

The Freethinker

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Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

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ONE OF THE MOST important scientific results of the emancipation of human thought from the yoke of the Church has been the creation and evolution of the Higher Criticism of the Bible: that is, that branch of literary and historical criticism dealing with the allied questions of date, authorship, literary content and historical background of the sacred literature of Christianity. It is nowadays common knowledge that the Christian literature, unlike, say, the Muslim Koran, was not the work of a single author or period, but was written in several countries by a number of authors, mostly unknown, and extended for a period of about a thousand years. Most critical scholars hold that the earliest narratives of the Old Testament can be traced before the Babylonian exile of the Jews about 600 B.C., while the New Testament seems to have assumed its present form about the end of the second century A.D.

Why Our Gospels Were Chosen

Modern Biblical criticism has developed in opposition to Christian orthodoxy. Even today Christian Fundamentalists, who include not only Billy Graham but apparently the vast majority of BBC religious broadcasters, will have none of it. Among educated Christians the Higher Criticism has undoubtedly modified the traditional view. This is so even in the Roman Catholic Church, while the virtual collapse of the old Biblical Fundamentalism, so rampant in the days of Paine, Bradlaugh and Ingersoll, is largely responsible for the present intellectual chaos in the Protestant Churches. It is nowadays clear that the "Holy" books which form the Canon of scripture were not selected by the Christian Church; or, for that matter, in the case of the Old Testament, by the Hebrew rabbis, on any recognisable principle of scientific criticism. It is, in fact, often rather difficult to see on what conceivable ground they were selected. What may be termed *political* criticism undoubtedly played an important part. Take, for example, St. Irenaeus' account of why *our* four Gospels were finally chosen from a considerable number of Gospels as the authentic witnesses to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It is unfortunate that so much attention has been directed to the silly initial statement of St. Irenaeus that because there were four winds and four cardinal points (as we should now say, the compass), therefore there *must* be four Gospels, for our second century author followed this puerile statement up with the real reason why, out of the numerous Gospels already in existence, only our four were henceforth to be regarded as authentic. These four Gospels, Bishop Irenaeus tells us, were already accepted and established as the Gospels for the four major Christian Churches of the day: Rome, Ephesus, Antioch and Alexandria. These Churches were collectively strong enough to impose their pet Gospels on the lesser Christian communities of the era, though the Ephesian and violently anti-Judaic Gospel of John appears to have been both edited and

added to before it eventually qualified for acceptance. (The puerile story which now forms its final chapter seems to have been specially added to ensure the recognition of Peter, the traditional founder of the Church of Rome, as Christ's destined successor.)

Honesty at a Discount

One thing seems clear: in the selection of the canonical books honesty was definitely *not* the best policy. Many of the books now accepted as integral parts of our "Holy Bible" were actually successful literary forgeries, as we should now term them, in antiquity. Perhaps literary copyright was then more easy-going! They got

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Biblical Criticism in Antiquity

By F. A. RIDLEY

in because their authors, instead of signing their own names, posed as ancient worthies of traditional holiness: in the O.T. *Ecclesiastes* and *Daniel* are notable examples. It is now common knowledge that neither had anything to do with the reputed authors, the "wise" King Solomon or the reputed prophet of the Babylonian exile, Daniel. Both were written long after their reputed authors: the actual date of Daniel was accurately computed by the pagan scholar Porphyry, whose estimate, suppressed by the Church at the time, is now accepted even by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* as a work written in the time of the Maccabees (second century B.C.), which had nothing to do with Daniel. These represent extreme examples, but many other Biblical books appear to qualify in the same category, including perhaps the most influential books in the New Testament, which are *not* the Gospels but the Pauline Epistles. Literary honesty was no passport into the Canon of scripture. At least two books in the *original* N.T., the *Pastor* of Hermas and Clement of Rome's Epistle to the Corinthians, both of which apparently formed an integral part of the N.T., were eventually recognised and rejected as apocryphal, precisely, as we know from contemporary evidence, because the authors signed the books themselves instead of posing as legendary holy men of old, in which case they would no doubt still rank as Holy Scripture!

The Ancient Church and Biblical Criticism

Biblical criticism—of a kind!—was obviously not unknown in the ancient Church. Had it been so we should have had, not four, but a much larger number of Gospels, now relegated to the class of apocryphal scriptures without ecclesiastical recognition. However, the Church selected and rejected books for reasons of its own which had much more to do with Faith—and with ecclesiastical politics!—than with genuine scientific criticism. We do not know the exact process, but a more modern "critical" judgment of that typical theologian Martin Luther may give us a clue to the psychology of the original editors of *our* Bible. Luther, as is well known, denounced and apparently denied, the canonical character of the N.T. Epistle of James, describing it sarcastically as "an epistle of straw." But the reason for this rejection did not lie in any scientific

critique of the alleged authorship of an Epistle written in first-rate Greek — supposed to be the best in the N.T. — by a presumably illiterate Galilean peasant, James, “the brother of the Lord,” as a modern critical scholar might do; but was simply due to the fact that James preaches that good works are pleasing to God, and accordingly denied Luther’s own fundamental dogma of salvation by faith only. As with Luther, the Church Doctors were guided by theological, not scientific, considerations. They preferred the fables of *Luke*, say, to those of *Peter* — most of the books bearing his name were rejected, including the *Gospel of Peter* which actually gives the only *first-hand* account of the Resurrection in surviving Christian literature! They did so, presumably, for obscure theological reasons long since forgotten.

