

The Freethinker

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IN OCTOBER a meeting at the Caxton Hall convened by the Humanist Council, representing the leading ethical and rationalist groups in Britain, enthusiastically endorsed a motion calling on the BBC to permit more representation of unorthodox opinion. The secretary of the Humanist Council promptly followed up this popular directive and talks with the BBC authorities are now under way. Some fight on their probable outcome, or at least on the motives

that inspire the present line of the BBC, was thrown by a recent talk at Conway Hall discussion circle sponsored by the South Place Ethical Society, by the official in charge of religious broadcasting, the Rev. Roy McKay. Mr. McKay, we understand, flatly refused to discuss the basic policies of the BBC, alleging that they were decided on "higher up," and he and his department merely had to administer them. He finally suggested that those dissatisfied with the present official policy had better approach the Governors of the BBC or, still better, the Prime Minister!

This reply of the reverend gentleman is, we suggest, extremely illuminating, indicating underlying realities. Actually the BBC, in its own estimation the administrative department of an officially Christian state, is in the last analysis bound by the official character of the State to which it owes its legal existence. Because this is officially a Christian country, the departments of State must regard Christianity as part of their programme. And not any kind of Christianity. Both England and Scotland are orthodox Christian communities. England is officially represented in the field of religion by the Church of England and that is, again, officially regulated by the Thirty-Nine Articles, which, however vague in some respects, definitely affirm the fundamental dogmas of Trinitarian Christianity as laid down in the creeds common to all such churches. Similarly the Church of Scotland also affirms, with some more or less important variations, these same dogmas. England and Scotland are both officially orthodox Christian lands.

"The Broad Stream of Christian Tradition"

The current policy of the BBC corresponds pretty rigorously with the legal framework in which it functions. It initiates nothing; it merely administers the existing state of things. The BBC regards it as its duty to promote Christianity as the established religion of the Christian State, and again, not any kind of Christianity. Today the term covers a multitude of sins and meanings. But orthodox Christianity is, in the words used by the authorities, "those forms of Christianity which conform to the broad stream of Christian tradition." This broad stream excludes such wandering tributaries as, say, the Unitarians, Swedenborgians and Jehovah's Witnesses, not to mention such dubious Christian borderland patrols as Mormonism, Spiritualism and Christian Science. It is confined to the established Churches of England and Scotland, the Church of Rome and the more orthodox Protestant Churches

which still adhere to the first timid theological phase of the Protestant Reformation. These, and only these, are rightfully entitled in a Christian country to the full freedom of the air.

"No Anti-God Stuff"

The ultimate direction of the BBC, as established by Act of Parliament, lies in the hands of the State — of the government of the day, in practice, or, more narrowly, of the Prime Minister. There, presumably, the last word in the Corporation's policy lies; it represents a *ne plus ultra*. I myself heard Sir Anthony Eden state in reply to a question in the House of Commons that he was

not willing to appoint a commission, as desired, to investigate the whole question of Disestablishment. However, the BBC is actually administered by a board of governors who, presumably along with the director-general and the higher departmental officials, do have a say in the determination, if not of *fundamental* policy, at least of its current application. The personal views of such highly placed personages have frequently varied widely. The virtual founder of the Corporation as a going concern, Lord Reith, was a Fundamentalist. He put religion on the BBC map and kept it there. As a wag noted at the time, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." The present Director, Sir Ian Jacobs, is also said to be a Fundamentalist. Other high officials have been more liberal in their religious outlook. Sir William Haley was a Unitarian, but this attachment did not seem to alter the policy of his department in any marked degree. The high — or low! — watermark was perhaps reached by another former governor, Sir Harold Nicolson, who once stated in reply to a question, in my hearing, that he was an agnostic and had no religious beliefs, and then, at the same meeting, went on in reply to a further question to state that while he was a governor of the Corporation there would be "no anti-God stuff."

Go for the Establishment

This attitude, in line with that of the reverend gentleman at the Conway Hall meeting, seems to indicate that the policy of the Corporation is fixed, and essentially unalterable within the existing *status quo* as formulated in relation to the official recognition of orthodox Christianity in England and Scotland. Accordingly, the attack on the present intolerant policy of the BBC is, and must largely remain, futile. The real thing to go for is not the BBC (the effect) but the Establishment (the cause and permanent justification). While the country remains *officially* Christian, whatever minor concessions might be made by more individually tolerant officials, the *fundamental* policy will remain, at most, only superficially changed, so that the broadcasting scales will continue to be heavily weighted in favour of orthodox religion, however many protest meetings may be directed against the BBC as such.

— VIEWS and OPINIONS —

The Established Church and the BBC

By F. A. RIDLEY

We should therefore attack the *cause*, and not, at least primarily, the *effect*. Probably the most important task which now faces the organised rationalist movement in these kingdoms is to effect the official separation of Church and State. *Then*, and not until then, will the ban on unorthodox opinion on the air be removed, and Christianity will be left, like Mohammed's legendary coffin, without visible means of support. The path to equality on the air would then become clear. The present policy of Freethought here should be to separate Church and State. Go for the Establishment!

A Mind in Bondage

By E. J. BARRETT

"Civilised man has proceeded so far in his interference with extra-human nature, has produced for himself and the living organisms associated with him, such a special state of things by his rebellion against Natural Selection and his defiance of Nature's pre-human dispositions, that he must either go on and acquire firmer control of the conditions, or perish miserably by the vengeance certain to fall on the half-hearted meddler in great affairs. . . . No retreat is possible; his only hope is to control, as he knows that he can, the sources of these dangers and disasters. They already make him wince. How long will he sit listening to the fairy-tales of his boyhood and shrink from manhood's task?"—Prof. Sir Ray Lankester, Romanes Lecture, Oxford, 1906.

