interest which has marked a year of the most remarkable advances ever made in the study of astronomy.

The speaker on this occasion of the 47th Conway Memorial Lecture was Mr. Fred Hoyle, of BBC fame (or should we say "notoriety" in view of his sudden disappearance from the scene after his heretical talks a few years ago?)

It was fitting that his chairman should be his friend and collaborator, Prof. Hermann Bondi, and among those on the platform were Prof. H. Levy and Prof. J. B. S. Haldane.

Speaking on "The Time Scale of the Universe," Mr. Hoyle described the methods by which astronomical times can be calculated. The latest estimate of the duration of this planet was 4,550 million years, the sun being a "little" older. The "little," we may note, is a mere 500 million years (i.e. five billion years old in the American sense).* The margin of possible error in these figures has now been reduced so as to be relatively small (i.e. two or three billion years).

The evolution of the innumerable galaxies of stars can be judged from the stage reached by the individual members. His parallel was the assembly line in the manufacture of a car: that is, although we may not stay to witness the whole process from start to finish, yet it is possible, by looking at the successive stages of completion, to see what has been happening. This in itself would not, of course, tell us how fast the car was being made, and the lecturer proceeded to explain how not only the evolution but the rate of evolution in astronomy, could be calculated. During the past six months great advances had been made in America with these calculations, and it was now possible to fix an approximate age for uranium (the two forms of which act as two reservoirs feeding the two corresponding forms of lead).

The earth itself was, of course, not as old as the materials of which it was made.

It was fair to say that what the telescope had found was a reliable sample of the universe; the more it probed the more it disclosed the same sort of things happening. About 1,000 million galaxies had been found, and they were moving apart. If the rate of moving apart was uniform, then they would have been near together about five billion years ago, a figure in line with the estimates already given.

*An American billion is a thousand millions.

At this point of starting there must have been "an almighty [here Hoyle paused slightly, and some audible excitement was heard throughout the hall in the breasts of the hopeful religious] congestion of material."

It was possible that the galaxies once moved apart faster, but not slower. However, his estimate of the time-scale of the universe was between five and ten thousand million years. He stressed, however, that this was not necessarily the age. His parallel here was the life-span of human beings. Looking around at human individuals, we conclude that they have an upper limit (say 110 years of age) but we should be wrong to conclude that the human species had therefore been in existence for only that length of time. If, then, the universe reproduces itself, the time-scale of five to ten billion years only represents one generation. He conjectured that perhaps some dramatic new development in astronomy would resolve the question of whether there was in fact a process of "continuous creation."

He then produced the information, only a few months old, of the existence of "anti-matter," the anti-proton having been found in researches at California. The interaction of the two types of matter would give birth to some catastrophic event. This he related to the strong probability that matter could never have been congested, and this would explode the theory that the universe began by a dense aggregate of matter.

There was time for one or two questions from the audience, and the first asked where the concept of God fitted in. Hoyle replied:

"We don't require anything further than the laws of physics — unless you want to equate God with the laws of physics."

Asked where the matter comes from in being continuously created, the lecturer said there was "nothing mysterious in this. Particles of matter are brought into existence every day in the physics laboratory." He instanced electrons, the energy for which may be got from mesons, though the electron does not come from the meson. "This does not involve any denial of the Conservation of Energy."

After such a brilliant and deeply fascinating address it was rather an anti-climax to hear the Rev. M. Davidson, who was on the platform, proposing a vote of thanks at some length.

Undeterred by some impediment and an unskilful use of the microphone, he bobbed up and down in a manner reminiscent of a Punch and Judy show, the effect heightened by his striking resemblance to the main character of that time-honoured puppet-farce.

If Hoyle had ranged all over the universe, the reverend gentleman ranged all round the microphone with the desperate message that we should all read his review of Hoyle's book in an issue of *The Literary Guide* six years ago. Some of his clerical colleagues, he lamented, had been "terribly upset" because they thought Hoyle had wiped out God. He had been at some pains to assure them that this was not so. He was very pleased that Mr. Hoyle had come "to entertain us with his beautiful theory, even to amuse us sometimes," but, as he repeated three times, Mr. Hoyle should not be taken too seriously.

If it was the intention of the organisers to put the Rev. M. Davidson on as comic relief after an intellectual feast, they succeeded admirably.

Prof. Levy seconded and made some interesting conjectures, and the meeting closed with warm appreciation.

The Jerusalem Old City paper *Falastin* recently published an article ridiculing simpletons who circulate or believe rumours that Quran copies containing hairs of the Prophet are on sale in Jordan towns. Rank heresy! An Israeli "This Believing World"!