Ancient “Higher Criticism”

However, along with the above type of criticism there were actually to be found a few genuine examples of Biblical criticism in early Church circles. As was to be expected, most of this was to be found amongst the pagan critics of the new oriental religion. In his *True Word* Celsus, for example, tells us that the Christian Scriptures have been rewritten “once, twice, several times.” Incidentally, both he and the Christian Justin Martyr describe the descent of Christ from Adam and Abraham, not, as recorded in our Gospels, through Joseph, but through Mary! — a clear indication that the Gospels in his day (c. 180) must have differed substantially from those now extant, in this case a rather surprising result of Christian editorship since the current version seems obviously incompatible with the Virgin Birth story that immediately follows it. About a century after Celsus the pagan critic Porphyry calculated

that the Book of Daniel was an after-the-event history of the period before the Maccabees, and that its author wrote about 164 B.C. at the time of King Antiochus Epiphanes, the persecutor of the Jews. A remarkable critique now universally accepted! No wonder its author was put on the *Index* and his books destroyed when the Church had got on top! Amongst the Christians themselves some genuine examples of Biblical scholarship are recorded. Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (third century) declared that the same John could not possibly have written two such dissimilar books as the Gospel and the Apocalypse, a commonplace of modern Biblical scholarship. About the same time a learned Christian, Julius Africanus (author of a lost history of the world, perhaps too heterodox to have been preserved) argued against Origen that the stories of Susannah and the Dragon were not in the original Hebrew version of Daniel and could not have formed part of the original book, a line later taken up by the Protestant Reformers, who consigned to the Apocrypha all Biblical narratives not found in the original Hebrew version. Even as late as 400, after the triumph of Christianity, the learned but orthodox St. Jerome, in his preface to the *Vulgate*, stated that some people rejected several New Testament books on account of differences in style, as in the case of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* or the *Second Epistle of Peter*, neither of which resemble other works in the canon ascribed to Paul and Peter — a view now almost universally accepted. Or because, as in the case of *Jude*, it quotes from the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*. Jerome himself, while having the honesty to record these heterodox views, completely rejected them. Such examples prove, however, that even on the threshold of the Dark Ages, Christian orthodoxy had not yet entirely submerged the critical faculty into an age of unquestioning Faith.

FOR NEWCOMERS

Witchcraft

JESUS CHRIST, assuming he lived, had a firm belief in the existence of “evil spirits.” That is, he accepted without question the superstition of his time, a superstition backed up by the barbarous command in the Old Testament, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”

This form of persecution was promoted by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, who early in the fourth century enacted that magicians were to be burnt alive. Among the famous men who believed in witchcraft, chiefly on Biblical authority, were Cotton Mather, Sir Thomas Browne, John Wesley, Glanvill, and Sir Matthew Hale. In 1773 a Scottish Presbytery passed a resolution expressing belief in the reality of witchcraft. Even after Franklin’s lightning conductor had proved successful, strong objections were raised to it as an interference with the mysterious way of Providence. It was by some persons considered safer to trust to the bones of saints.

Witches were supposed to be in league with the Devil and his imps in order to vex and injure human beings. With supernatural resources they were able to plague cattle, ruin crops, cause diseases and bad weather, and generally to advance the reign of evil. James I attributed to witchcraft the storm which had given him an unpleasant experience on his voyage from Denmark in 1589. For this offence a doctor was burnt after being shockingly tortured. The idea was to get rid of the evil spirit, but this usually involved the death of the witch by the most painful of methods. Under Roman law torture might be employed,

but with limits. Christian justice set them aside, because the victims were strengthened by Satan.

Long before the Christian era the physician Galen had taught that madness was due to brain disease. Under Christianity it was believed to result from possession by evil spirits — a belief which naturally increased the number of the insane and led to a brutality of treatment that lasted hundreds of years. This cruel and foolish belief in evil spirits was thought to prove, not the error of the Christian Scriptures, but their Divine authority. That was why the superstition flourished for so long. The belief in a personal Devil and his followers has now only a fragment of its former influence, but those who retain it seldom perceive the logical consequences. Not reflecting that their Redeemer shared this terrible superstition, they thank him for healing a few sick persons out of millions.

Ready support was found in the Bible for these superstitions. The serpent in Eden and the Gadarene swine were proofs that animals could be possessed by evil spirits. Even insects, such as the logic of the Dark Ages, could not be held guiltless. St. Bernard excommunicated a swarm of flies which impiously interrupted his preaching. Bossuet was so confident of the reality of evil spirits that he said “a single devil could turn the earth round as easily as we turn a marble.” This egregious belief, shared by the great Reformers Luther and Calvin, was a necessary outcome of the belief in a personal Devil.

G.H.T.

—NEXT WEEK—

Religion and Politics

By F. A. RIDLEY

Two Lords

By E. G. MACFARLANE

TWO LORDS made statements in the second week of October which epitomised concern with the future and also concern with the past.