CONFRONTED AND CONFOUNDED, as we are, with the complex problems of our own time—especially with the problems associated with the peaceful and constructive utilisation of atomic energy—Lankester's words have a more compelling significance today. The lines are far too serious for muddled thinking—or tinkering with any important issue, religious, moral, or political. We are engaged in "a race between education and catastrophe," as the late Mr. H. G. Wells so graphically expressed it, and we cannot afford the luxury of preoccupation with merely trivial or ephemeral interests.

The writer recently received a typical sample of religious thinking in the form of a letter addressed to him by a senior theological student in a New Zealand seminary—and now an ordained clergyman. Freethinkers may sometimes feel, in carrying on the fight against the Christian superstition, there is some justification for the charge that they are merely "flogging a dead horse." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Though the presentation of the Christian case may change "to suit the pressure of the changing times," the intellectually paralysing influence remains, and so long as it remains, it will continue to be the most serious obstacle to real and genuine progress. The following observations were made on the questions raised in the letter of this budding theologian, and, as is usual in cases of the kind, there was no reply.

Now, what has this champion of the faith to say in defence of his beliefs? After assuring me that the "New Testament acquaints us with the fact that unless one becomes as a little child, one cannot enter the Kingdom of God," he goes on:

"This is the point where a person in a search for truth, the person who follows to the end of a logical sequence, or chain of reasoning, and refuses to go further, or tries no other means of search, is at a disadvantage. It is obviously better in such a search to 'cast about' or 'seek,' 'really search,' or use the method of 'trial and error,' because by this means many great men find more truth. They exercise in the beginning a kind of 'blind faith,' yet the reality they find after is not based on 'blind faith.' He who refuses to try 'blind faith' as a scouting squadron is at a disadvantage. Any new theory needs its propounder to have 'blind

faith' in its truth to begin with, or he would not trouble to test it."

Those words admit of no other interpretation than that he had been eminently successful in his efforts to "become as a little child." Let us examine his logic. Where is there so wondrous a destination as "the end of a logical sequence, or chain of reasoning"? And where is the region beyond this, which he sees as a further fertile field for profitable exploration?

"He who refuses to try 'blind faith' in his search for truth is at a disadvantage. Any new theory needs its propounder to have 'blind faith' in its truth to begin with, or he would not trouble to test it."

This proposition is hopelessly absurd. If the correct solution of any theory were to be so easily ascertained, there would be no need to theorise at all. Such would be superfluous! Conquests in the realm of science are achieved only by perseverance in research and experiment. The history of science proves this. And the other imposing method he recommends in the search for truth, the method of "trial and error," is calculated to guide the investigator to the sanctuary of truth no further than it "guides" the organism *Euglena* to a source of light. This theory was suggested years ago by Prof. Jennings, to reveal the cause for the movement of microscopic organisms under the influence of light. The theory was exploded by the mental establishment of the Bunsen-Roscoe Law (the law of photochemical reactions) and, as Professor Jacques Loeb reminds us, "this much-beloved theory of the obscurantist is not even correct for the organism for which Jennings developed this idea." So much, then, for your "trial and error" method as a guide in the discovery of truth.

Here, let me emphasise this fact. Our one and only reliable means of establishing the truth of any proposition is by the unfettered employment of reasoning. The great Huxley, in his celebrated essay "On Improving Natural Knowledge," is eloquent on this point:

"The improver of natural knowledge," he says, "absolutely refuses to acknowledge authority as such. For him, scepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin. And it cannot be otherwise, for every great advance in natural knowledge has involved the absolute rejection of authority, the cherishing of the keenest scepticism, the annihilation of the spirit of blind faith; and the most ardent votary of science holds his firmest convictions, not because the men he most venerates hold them; not because their verity is testified by portents and wonders; but because his experience teaches him that whenever he chooses to bring these convictions into contact with their primary source, Nature—whenever he thinks fit to test them by appealing to experiment and to observation—Nature will confirm them. The man of science has learned to believe in *justification not by faith, but by verification.*"

(To be concluded)

QUIZ

1. Who was the first President of the Turkish Republic?
2. Who were the previous two Archbishops of Canterbury?
3. The "bad" King John was laid to rest in Worcester Cathedral between two saints. What is the tradition behind this?
4. Gives the real names of (a) George Eliot, (b) Mark Twain, (c) James Bridie, the rationalist playwright, (d) Tito.
5. What were the Charvakas?
6. At the infamous Reichstag Fire Trial one of the accused put up a spirited defence against Goering and later became Prime Minister of Bulgaria. Who was he?
7. "Mr. Wilkes, you will either die of hanging or of the pox." John Wilkes, made a celebrated reply, reputed to be one of the most scorching pieces of repartee on record. What did he say?

(Answers on page 396)

Religious Neurosis

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

FEW BOOKS in recent years have caused such a stir in scholarly circles as Mr. Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*. Most critics have been greatly impressed by the erudition and alleged profundity of thought displayed by the 24-year-old author. Mr. Wilson is undoubtedly an exceedingly well-read young man, and yet to me at least it seems that *The Outsider* is precisely the kind of book which a brilliant student of his age might be expected to write; that is to say, it is witty, iconoclastic, full of the exaggerated dogmatism and sweeping generalisations of youth, and in its conclusions, fundamentally wrongheaded.