From Hungary—1

AN INQUIRY as to the position of Freethought and religion in Hungary was recently made by Mr. D. Shipper to the Hungarian Radio Information. The reply to the inquiry was made on the air over Radio Budapest by Vilma Fodor, who provides the following English translation of her broadcast:

"First I should say that no one in Hungary is penalised for either religious belief or disbelief. The churches are open and well filled. The predominant religion of our country is Roman Catholic and you can see all the festivals of that Church solemnly kept; there are also Lutherans, Calvinists and Baptists. Whatever propaganda rationalists do has to be done by information and intellectual conviction. The body which does this is a scientific society rather like the one about which Radio Moscow told you; its name is a rather long one, the Society for the Dissemination of the Natural and Social Sciences and it is abbreviated to its Hungarian initials TTIT. The society is quite an old one and has many famous rationalists and scientists as its members. One of these was the great Darwinist, Otto Herman (1834-1914). Today the society has over 10,000 members. It arranges lectures and visits to the Zoo, the Botanic Gardens and places of interest. It has a weekly magazine, *Life and Science*, which is very popular, and is my own favourite among our weeklies. Its range is very wide. Some of its articles are geographical, some concern archæological discoveries, biology, plant breeding, wild birds and animals, discoveries in physics, atomic energy, astronomy and the age of the earth, and many more subjects. Its articles and lectures are not, however, anti-religious in the sense that they attack or ridicule religion or indeed deal with it directly in any way. They are based on the solid foundation of a rational and scientific view of the world, backed up by facts about the pre-history of man and the evolution of all living things which are left to speak for themselves. Similarly, in school, children are given a sound scientific training, based on the rational and not the mystical view of the world, but they can receive religious instruction if they or their parents wish it. The children are encouraged to use their own mental faculties so that they can make their own choice when they are old enough."

In his reply, Mr. Shipper suggested that something more than scientific teaching might be needed to combat supernatural beliefs carried in religions of a long history and with an established foothold in society, and also drew attention to the Roman Catholic Church as a totalitarian organisation. Miss Fodor's reply from Budapest to these further points will be quoted in a forthcoming issue.

ANSWERS TO SHAKESPEAREAN QUIZ

1. (a) Macbeth; (b) Jaques (in *As You Like It*); (c) Prospero (*The Tempest*).
2. (a) Claudio (*Measure for Measure*); (b) Hamlet.
3. (a) Brutus; (b) Antony.
4. Mercutio's "Queen Mab" speech (*Romeo and Juliet*).
5. (a) *The Tempest*; (b) Shelley (on his tomb at Rome).

CORRESPONDENCE

SCHWEITZER

Mr. Du Cann is barking up the wrong tree. Albert Schweitzer has dealt the weightiest blow to dogmatic Christian theology delivered in the last nineteen hundred or so years. He is a great and most impartial historian, whose sole aim is the truth and whose world-influence in the future will be (and, as I believe, for good) incalculable. Let your contributor read his theological works again and digest their implications. Not for nothing are his works ignored by organised religion and established Churches. A. M. CLEMENTS.

BERGSON

To settle an argument could you tell us whether the French philosopher Bergson was ever an atheist and did he in fact recant and die a Christian? A. ALMOND.

[Bergson was neither an atheist nor a Christian. He agreed with F. H. Bradley that the God of theology is nothing since he does nothing, and usually insisted that his *élan vital* was not to be considered personal or eternal. However, A. Seth-Pringle-Pattison reported that he received one letter from Bergson in which he wrote that his philosophy of Creative Evolution "should leave a clear idea of a free and creative God, producing matter and life at once, whose creative effort is continued in a vital direction by evolution." This would make Bergson a theist, not a Christian. In Christian eyes Bergson was an unbeliever, and Dean Inge condemned his philosophy as "a stream of forces flowing in no definite direction, a shoreless river deriving the strength for its renewal from some blind and unintelligent impulse." (*Science, Religion and Reality*.) The fact that Bergson had a religious funeral does not prove he had Christian beliefs; at the most it merely proves the beliefs of those who arranged the funeral.—ED.]

KEIR HARDIE

Mr. Varney seems to imply that Hardie was justified in playing to the religious prejudices of the Welsh electors, so as to win their support. I remember that Hardie told them he got his Socialism from the New Testament. This from a "Freethinker" was playing a paltry game. So far from being a scientific Socialist of the Marx-Engels school, he adopted the sentimental semi-religious attitude; hence the bubble-like existence of his party, the I.L.P. On what grounds does Mr. Varney state that C. B. Stanton was a Socialist? He was a jingoist of the vilest kind, and I strongly object to such a misuse of the word Socialism. EDMUND J. FORD.

MORMON COLOUR BAR

It is wrong to say that in theory anyone can become an Elder in the Mormon Church. A negro cannot, nor if it's held that he is a descendant of Cain, but just to soften the blow, the Church teaches that on joining a negro starts to go white. ROBERT MORRELL.

THE UNREAD BEST SELLER

Giving Bibles away is easy. Getting people to read is the hard part. Although the Bible is still the best seller, I doubt if more than one in 500 church members has read it through. Considering the millions of Bibles that have been printed since 1456, and, judging from past events and present conditions, the opponents have nothing to fear, nor the promoters anything to gain. E. A. HUNT.

PAST PRAYING FOR?

SIR,—A succession of disasters has suddenly overtaken the parish church of Publow in Somerset. The oldest bell of a fine peal was cracked in ringing. A fortnight later lightning struck the tower, hurling pinnacle and parapet through the roof and crushing the pews below. Consequent inspection revealed a roof heavily infested with the death-watch beetle.

This is a small village with two historic churches. The one referred to above is a magnificent 14th-century church which provided Anne Boleyn with the necessary dowry to marry Henry VIII. Can you help?—Letter to the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, September 12th, 1956.

"Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy piece, and afflict us very sore?"—Isaiah 64, 11/12.

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