Lord Clyde was responsible for a verdict in a case concerning the custody of a child of divorced parents. He ruled that the father (who is an atheist) should gain custody of the child but on the condition that the child be given "a Christian upbringing." The reason he gave for the condition was put forward in the following words: "Since the paramount consideration in custody cases is the welfare of the child, it would be almost impossible for a court in Scotland to award the custody to an atheist with the prospect of the child being brought up without the solace and guidance of any religious teaching at all... for atheism and the child's welfare are almost necessarily mutually exclusive, according, at least, to our standard of civilised society."

This man is not merely *talking*, notice. He is in a position of actual *executive* authority and his statement has all the force of the state behind it. He would undoubtedly be backed by the leaders of all the orthodox political parties. The reading (the only possible reading!) of the significance of his statement is that these people *all* regard Britain as a *Christian State*. In other words, atheists have not an equal standing with Christians in Britain and thus the desires of atheists can be disregarded and overruled by those in authority at every available opportunity.

Obviously these people assume that the present state of society in Britain accepts the truth of the "Christian revelation" and that those who are critical are in error and therefore correctly liable to be overruled or have their views suppressed.

The only cure for this state of affairs is a new political initiative which will wrest official power from the Christian parties and then institute a state of affairs in which *all* doctrines of belief (including atheism and agnosticism) are treated as equally valid before the law. I think that those who are prepared to accept this ideal in place of the current ideal of a Christian-dominated state should immediately leave the Christian political parties and get together on a basis of the new ideal.

Here I come to Lord Montgomery's statement. (This Lord is not talking in an official capacity, notice. He is merely airing his personal views on the way we should shape society in the future.) He wants "... a master global plan to fight Communism. But we cannot make such a plan without a supreme authority for the direction of political policy and military strategy..."

Insofar as Communism attempts to impose particular doctrines of belief to the exclusion and suppression of others, and prohibits free political organisation and opposition, I am disposed to agree with Lord Montgomery. But if he wants to see a supreme authority which accepts the current basis of Christian doctrines with the accompanying restriction of freedom for other views, I cannot accept his aim.

Those of us who wish to institute a state of society in which theists and atheists can contend for their views on equal terms can accept Lord Montgomery's challenge to bring into being a single source of political authority not merely for "The West" but for the world as a whole. After all, there must be many Russians and Chinese who will support our reasonable request for equality of opportunity for atheists and theists alike and if we can persuade them

to turn out the totalitarians (i.e. people who desire to impose a particular set of beliefs on everybody) in favour of those who desire equality of opportunity, then we have the basis of a possible world-wide social order on our principles.

These principles I would state as follows:

(1) That local nationalism and local political sovereignty be abandoned in favour of the aim of seeking a cosmopolitan society with a single source of political sovereignty in the world.

(2) That all attempts to impose the establishment of any particular system of belief doctrines should be abandoned in favour of giving all views of that kind identical treatment before the law and particularly in monopolistic organs of the press and radio.

(3) That all attempts to discriminate between people on racial grounds should be abandoned, since all human beings have a common biological origin, and so-called "racial differences" are so superficial that they can be ignored as irrelevant to the granting of rights as citizens.

(4) That the right to oppose existing political parties and to contend with them openly and legally for the possession of political power in any state is clearly established.

On the basis of these principles, I think we could defeat all forms of totalitarianism as well as exorcise all divisive forms of nationalism and racialism. Then, instead of the British thinking of themselves as being members of a "Christian state" we could teach them to think in terms of a "freedom-loving state," and instead of thinking of themselves as "British" we could teach them to think of themselves as "Human." In time people like Lord Clyde (and the "noble Lords" who concurred with his reactionary verdict!) would learn to base their judgments on these new principles and Lord Montgomery would achieve his desired "supreme authority."

Does Lord Clyde deny that the attitude I have indicated is more reasonable and modern in outlook than that indicated by his verdict — and will he take steps to help us change the present basis of the social order accordingly, if he agrees with us? Does Lord Montgomery consider it possible to establish a single authority over people of many differing beliefs unless some such principles of common justice are clearly established?

[Readers may be interested to know that the National Secular Society and the Humanist Council have protested to the Secretary of State for Scotland about Lord Clyde's remarks.—EDITOR.]

HAPPINESS

WHAT men and women need far more than religious incentives are those encouragements which fill the heart with cheer, the mind with light, and life with gladness. There is a constant mental pilgrimage towards that Mecca of the human heart — happiness. The whole world looks to the enjoyment of certain circumstances, or to the attainment of a certain state of being, as the realisation of its earthly ambition. Everybody wants to be happy, and thinks, strives, wishes, and lives to that end. Mankind desire those objects and conditions which bring enjoyment here. I wish at the outset to acknowledge my approval of this sensible ambition. I believe that the pleasures of life are consistent with the noblest pursuits and the loftiest aims; and I further hold that those comforts and delights which minister to the sweet gratification of the senses are not only legitimate, but also worthy and pure. I respect my whole nature, and believe that the cravings and wants of every part should be satisfied. The eye's wish to look upon what is beautiful should be respected. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

— L. K. WASHBURN.