What are, according to Mr. Wilson, the fundamental characteristics of the typical "outsider"? Throughout his treatise Mr. Wilson offers varying and, as we shall see, inconsistent definitions. He is Keegan in *John Bull's Other Island*, who, unlike the crass, unthinking optimist Broadbent, does not feel basically "at home" in the world. He is "the man who is interested to know how he should live instead of merely taking life as it comes." He is Tolstoy asking "Is there any meaning in life that can overcome inevitable death?" The "insiders," on the contrary, are the regular travellers on the 8.15 to the City immersed in their newspapers, or gazing vaguely at the advertisements above the opposite seats. "Inscribe on the placard in place of the advertisement for corn plasters, Eliot's 'We are the hollow men. We are the stuffed men, leaning together,' and they would read it with the same mild interest with which they read the rhymed advertisements for razor blades, wondering what on earth the manufacturers will be up to next."

Now, there is obviously nothing in all this to which the average Freethinker could so far take exception. Indeed, interpreting the above definitions strictly, secularists are themselves "outsiders," since they continually apply their brains to a consideration of life and its purpose and are far from being content to drift with the tide. Yet it becomes clear as the book proceeds that the genuine "outsider" as envisaged by Mr. Wilson could never hold that this world is the only one of which we have any knowledge. He must have a mystical insight into realms beyond both the senses and the reason. Thus Wilson writes: "The visionary faculty is man's norm. Just as you could not count a man normal if he had a mouth but no eyes, so you cannot count him normal if he has a brain but no visionary faculty. Most men live from moment to moment with no foresight or hindsight. The dogma of original sin insists that man has lost his visionary faculty because he spends all his time thinking about practical things." The *non-sequitur* here is glaring. It is obviously eminently possible to refrain from living merely from moment to moment, to think about "non-practical" things, and at the same time to entertain strong doubts regarding the existence of a "visionary faculty." The proofs Mr. Wilson offers in this respect are singularly unconvincing. It is seen in operation, he maintains, in Van Gogh's "Cornfield" and "Road with Cypresses," in the last movement of the Hammerclavier Sonata, and in Blake's mystical poetry. And he quotes Blake's celebrated utterance, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything will appear to man as it is, infinite." Now, no person of culture, whether atheist or theist, of course, denies the supreme emotional experience of great art, but it is surely clear that all such masterpieces depend for their creation and appreciation on the very material senses. As the present writer has pointed out in his articles on Zen Buddhism and Krishnamurti, the state

of liberation and happiness which Zen calls "Satori" and Krishnamurti "choiceless awareness," is only attainable through this present mundane existence. Indeed, Blake himself emphasises this in the very passage Mr. Wilson quotes—the doors of perception are "cleansed," not superseded. The fallacy in Mr. Wilson's reasoning at this point rests on the familiar confusion (exhibited also in the writings of Messrs. Huxley and Heard) between an emotion and a perception. The appreciation of the highest art is a subjective emotional state and cannot, as Mr. Leonard Collier wrote in the *Flight from Conflict*, prove anything about the universe except the fact of its own existence. It is mere illogical word spinning to say that some mysterious "out of this world" condition exists with which we are able to make contact when we read, listen to, or look at, the productions of the great masters.

There can be no doubt that many of Mr. Wilson's "outsiders" would have kept the psychiatrists of their various days and ages fully occupied. "Blake told Crabb Robinson," says Mr. Wilson solemnly, "that he had seen the ghost of Julius Caesar on the previous evening, and that he spent more time conversing with spirits than with ordinary human beings. This is either madness or a very strange order of sanity." Most people would be inclined to accept the former alternative. Blake was unquestionably a poet of genius, but there are long passages in his "prophetic" books which are hardly the utterances of a wholly sane man in any reasonable meaning of that phrase. Few Freethinkers, moreover, will be disposed to disagree with Prof. H. J. Paton's judgment of another of Mr. Wilson's idols, Kierkegaard. "His (Kierkegaard's) popularity today is a sign of the dangerous pass to which we have come—a mark of desperation and despair. We may pity his unhappy and diseased temperament but neurosis is a poor qualification for setting up as a religious guide." (*The Modern Predicament*, p. 120.) Or again when Mr. Wilson writes of Swift's view in the last book of *Gulliver's Travels* that man is a lump of deformity and diseases. "This is not pathological loathing. . . . It is the ordinary Outsider's attitude to man. It is also the religious attitude," we can only reply that if this is so the less we have of the Outsiders and the religious attitude the better. Finally, it would be a brave man who would swear to the overriding sanity of such as Nietzsche, Gurdjieff and T. E. Hulme. In truth, with the single and striking exception of Shaw, all of Mr. Wilson's "outsiders" suffer from the grave defect of having no sense of humour. The absence of this invaluable quality is always accompanied by a lack of proportion and by a distinct strain of fanaticism which all Mr. Wilson's eulogies cannot conceal.