This Believing World

With pride, the Rev. R. McKay, who is the Head of Religious Broadcasting, tells us that "the number of religious programmes in Television has been greatly increased." Every effort is to be made to bring in "personal" stories—those "which led to decisive action through their Christian faith." We shall even see English cricketer the Rev. D. Sheppard among many other great Christians, and there are going to be more programmes of outside broadcasts of church services as well as the usual *Epilogues*, *Time for Prayers*, and *Sunday at Six* for children. All these are still in the "experimental" stage, so it will be most interesting to see what Mr. McKay will do when he gets past that, and given far more time and far more programmes. What a pity it is that on Sundays both radio and TV cannot be devoted entirely to religion. The people would love it so.

★

The Rev. Professor T. Fish conducted the harvest festival recently at Nether Alderly, and was candid enough to inform his congregation that, though the occasion was one of "great joy," it was a pagan custom all the same, and "no worse for that." We fully agree. The Virgin Birth comes straight from paganism; so does the Cross. The "mystical" letters "I.H.S." are pagan; the Triangle which symbolises the Trinity is pagan; the Dove, symbolising the Holy Spirit, is pagan; and one could easily show how much paganism was taken bodily over by Christianity—even including the Sabbath Day, Sunday, the day devoted to sun worship. But we do not expect Mr. Fish to add all this to his "frank" admission about the harvest festival.

★

Introduced by the Rev. Brian Green, TV brought forward the other Sunday a doctor who had been an "agnostic," a clergyman who had been an "atheist," and a German woman who had been a Jewess—all joyously relating how they had come to Christ. It would be safe to say that neither the doctor nor the clergyman had anything but the vaguest notion of what atheism or agnosticism really was—and certainly they could never pluck up enough courage to meet an unbeliever in debate. Their "faith" was nothing but credulity and emotion, and no doubt they would be surprised if told that they added far more to the entertainment value of TV than to its intellectual impact. In other words, they were all *funny*.

★

Although the Society for Psychical Research thoroughly exposed the humbug of the "hauntings" at Borley Rectory, Spiritualists are still there digging for a well. This well—it may or may not have now been found—will prove that spooks *must* have haunted the sacred edifice. A "grey nun" is one of the spirits—and, of course, she had to be grey, just as an "Indian Guide" has to be called "Red Cloud" or "Red Eagle." But we must not be too hard on believers in spooks. After all, bishops and cardinals have believed, and perhaps still believe, that "our Lord" was carried through the air by a Devil!

★

We received quite a number of angry attacks from another kind of believer when we suggested that "flying saucers" were all my eye and Betty Martin. Thousands—or is it millions?—of people have seen them, and some have even talked to "Venusians" who have come on a flying visit from Venus. Anyway, we were glad to learn that at San Luis Obispo, in California, a Flying Saucer Day was organised recently, and spacemen were expected to come in huge numbers to confound the silly unbelievers. With the utmost pain in our hearts, we have to report that no messages of regret at their absence came in—and not

even a tiny, weeny, flying saucer appeared to greet the expectant crowd.

★

It now appears that hopes of their coming were raised by "saucer scientists" in London and Paris; but perhaps some mistake had been made. They may not have been "saucer" but "saucy" scientists. One never can predict the kind of humour some scientists fall for, and all we can send to California is our deepest sympathy, and the hope that flying saucers will one day appear there if only to confound such ignorant disbelievers as ourselves.

Miles Standish

IT IS A VERY OLD and paying custom for all Christian countries, in carrying out the conversion of other nations to the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ and more trade, either to buy off the leaders or to shoot them off.

The three hundredth anniversary of the death of Miles Standish, the daring and romantic leader of the Pilgrim Fathers, is now being celebrated. He was the hero in one of Longfellow's poems, "The Courtship of Miles Standish."

Born in Lancashire, Standish served in his youth as a soldier in the Netherlands, and consequently had a knowledge of the art of killing. He accompanied the Pilgrim Fathers on the Mayflower in 1620. Becoming a leader, he had a good nose for smelling out witches, "these servants of the Devil," as he called them, who had by their cunning accompanied the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. Many an old neurotic woman, charged with witchcraft was roasted at the stake by his orders.

His massacres of the American Indians brought him great honours, and demonstrated to the British Government of the day that he was really a great and noble soldier, not only of Britain, but of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Two Indian chiefs who had protested against Standish and the Pilgrims taking over land which did not belong to them were dealt with in the good old Christian way. Going with eight other Pilgrims to the camp of the Indians, Standish and his men had a pow wow, and then invited the Indians to a conference at the Pilgrim settlement, to be held on the next day. The Chiefs and their followers, a dozen from the camp, attended unarmed, as requested. Standish met them in a friendly manner, with a smile on his face. Inviting them into the conference room, he closed and locked the door. Then he and his committee immediately shot them.

No wonder he was lionised by the Government and no wonder that his memory still lives. As a good Christian, he deserves to be remembered, for did not this hero set the seed that brought about the extinction of a race, and the eventual establishment of the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the almighty power of Wall Street in God's Own Country?

PAUL VARNEY.

QUIZ

1. What was the first slave ship of Hawkins called?
2. What are four main R.C. Religious Orders?
3. The President of a 20th century State was an agnostic philosopher who founded a Rationalist Society. Who was he?
4. What the first English newspaper?
5. A famous conjuror was so successful in reduplicating alleged "spiritualist" phenomena that the late Conan Doyle said, in explanation, that he must have been a medium himself. Who was he?
6. What were the Rexists?

(Answers on page 380)

THE FREETHINKER

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TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- 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.
- Merseyside 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.: R. POWE. Sunday, 11 a.m.: R. MORRELL and R. POWE.
- Wales and Western Branch N.S.S. (Bristol Downs).—Every Sunday, 3.30 p.m.: D. SHIPPER.
- West London Branch N.S.S.—Every Sunday, at the Marble Arch, from 4 p.m.: Messrs. ARTHUR and EBURY.

INDOOR

- Bradford Branch N.S.S. (Mechanics' Institute).—Sunday, November 25th, 6.45 p.m.: F. L. AGAR, "Art—the Mirror."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, November 25th, 7.15 p.m.: Miss R. MILTON, "The Church and Sexual Freedom."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, November 27th, 7.15 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, B.A., "Humanism and Atheism."
- Glasgow Secular Society (Central Halls, Bath Street).—Sunday, November 25th, 7 p.m.: GUY A. ALDRED, "The Importance of Atheism."
- Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, November 23rd, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Comparative Religion" (third of six Study Classes). Subject this week, "Evolution of Islam." Admission 1/-.
- Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, November 25th, 6.30 p.m.: R. SEAR, "Recent Developments in Poland."
- Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Wheatshaf Hotel, High Street).—Sunday, November 25th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "The Great Religious Orders."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, November 25th, 2.30 p.m.: V. E. PRYSCOTT-PICKUP (Conservative Party), "The Fourth Empire."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, November 25th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, P.H.D., "Some Aspects of the American Scene."
- Wales and Western (Bute Town Community Centre, Cardiff).—Tuesday, November 27th, 7.45 p.m.: G. DAVEY, "Men and their Gods."

Notes and News

A REVOLUTIONARY religious movement at Drenft, near Arnhem, Holland, is an appeal by the ecclesiastical authorities to local farmers for help in restoring churches by putting eggs in the collection plate instead of money. The pious farmers have each nominated a hen to work exclusively for the Church. The clergy will no doubt provide the cackle.

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PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £101 5s. 5d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; A. C. Blythe, 5s.; A. W. Laing (Manchester), £25; F. McVeigh, £1 10s.; J. Molyneux, 5s.—Total to date, November 16th, 1956, £128 7s. 5d.

Appreciation

As the compiler of the news column in *The American Rationalist* magazine, I have used THE FREETHINKER a great deal as one of the best journals to report what is going on, not only in England, but throughout the world. It is the best source of news and I eagerly scan the small paragraphs to hunt for the news. I like also the interesting notices on street lecturing. Over here I think there is only one place in the country where there is open-air lecturing, and that is Los Angeles, and I doubt very much if any Rationalist ever gives a talk. Your continual list of indoor and outdoor lectures is impressive. It gives us courage to try to copy the record, and also makes us glad that someone is doing something for the movement.—ELDON SCHOLL.

We must not let THE FREETHINKER lapse; it is the only paper really in the fight for freedom of thought.—(Kent.)

Rome Report

THERE WERE SOME BIG SMILES around Rome recently when the Vatican solemnly advised some its younger female members to stop taking questions of a personal intimate nature to their local priest, but instead to discuss such matters with their mothers. It appears, according to the Vatican, that "a secret lust of the heart" was prompting the girls to bring their questions to their priests' ears, and not a genuine desire for information and guidance. So now the girls are told to ask mother instead of Father.

The reason behind the issuing of this unusually sound advice on the part of the Vatican is not hard to find. Their priests are such terribly sensitive chaps! Committed to lifelong celibacy, their imaginations are apt to run away with them. The proximity of a young woman, perhaps the rustle of a skirt, accompanied by the scented whisper of some delicate problem of an intimate nature, while likely to pass unnoticed in the world of men, may well excite and disturb the mental equilibrium of these celibate, frustrated creatures.

One may well surmise that after hearing several such "confessions" the poor priests have found it more than usually difficult to return their minds to the contemplation of purely spiritual matters. As Chapman Cohen once said, "One should never discuss sex with a priest. It is so very unfair!"

Elsewhere in Rome, life continues to run normally. One can see hundreds of black-frosted priests of every nationality scurrying around all over the city, but nobody pays them the slightest attention. It is a common sight. Rome has never struck me as being a very religious city in spite of its being the H.Q. of the R.C. Church. Many a citizen, once you get to know him, harbours a surprising amount of healthy scepticism.

Currently, the Hungarian Catholic Action in Rome are demanding assistance for the rebels in Hungary, but there is little evidence of any response. In any case, the Hungarian people would be no better off after swapping their Soviet masters for the bosses in the Vatican. Self-interest, not the promotion of individual liberty, is the guiding principle of the hierarchy here.

With warmest greetings to THE FREETHINKER.

JACK GORDON.

The Errors of a 'Brilliant Historian'

By C. T. SALISBURY

WHEN several evening newspapers announced that they were to serialise Dr. Werner Keller's new book, *The Bible as History*, they also informed their public that this worthy had spent five years on a survey of all the known archaeological discoveries of the past 150 years. The present writer would suggest that he spends another five years in study, this time making sure that he gets his facts right, for never has there been such a "massive investigation" containing so many errors.