On numerous occasions Mr. Wilson goes out of his way to attack the secular approach to life in the most extravagant and abusive terms. Thus, "The most irritating of the human lice is the humanist, with his puffed-up pride in Reason and his ignorance of his own silliness." Mr. Wilson, it will be noted, trusts to his own despised reason to try to establish his whole case. "Blake's particular bugbears were the rationalists and the natural religionists—Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau and the scientists Priestley and Newton (modern counterparts would be the Secular Society and thinkers like Dewey or Russell)." If it is not "puffed-up pride" on the part of both Blake and Mr. Wilson to sneer in this juvenile fashion at men of such stature as the above (Mr. Wilson pays the Secular Society an uncon-

(Concluded on next page)

This Believing World

It is a commonplace even with Spiritualists that mediums who can force up from the mighty deep all sorts of information about one's late Uncle George or Auntie Martha, thus proving conclusively that they are in hot communication with their spirits, always appear to fail in a whodunit murder, or in a lost child case. Little "Tiddler" Fearon who unaccountably disappeared from his home, was not found through any medium or through a famous TV "extra-sensory perceptionist" who volunteered to find him. The poor little chap was found dead, but by the police and ordinary people. Mediums succeed only *after* the event.

★

Another Church of England parson, Mr. Hugh Ross Williamson, has gone over to Rome because, as a *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer says, "of the shocking prospect of Methodists from Madras communicating at Anglican altars." On what principle, Mr. Williamson "asks in horror, could Methodists from Manchester now be excluded?" We admit that this world-shattering dilemma must compel any sane person literally to run to Rome; but this was not exactly the reason why we mention Mr. Williamson.

★

It appears that, in his varied career as parson, journalist, amateur historian, etc., he was in his early days a "rationalist," and we cannot help wondering what he meant by that much-abused term. Did it mean for him complete disbelief in religion with a thorough knowledge of all the arguments against the truth of Christianity, all of which he can now dispose of with a mere turn of the hand? We take leave to doubt that he knew any more about Freethought arguments than the well-advertised Mr. C. S. Lewis, who also boasts that he was an "atheist" in his young days, but now is a literal believer in Devils, Hell, Miracles, Angels, and all the other accessories which so distinguish true Christianity. Neither of them anyway could even answer Paine's *Age of Reason*, let alone Bradlaugh's *Plea for Atheism*.

★

The activities of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge are always turned to pure Fundamentalism, so we must not be too surprised that it has now published a biography of Joanna Southcott (1750-1814), the famous lady who, though of an advanced age, wished to emulate the Virgin Mary and give birth to the World Messiah again. With the aid of plenty of Bible prophecies, a trumpery trinket which she called "the seal of the living God," and a gent who called himself the Archangel Michael, she gathered a large number of followers; and no doubt, had she had the money and advertising behind her as did the ineffable Billy Graham, she would easily have mustered equally gullible audiences in size and wealth.

★

As one reviewer of the book sadly admits, her disciples "included cultured men such as fellows of Oxford and Cambridge colleges, members of Parliament and clergy of the Church of England." But then, so did Billy's, and even now the BBC regularly gives us broadcasts which in essence are quite as silly as anything of Joanna's. She still has disciples all over the world, and a Black Box, which contains the Divine Solution to all the world's troubles. Instead of giving birth to a Messiah, Joanna died of dropsy, but, thank God, her cult still survives. It is Christianity at its holiest.

★

Up to very recently Spirit Doctors only performed their miracles through reading healers like Mr. H. Edwards. This will soon be changed, and an astounded public will

no doubt be able to watch the Doctor Spirits themselves doing their wonderful healing. For example, they came to a couple living in Devon recently — on November 8th to be precise — and began to operate "on both husband and wife." The lady saw them working on her husband's back, and after a few treatments both invalids were completely restored to health. So clear were the Spirit Doctors, that the husband made a pencil drawing of one of them at work and sent it to *Psychic News*. And what better proof can one have of spooks than that?

★

This puts us in mind of an old illustrated Family Bible we once saw in which was a beautiful drawing of the Devil, with horns and tail complete, tempting Jesus. How can anyone deny the reality of both "our Lord" and his Wicked Adversary in the fact of such proof shown in Holy Writ? Even *Psychic News* cannot answer that one!

RELIGIOUS NEUROSIS

(Concluded from page 391)

scious compliment in linking its name with theirs!) then words have no meaning. "The essence of religion does not deny knowledge and civilisation and doing good. It only denies their primacy. The attitude of Leigh Hunt's 'About Ben Adhem,' who admits he does not love God but tells the angel 'Set me down as one that loves his fellow men' is loathsome to it as sentimental sophistry." Through this last quotation Mr. Wilson reveals the religious approach in its true colours. Ethics, "doing good," is relegated to a position of secondary importance. Thus, elsewhere he writes: "Raskolnikov (in *Crime and Punishment*) does not fail because the solution is morally wrong. He fails because he is not strong enough to cease to be an Outsider." Raskolnikov's "solution," it will be remembered, is the brutal murder of an old woman. Again, Mr. Wilson quotes with approval the dialogue between Kirilov and Stavrogin in *The Devils*: "Everything's good." "What about the man who insults and rapes a little girl? Is that good, too?" "Yes, it is."

The Outsider's philosophy is thus clearly and frankly set out as one of religion without morals, and this, as we have seen, is borne out by the personal lives of many of Mr. Wilson's heroes (Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard being perhaps the most glaring examples). Mr. Wilson is said to be now engaged in writing a novel about Jack the Ripper, whom he regards as the perfect "outsider." This would certainly seem to be a logical development of his conclusions in the present work, but dare we suggest that the world might be a happier and healthier place with fewer Jack the Rippers, Raskolnikovs and so on, and more lovers of straightforward humanist values such as simple kindness and tolerance? "The new anti-humanist epoch," writes Mr. Wilson in a final rhetorical flourish, "will be the consequence of the rigorous questioning of such men as Blake, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Shaw. . . Humanism is only another name for spiritual laziness or a vague half-creed adopted by men of science and logicians whose heads are too occupied with the world of mathematics or physics to bother about religious categories." Let us hope profoundly that "the new anti-humanist epoch" will be strangled at birth, for there can be few more dangerous and pernicious influences than the immoral religious Outsider whom Mr. Colin Wilson holds up for our admiration.