Where, on odd occasions, the facts cited are correct, Dr. Keller puts forward his own rather infantile conclusions as if they were the views of the majority of scientists, when in reality no scholar would for a moment consider them. Let us therefore examine some of these blunders.

(1) There are world-wide flood legends and most of these give a graphic picture of what appears to have been extra-terrestrial disturbances, showers of hot ash, earthquakes, and so forth. Very few scholars subscribe to the theory that the flood deposits at Ur of the Chaldees have anything to do with these, and reasonably suggest that they are a memory of a prehistoric cataclysm in an early centre of civilisation. The main exponent of the "Flood at Ur" idea is Sir Leonard Woolley, but his theory has not stood up to criticism.

(2) Keller says that excavations at the site of the ancient city of Mari prove the existence of Haran. They do nothing of the sort and the identification of the latter city is still unsettled.

(3) There is not a shred of evidence to support the notion that the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah lie beneath the Dead Sea. Here again, such a supposition is sheer guesswork, and *not* a fact, as Keller states.

(4) As evidence for the historicity of Joseph, Dr. Keller produces the Papyrus D'Orbiney or "The Tale of the Two Brothers." What this Egyptian folklore (of a much later period than the supposed time of Joseph) has to do with this personage is hard to imagine. But the prize bloomer is his suggestion that the "Bahr Yusuf" or Joseph's Canal was named after, or perhaps even constructed by, Joseph. His assertion that tradition supports this idea is downright nonsense. The canal was mentioned by Strabo and Ptolemy among others, and, as far as can be ascertained from the ancient writers, it was unnamed at that time. The local tradition tells us that it was given its present title by Saladin, the Moslem leader of the time of the Crusades, and certain old workings on its banks bear the cartouche of one of the kings of the 12th dynasty, a period long anterior to the supposed time of Joseph. The name Yusef is quite common amongst the Arabs and to suggest that the canal is a memory of "Pharaoh's great vizier" is absolute rubbish.

(5) Dr. Keller dogmatically tells us that "the new king who knew not Joseph was Rameses II," showing just what little knowledge he has of the subject about which he is claimed to be so expert. In reality this was a view held by nineteenth century theologians and today very few scholars support it. However, the writer dealt with the historical aspect of the Exodus, etc., in a previous article for THE FREETHINKER, which gives the only available facts on the subject. In this same extract details of a wallpainting showing semitic prisoners are given. The painting is one which is in the tomb of Rekhmire, and our author infers that this is evidence of Israelite prisoners. "The picture is an impressive illustration of the biblical words." But Rekh-

mire was the vizier of the Pharaoh Thutmose III, who lived 200 years before Rameses II and at a time when, according to the Bible, the children of Israel were free. Needless to say, the rest of the articles dealing with Moses, plagues and the Exodus, etc., are quite puerile.

(6) The date of the entry into Canaan is given as 1200 B.C. and this would also be the time of the supposed siege of Jericho by Joshua. But this date is impossible, for at that time the vast migrations of "The Peoples from the Islands in the Midst of the Sea" or "The North People" were sweeping through Syria, smashing the powerful Hittite Empire and burning and plundering every city they came to, whilst their great fleet ravaged the coasts of Syria and Asia Minor. In 1194 B.C. they were at the gates of Egypt and only then was their power smashed. There is plentiful evidence of the Sea Peoples — none for Joshua and his Israelites. The late Professor John Garstang is cited as an authority for the date of the destruction of Jericho in 1200 B.C. However, Garstang tells us that according to his researches, this particular level at Jericho came to an end at the same time as the close of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt — or *circa* 1750 B.C. Keller is 550 years out.

(7) The finds at Ras Shamra, the site of the old city of Ugarit, are supposed to provide evidence of the wicked religions which confronted the pious Israelites. In reality, it has been shown that the inhabitants of Ugarit had very lofty ideas and as early as the 16th century B.C. they had formed a monotheistic concept whilst still retaining their pantheon. Moreover, hundreds of clay tablets have shown that the Hebrews must have obtained many of their religious ideas, psalms and law from this source. There is, for example, an identical story to the Crossing of the Red Sea, dating to about 1400 B.C., and the late compilers of the Book of Exodus must have obtained their legend from a Canaanite myth already in existence. Ugarit appears to have met its end about 1300 B.C. Therefore Dr. Keller is once again 100 years out.

(8) According to Dr. Keller, there are New Testament manuscripts going "back to within a few decades of Christ." Details of the earliest fourth and fifth century codices, etc., are too well known to Freethinkers to repeat here, but such a downright lie is hard to beat anywhere.

The above are just a *very few* of the mistakes made in this book, and because of space it has been necessary to deal *very briefly* with them. However, it is hoped that they will suffice to show up the "qualifications" of Keller, though the general public will doubtless swallow the stuff and acclaim him as an infidel-conquering genius.

Authorities for the above statements can be found in the following works:

Encyclopædia Britannica — Articles: Babylonia; Mesopotamia; Sodom and Gomorrah; Bible.

Broderick and Morton — *Dictionary of Egyptian Archaeology*.

J. H. Breasted — *A History of Egypt*.

S. A. B. Mercer — *Tutankhamen and Egyptology*.

C. Schaeffer — *Ugaritica I*.

C. Schaeffer — *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra*.

J. Garstang and G. E. B. Garstang — *The Story of Jericho-Ugarit*.

Virgin Births

A RECENT LECTURE by Dr. Edward Roux to the Rationalist Association of Johannesburg was inspired by the publicity which has been given to alleged instances of virgin birth in humans.

He referred to the main ways in which reproduction is known to occur. He mentioned budding or vegetative reproduction (common in plants, but also occurring in animals like worms and jellyfish); reproduction by single cells, called spores, which reproduce the whole organism (found in most plants and, again, in some lower animals); and sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction requires the fusion of differentiated cells, known as gametes, as a preliminary to the development of the organism. The gametes produced by the female are seldom identical in appearance to those contributed by the male, nor are they produced as prodigally: the female gamete or egg is immotile and relatively large, while the sperm are small and motile.

Normally the egg will not develop unless it is fertilised by the sperm, and this, as far as we are certain at present, is always the case in humans. Development of the egg without fertilisation (parthenogenesis) is either a regular feature in the life cycle of certain lower organisms, or may be induced (even in animals with backbones). To illustrate: worker bees are undeveloped females, queens are fully developed females, and drones are masculine. Only the queen can lay eggs. During the mating flight the testes of the drones are torn out and all their sperm is stored in the body of the queen. Depending on her posture when laying, the queen may produce fertilised or unfertilised eggs. The former, laid in small cells of the comb, develop into workers. If transferred by the bees to special large chambers and fed on "royal jelly" they become queens. Unfertilised eggs, laid in cells of intermediate size, develop parthenogenetically into drones.

Many years ago Jacques Loeb caused the eggs of sea-urchins to develop parthenogenetically by placing them in sea-water containing an unusually high percentage of salt. He also induced parthenogenesis in frogs' eggs by the simple process of pricking them with a fine needle. Recently Pincus and Shapiro have succeeded in inducing a female rabbit to produce a parthenogenetic daughter by chilling the fallopian tubes (through which the ova pass) with ice-cold water; and Strassman records the parthenogenetic development of ova in cats injected with indigo, carmine and other dyes which do not kill cells they pervade. As far as he could gather from the literature, said Dr. Roux, no case of parthenogenesis occurring under natural conditions has been authenticated in mammals.

The alleged case of parthenogenesis in humans has the following history. The *Sunday Pictorial* asked women who thought they had conceived parthenogenetically to submit themselves and their daughters to tests which should expose fanciful claims. It should be explained that accepted theory regarding inheritance furnishes opportunities for investigations which can controvert false virgin birth claims. The motive behind most of the tests was to discover whether the daughter had inherited the characteristics in question from a source additional to the mother. The characteristics singled out for investigation are those which a mother, according to current theory, cannot transmit to her offspring through her ova unless she herself possesses them.

Nineteen women responded to the invitation, and the results of the tests were reported by Dr. Balfour Lynn (*Lancet*, June 30th, 1956). Eleven were eliminated at the preliminary interview. They had wrongly imagined that a

hymen which remained intact after conception indicated a "virgin birth."

The blood of mother and daughter was compared with the necessary thoroughness in the case of the remaining eight mother and daughter pairings. The constitution of their blood disqualified four pairs, because the daughters' blood revealed supplementary constituents whose presence required the transmission to the daughter of hereditary material which the mother's ova could not have contained, and which presumably was contributed by a sperm.

Of the four pairs who were not eliminated by major blood group and rhesus investigations, two couples went down on the rare blood-group tests. There remained Mrs. Alpha and daughter and Mrs. Beta and daughter. Mrs. Beta was then eliminated because her daughter had dark brown eyes while her own were light blue. This implied a dark-eyed man in the background. (In fact, Mrs. Beta might have been excluded at the beginning.) At this stage Mrs. Alpha, the surviving claimant, and her daughter, then passed the "tasting test" (both being able to taste phenyl carbamide); they triumphed on the saliva and blood-serum tests. The testing programme was terminated by a skin-grafting test. According to theory, a parthenogenetic daughter should have no skin antigens which her mother does not have, and a graft of daughter's skin on mother should take. Parthenogenetic development should, in other words, confer such inter-homogeneity on the skin of daughter and mother, that grafts will take as they do from one part of an individual's body to another, or between identical twins. The graft of mother on daughter lasted six weeks, that of daughter on mother four weeks, before each showed signs of devascularisation and had to be wiped off.

It should perhaps be pointed out that the tests are only conclusive within the context of current theory and that there is no guarantee that any particular and limited programme of tests has been sufficiently searching to eliminate all possibility of an ultimate negative result. Scientific advance could at any time conceivably generate a test which would trip up claimants who had survived a selection of other tests.