—NEXT WEEK—

HUMANISM: A REVIEW
FREETHINKERS FRIGHEN GHOST

THE FREETHINKER

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THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 10s. (in U.S.A., \$4.25); half-year, 15s.; three months, 7s. 6d. Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

- P. T. LICKIE.—James is not actually referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" but only as his brother. Would kinship alone establish that James held the apparently unique distinction?
- E. WELSH.—Our Pamphlets for the People are excellent for the sort of casual propaganda you have in mind.
- E. WHITTAKER.—Thanks for your support and interesting comments on the many topics. They indicate the lines taken by THE FREETHINKER over many years.
- A. FRANKEL.—Mr. Lidaks, who is a widely travelled seaman (and a Latvian by birth) assures us that the experiences he recorded in a recent letter were quite factual.
- E. WILLIS.—An assessment of the valuable work of Cohen and of McCabe will be made in some forthcoming articles by Mr. Cutner.
- GORDON F. MCKNIGHT.—Only occasionally can we have room for long articles "re-examining the theoretical basis of atheism." In any case, all your points are covered in Chapman Cohen's *Theism or Atheism*.
- A. MALKIN.—There is no N.S.S. branch in the Potteries but great need for one now that the Sunday games question is to the fore at Stoke.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

- Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening. Various speakers.
- 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.
- 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, December 9th, 6.45 p.m.: J. L. SHEPHERD, "What Freethought means to me."
- Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, December 9th, 7.15 p.m.: BONAR THOMPSON, "Some Secular Poets."
- Conway Discussions (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, December 11th, 7.15 p.m.: A. D. HOWELL SMITH, B.A., "Did Jesus Ever Live?"
- Head Office N.S.S. (41 Gray's Inn Road, W.C.1).—Friday, December 7th, 7.15 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "Comparative Religion" (fifth of six Study Classes). Subject this week: "Fraud and Religion."
- Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, December 9th, 6.30 p.m.: Councillor W. J. MARSTON, "Current Affairs."
- London I.L.P. (Holborn Hall).—Tuesday, December 11th, 7.45 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, "European Crisis."
- Newark (Notts.) House of the Sacred Mission, Kelham.—Saturday, December 8th, 7 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "Why I am an Atheist."
- Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, December 9th, 2.30 p.m.: B. BANKS, "Politics: A Young Man's Dilemma."
- South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, December 9th, 11 a.m.: W. E. SWINTON, P.H.D., "The Mayan Civilisation and Our Own."

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £130 6s. 2d.; C. E. Ratcliffe, £1; A. Allman, 7s. 6d.; S. C. Merrifield, 3s.; Mrs. N. C. Capps, 3s.; F. J. Gentry, 5s.; Miss E. Lloyd, £1; A. Hancock, 1s.—Total to date, November 30th, 1956, £133 5s. 8d.

Notes and News

MRS. MARGARET KNIGHT continued her series of public debates when, on November 12th, she took part in a debate organised by the Students' Union at Keele University College. She moved "That this house prefers morals without religion and considers Christianity to be an outworn myth. Opposed by the Rev. R. Davies, a Bristol Methodist minister, the motion was lost by 120 votes to 55. Such a count, taken *after* the debate, does not show any swing of opinion which might have been effected, and probably merely reflects roughly what a vote taken *before* the debate would have shown. Press reports show that Mrs. Knight conducted the debate with her usual skill, while her opponent put his faith into those hoary arguments from Design and Free Will as though they had never been demolished and subsequently abandoned by many Christian scholars. Such debates, however, are excellent propaganda for the freethought case. Mrs. Knight has earned our admiration time and time again for her untiring efforts for freethought and scientific humanism.

STOKE-ON-TRENT, whose local newspaper gave a very fair report of Mrs. Knight's debate, is now obviously moving towards Sunday games in its parks, according to reports and comments. "There has undoubtedly been a shift of opinion in favour of the principle of Sunday games," says the editorial article of the *Evening Sentinel* (November 15th), but "there will undoubtedly be opposition from some of the Churches." Very true! In fact, it has already started, and a Burslem Methodist minister has complained that Sunday games are contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Well, so much the worse for that "teaching."

MRS. KNIGHT also took the leading part in a heavily featured discussion recently in the *Woman's Sunday Mirror*, under the title "Mummy, who made God?" Here her opponent was the editor of the *Modernist C. of E. Newspaper*, and he took the line that "Even myths can teach a lesson." In her brief but busy life as a freethought propagandist, which began less than two years ago with a hectic propulsion into world headlines, Mrs. Knight has met various types of Christian antagonist and is therefore in a position to play off one against the other. In the present case (the *Modernist* Rev. C. Rhodes) we have Christian teachings and doctrines defended, not because they are all true, but because they are useful. The same could be said—with more justification—of Aesop's Fables.

THE Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society, jointly with the Manchester Humanist Fellowship, is to hold a meeting on Sunday, March 10th, 1957, at 7 p.m. in the Lesser Free Trade Hall, Peter Street, Manchester. The speaker is to be Prof. Allegro, M.A., of the University of Manchester. Last September Prof. Allegro was in an ITV programme discussing the translations of the Dead Sea Scrolls with a Roman Catholic priest and an Anglican minister. Press comments stated that the Scrolls had undermined the authority of the New Testament and challenged the divinity of Christ. Prof. Allegro will lecture on the translations and show slides of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Reserved seats at 1s. each will be bookable through the Manchester Branch Secretary.

A Matrimonial Pitfall

By LEON SPAIN (U.S.A.)

THE OBSTACLES to a happy and durable marriage are numerous and complex, and many times the seeds of marital discord are sown in causes beyond the control of the partners to the marriage vow. To steer the matrimonial barque along the precarious waters of economic difficulties, differences of individual temperaments and inclinations, and sexual incompatibilities, etc., has indeed proved more than a challenge to partners committed to their original marital vows. The course of marital bliss is impeded by many natural obstacles which become more pronounced with the passing years, and in many instances culminate in divorces or separations. However, it is the unnatural or artificially imposed barriers to a happy marriage, such as the religious sanctions to interfaith marriages, which have proved more than a thorn in the side to the most intimate of human relationships.

An article exposing the effects of religious sanctions upon "mixed," or interfaith, marriages appeared in the October issue of *Redbook*, a fashionable American ladies' magazine, entitled "How Successful Are Interfaith Marriages?" by Norman Lobsenz. The author minces no words in pointing out the stumbling-blocks and discouragements facing the best-intentioned partners to an interfaith marriage. From the outset he reveals the blighting effects upon a marriage when one or both partners are deeply attached to some religious belief. And he shows, by statistics, interviews with social workers, ministers, priests, and rabbis, the intense pressure brought to bear upon such couples with reference to how their children must be reared. This factor would never face couples to whom ecclesiastical technicalities are meaningless and trifling, and who know that social and family life are sustained by observing ordinary human decencies.

Mr. Lobsenz observes that one out of every five marriages is made between persons of different religions, meaning that there are more than 300,000 interfaith marriages each year in the U.S.A. He also shows that every church is taking a decisive step against interfaith marriages, and, where discouragement fails, classes in conversion are held for those contemplating such a marriage. The stresses and strains to which such marriages are subject are dealt with in great detail. Some quotations and facts taken from the article should be of more than passing interest. "Virtually every church — certainly every major denomination — takes a firm stand against mixed marriage. Catholics and Jews forbid it as part of their articles of faith. Other denominations discourage it on grounds that it is a too severe barrier to family happiness." He cites the fact that the large number of "mixed" marriages involving a Catholic is due principally to the device known as the "ante-nuptial agreement." If the non-Catholic partner to the agreement signs the "ante-nuptial" pact he or she will more likely than not secure a dispensation permitting the marriage to be performed; also, that he or she will not interfere with the religious practices of the Catholic partner-in-marriage, and that their children will be baptised and educated in the Catholic faith, and other accompanying concessions to the Catholic Church in family matters. Further, Mr. Lobsenz states: "Even liberal Reformed Judaism reaffirmed a resolution of the Central Conference of American Rabbis that interfaith marriage be discouraged. 'Not because we believe it means living in sin,' says Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, president of the American Hebrew Congregations, 'but because we feel a

lack of religious unity lowers the chances of marital success.'"

One may pertinently comment that if religious instruction is such an indispensable element in the upbringing of children and guidance in daily living, why does it in practice turn out to be a divisive barrier, fostering exclusiveness and social aloofness, and permitting at most, only relationships short of marriage?

Mr. Lobsenz states that many interfaith marriages would have worked out successfully if left to fend for themselves. However, the intense pressure from friends, family, and clergy create difficulties for such marriages. Another source of contention is the outward forms of the religion in question, such as rituals, ceremonials, and other formalities attending the practice of a religious belief. For instance, the author suggests that a Jewish-Gentile marriage will function more smoothly without a kosher house and the dietary observances it entails, necessitating extra work in the kitchen, and says that the Protestant position is strongly in opposition to the signing of the "ante-nuptial pledge," for it virtually labels their own belief as a heresy and imposes all the concessions upon them in yielding themselves and their children to a religion in which they do not believe. That clerical pressure can be a serious obstacle to an interfaith marriage almost goes without saying, and citing an instance of such a nature, Mr. Lobsenz points out that "one Catholic bishop recently threatened excommunication even for those who gave wedding presents to the wedding couple or attended the parties." The Protestant National Council of Churches has published two booklets with such titles as "If I Marry a Roman Catholic" and "Marriage with Two Strikes Against It," in their determined opposition to interfaith marriage, specifically with Catholics. These are only a few of the cases which he cites in the energetic efforts of the "big three" to discourage interfaith marriage, supposedly on grounds that such marriages are impracticable and bear the seeds of a future divorce or separation.

Mr. Lobsenz comments that in most instances, legally and by tradition, children tend to follow the religion of the mother, and that this is a compelling reason why Catholic clergymen are sceptical about an interfaith marriage in which the father is Catholic and the mother is Protestant. A further observation is that "Clergymen point out that a child's basic religious outlook is shaped long before the child is old enough to make his own choice."