For reasons well understood by scientists, and concerning structures called chromosomes, visible in the cell under suitable conditions, the development of an unfertilised ovum into a male is believed to be an impossibility. Ova, so far as is known, contain only one kind of sex chromosome, whereas *both kinds are essential if the ovum is to develop into a male*. One of two things must happen if the ovum is to develop into a male. Either the other kind of chromosome must be contributed from outside (this occurs in half of all fertilisations of an ovum by a sperm because half of all sperm contain the one kind of sex chromosome and the other half the other kind, so that male and female children are born in roughly equal numbers). Or the second kind of chromosome must be produced *in situ* in the unfertilised ovum. But chromosomes are only produced by exact duplication of existing chromosomes, and the one type in the ovum can only produce a copy of itself, and not the second kind.

The laity often interpret the biblical account of the circumstances of Jesus' conception as meaning that Jesus developed parthenogenetically. Scientifically, the parthenogenetic origin of a male is an impossibility. The relevant passage in Matthew 1:18, "before (Joseph and Mary) came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost," can be interpreted quite differently—in scientific terms, that the Holy Ghost miraculously furnished the

missing kind of chromosome — *not* that the male child, Jesus, developed from an unfertilised ovum.

Be that as it may, the contention seems to have a late addition: perhaps acquired from the Greek saviour religions, with which Christianity competed in its early days — many of which claimed divine births for their heroes. It is not mentioned by the earliest Christian writer, Paul, and the first Gospel, that of Mark, does not refer to it.

Another misconception is that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception proclaimed by Pius IX in 1854 envisages a miraculous or virgin birth for Mary. "It means that (to quote McCabe) at the conception of Mary herself by her mother she did not inherit the guilt of the sin of Adam (Original Sin)."

Report from Malta—2

By A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

IN 1932 the Maltese Legislative Assembly consisted of the Upper House and the Lower House, called the Senate. In those days the majority of the electorate was illiterate and firmly in the grip of the local politicians and the clergy. The Roman Catholic Church was predominantly influential in the Senate and ensured that laws intended to improve working class conditions were mostly shelved, for the Senate had the power to reject bills passed by the Upper House.

In those days two parties dominated Maltese politics: the Nationalist Party and the Constitutional Party. The former was, to all intents and purposes, the party of the clergy, and had as its Minister for Education a fiery priest, Monsignor Dandria. Readers may easily guess what sort of education the Maltese people received under the Monsignor; three-quarters of the day was wasted in religious teaching and activity. The leader of the Constitutionals was the late Lord Strickland, an honest, forward, and broad-minded person, who at one time tried to introduce a land tax in Malta. The Church, being the largest landowner in the island, raised heaven and earth to prevent this, and accused Lord Strickland — a Roman Catholic — of promulgating the interests of the Anglican Church. Catholic strength in the Lower House ensured rejection, for a Bill had to pass both Houses to become law.

History repeated itself during Malta's first Labour administration. Although the Senate was abolished, the clergy succeeded in raising the Nationalist Party from the obscure position it had fallen into through the war with Italy. In 1948 the Labour Government introduced a Bill on income tax. At once the Church — this time through the person of the Archbishop himself — insisted that she must be exempted from the tax on the grounds that her money was derived from wills and was used for charitable purposes.

After a heated debate, the then leader of the Malta Labour Party, Sir Paul Beffa, conceded an amendment to the proposed Bill; and the only Cabinet Minister who remained steadfast was the Hon. Dom Mintoff, Minister for Works and Reconstruction. Forthwith, Mr. Mintoff was made the target of vile abuse and allegations. His marriage to an English lady was commented upon, under the pretext that she was an Anglican.

So the struggle continued. Last year it reached something of a climax with the fight over the proposal for Integration with Britain. The Church's resistance was made clear to all. She aimed to assert her control, but this time she met a formidable opponent in Dom Mintoff: a man who knew the ways and wiles of the clergy and was

prepared to defy the seemingly all-powerful Archbishop. There were, of course, the usual threats, the undisguised interference by the Church of Rome, but the Labour Government stood firm. It won the admiration of all lovers of freedom and it won the referendum. It is sincerely to be hoped that it will remain firm and show the clergy that they can no longer control the social and political affairs of Malta.

At present, the Roman Catholic Church — the biggest landowner in Malta — is still exempted from income tax and still dominates — if in a declining way — the private lives of the Maltese people. Let the people of Britain give a thought to their Commonwealth fellows on the George Cross Island; let Members of Parliament with Freethinking tendencies turn their minds to the difficulties in the way of Freethought in Malta.

Shortly, it seems, Malta may send three representatives to Westminster. Three may not be a lot, but they could well be three more Roman Catholics. If I know the Church she will do all in her power to ensure that the representatives are to her liking, and that would be detrimental to both Malta and Britain.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Jesus. 2. Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits and Benedictines. 3. Masaryk of Czechoslovakia. 4. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (886 to 1154). 5. Houdini. 6. Belgian Fascists led by Leon Degrelle, who prepared the way for Hitler; they enjoyed the covert protection of the Palace and controlled (1939) four newspapers. G.H.T.

OBITUARY

It is with regret that we announce the death of Ronald George Dixon Addey, of Forest Hill, London, at the age of 74. Mr. Addey was a keen Secularist and reader of this paper, and we shall miss his periodic visits to the office. The Secretary N.S.S. conducted a secular service at Honor Oak Crematorium on November 9th in the presence of Mrs. Addey and her family, to whom we send our sincerest sympathy.

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