Many interfaith couples, indifferently disposed to religious indoctrination in the upbringing of children, do not feel that religious training is so all-important, but living in a modern social environment they feel their youngsters will suffer if they do not bear a sectarian identification. This shows, at least to a considerable extent, that a nominal profession of some religious affiliation or respectable sectarian label is one of the avenues to social respectability. This in turn has caused the growth in popularity and numbers of such "compromise groups" as the Unitarian Church, Community Church, and Ethical Societies.

Despite overwhelming proof to the contrary, Mr. Lobsenz states that social workers and religious educators maintain that homes without religious attachments, and without religious instruction for children, live in "spiritual vacuums," and that religion, even in its most attenuated form, is indispensable to a happy marriage. The facts do

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Some Candid Admissions

By H. CUTNER

A BOOK I recently borrowed from our Free Library would, I am sure, shock our Christian Fundamentalists far more than even THE FREETHINKER. Its title is *Pictorial History of the Jewish People*, from Bible times to our own day, and it is mostly as unorthodox as Paine's *Age of Reason*.

It was Robert Taylor more than 120 years ago who pointed out that there was no such thing as a Jewish race, but he probably influenced even fewer people by that than he did when he declared that Jesus was a myth.

But Mr. Nathan Ausubel, the author of this extremely interesting work, is forced to admit that about the only thing which keeps believers in Judaism together is their Talmudic ritual. "To speak precisely," he declares, "in the language of the anthropologists, there is no such thing as a 'Jewish race.' The idea of a 'Semitic race' is also a fiction. Furthermore, they contend, there is no 'Aryan race' either. The words 'Semitic' and 'Aryan' were originally used by philologists to describe certain language groups, and not races at all."

The truth is that we simply do not know who "invaded" Canaan and became known later as "Israel" and "Judah." There may well have been no invasion at all, but the entry of a few nomad tribes who intermingled with the original inhabitants, and later absorbed their customs and ideas. The story of a continuous race springing from somebody called Abraham is pure moonshine. The modern Jews are an aggregate of many peoples differing widely in colour and culture, and it can be said with certainty that the modern white Jew of Europe is not descended from the Arab type which must have inhabited Canaan in what we call Biblical times.

If "Gentile" peoples insist that the Jews are a race apart, the "Chosen People" in fact, it is because they wish to perpetuate the authority of the Bible, part of which is put forward as the true history of "God's people." If there are no Chosen People, if their story as related in the Old Testament is not true — then the Bible, in spite of Science, is of no authority whatever. The Christian religion, in fact, gets into a sorry mess without the Jews.

Mr. Ausubel does not try to disprove the "Creation" story except by calling it "traditional Jewish belief." Nor does he attempt to discuss the problem of "God" — who is also "traditional." "All people have their creation-myths," he tells us, and therefore the Bible merely follows the pattern — though the Jewish creation-myth has striking similarities with those of other nations of antiquity. And he points out that as far back as the first century, Philo was insisting that the Bible story of Creation was merely an allegory, and must not be taken literally. Many modern Christians in the year 1956 not only do take the first and second chapters of Genesis literally, but take the whole of the Bible literally. It seems incredible.

Mr. Ausubel is candid enough to admit that "there are historians who have expressed serious doubt that the Hebrew patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — ever really lived. They consider them folk-myths . . . outside the Scriptures no mention of them is to be found in any ancient records. For them this fact is conclusive evidence that the Patriarchs never existed." And the same goes for Joseph — "It is indeed surprising that in the well-documented history of ancient Egypt there should not have been found a single reference to such an august personage as Joseph, the vizier to a Pharaoh."

It cannot be too strongly urged that this does not mean — from the Freethought point of view — that the Old

Testament writers *invented* all these stories. All or nearly all our Bible stories are based on records of some kind which were used to give substance to the completely mythical history of the Israelites or Jews. If Egypt and Babylon and Assyria had a great warlike history, why should not the Jews have a great warlike history? And it was so well written up from all kinds of available records (which had no more to do with the Jews than with the flowers that bloom in the spring) that the world ever since has actually believed it to be true — except for a handful of Freethinkers.

The story of Joseph was taken from two sources, one of them being an Egyptian "novel" called the *Two Brothers*, and from the story of an Egyptian king called Idrimi, who left an inscription discovered by Sir L. Woolley detailing his own life. Just as the Pentateuch writers cribbed the Babylonian story of a Flood from Noah from Babylon, so they worked up Idrimi's story into that of Joseph. And Mr. Ausubel has to admit that it proves nothing "conclusive" about the *historicity* of Joseph.

He goes even further. "Neither Abraham," he declares, "nor, for that matter, his immediate descendants, really believed in One Supreme Being." This is "an undisputed conclusion of our historians of religion. The faith of the first Jews was one of monolatry, which means the worship of a chief or favourite deity." And he points out that while the chief deity of the Patriarchs was "the Lord," it did not prevent them paying homage to "other and less esteemed" gods. The word "Jehovah" came into use by Christians only "after 1518, when Peter Galatin, Pope Leo X's confessor, introduced it." All this is most intriguing, coming from a Jewish writer.

The worship of "one God" came only after Ezra and the Scribes "compiled and edited the Bible during the fifth century B.C."

Mr. Ausubel poses the question — "Who exactly were the Hebrews?" No "documentary proof," he tells us, "has thus far been presented of the Israelite settlement in Egypt. History has shed no light whatsoever on the life and personality of Moses, not even a hint that he ever really existed. In fact, in no writing extant today is there even a mention of the Exodus." But, "perhaps in time the proof will appear."

All these startling admissions from a Jewish writer are, of course, commonplaces in Freethought literature, for some have been made from the time of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* at the end of the 18th century, and have been always angrily denied not only by the learned men in Jewry but by all Christendom. The Bible is God's Precious Word, wholly inspired by him, and could contain no error. And here we have a Jewish historian admitting most of our contentions, and hoping one day "the proof will appear" that the Bible is true.

There is not the slightest historical evidence that there ever was a Joshua, and no doubt it would not be too difficult to find the sources of his remarkable victories over the "Philistines" and other enemies of the Israelites. But here again we get the admission that "no one can fix a definite date for the rule of the five Judges of Israel." Still, though so much is obviously legendary, and Mr. Ausubel is forced to admit it, he cannot — no one could expect him to — give up Saul, David, and Solomon, or the great Temple. He produces no evidence whatever that they really existed, being content to follow the Bible, though he admits that of the Temple *nothing* exists except the site.

If the early history of the "Jewish race" is either completely legendary, or we know nothing about it, what becomes of the Precious Word in relation to Christianity? The whole of the foundations of that much advertised and controversial religion vanish. It has been said over and over again that if there was no Garden of Eden, no Hebrew-talking serpent, and no Adam and Eve, there could be no Fall of Man; and therefore no necessity for a Saviour. No wonder Christians are almost desperate in boosting up the Bible at all costs—even dragging in "Science" to prove it "was" right.

Mr. Ausubel's book is of absorbing interest as an historical work—but not in proof of the Bible or the Jews as God's Chosen People. It proves just the opposite.

A MATRIMONIAL PITFALL

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not sustain such an assumption and entirely refute such a position. Human marriage and its usual resultants, the bearing and rearing of children, will function more harmoniously without the impairing effects of contention begotten by differences of religious attachments and preconceptions.

From Bulgaria—2

[Continuing his correspondence with Radiodiffusion Bulgare, Mr. D. Shipper asked for information of any specifically freethought activity in Bulgaria. The following is extracted from the reply he received.]

YOU WRITE that as an atheist it is of interest to you to learn that there is no need of any anti-religious organisations in Bulgaria. Well, I must reaffirm my stand that the existence of special anti-religious organisations in Bulgaria is not justified. This is so since the overwhelming majority of the Bulgarians are atheists and religious prejudices are not an obstacle to the construction of a socialist society and the formation of a socialist point of view.

You ask would an anti-religious organisation in this country be allowed? Certainly, it would. There is freedom of organisations in this country and as I wrote to you, such an organisation would have been set up if a need had been for it.

Your next question is whether there are any people in this country who are carrying out an anti-religious propaganda? You know that there is a strong Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in Bulgaria which heads the Government. Marxism-Leninism is incompatible with religion and religious prejudices. Therefore the party itself is fighting religious bigotry in so far as it exists. The same holds good for our youth organisation, which embraces over one million people. But I have to stress once more that no special anti-religious campaign is carried out, as it seems unnecessary. There are few believers in this country, and to most of them faith is a tradition inherited rather than any fanaticism.

And now for your last question, whether there are any anti-religious books and pamphlets written by Bulgarian authors? There are a number of articles against religion but I could not find any special books by Bulgarian authors. There are a lot of them by foreign writers translated into Bulgarian.

I would like to tell you once again that religion in Bulgaria enjoys full freedom and is not persecuted by anyone. Regular services are held in all churches and believers attend them undisturbed. There are special bookshops of the Synod in Sofia and other towns of the country with all kinds of religious literature on sale.

A Christian View of Schweitzer

AN ARTICLE called *Dr. Schweitzer's "Christianity"* appears in the magazine of the Free Church of Scotland.

It states that visitors to Dr. Schweitzer's hospital at Lambarene (French Equatorial Africa) describe the sanitary conditions as "atrocious, owing to the doctor's religious aversion to the killing of life, even of germ-laden insects. . . . Nothing is killed in the hospital area. Insects, animals which deposit their filth everywhere, including the operating room, and animals with serious infections that mingle with the all-white staff and the patients. . . ."

"Dr. Schweitzer is justifiably regarded as more a Hindu-Buddhist than a Christian."

"Unpleasant as these facts are, they bear out the contention that a man who abandons the New Testament conception of Christianity eventually abandons every recognisable tenet of Christian faith and every vestige of Christian practice."

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1. Mustapha Kemal Pasha Ataturk (1923). 2. Dr. Wm. Temple (1942), Dr. Cosmo Lang (1928). 3. He was supposed to be thus safe from the Devil on the Day of Reckoning. 4. (a) Mary Ann Evans, (b) Samuel Clemens, (c) Dr. Mavor, (d) Broz. (5) Anti-religious propagandists of ancient India. 6. Dimitrov. 7. "That will depend upon whether I embrace your lordship's principles or your lordship's mistresses." G.H.T.

CORRESPONDENCE

ONE VOICE?

I notice that your reports from Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria seem to speak with one voice. The voice of Moscow? J. Doss.

BULWARK AGAINST CATHOLICISM?

You in Britain had better keep your Monarchy. Norway, Sweden and Denmark also have monarchs and are free countries likewise. It is the Republics of Western Europe that are priest-ridden. And their cultured families are helpless.

My own country, U.S.A., was only free because all the founding fathers were either cultured deists or outright atheists. And now in 1956 the Irish Catholic hierarchy here has almost destroyed freedom of the press and of speech. HOWARD EHALT (New Albany).

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