

# The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVII — No. 2

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

MR. ALISTAIR COOKE, reviewing the events of 1956 from the standpoint of his Letter from America in the Home Service on December 30th, was allowed to make a report which was so serious a body blow to Christian doctrine that one can only suppose that the religious bigots of the BBC were caught unawares. The view that they deliberately let it go through would, we are afraid, be too charitable. It would certainly be too flattering to them in the light of their recent record.

The most significant event of 1956, on the long view, said Mr. Cooke, would turn out to be the declaration by a gathering of America's foremost biologists that *living creatures had developed from non-living matter*.

## Life from Non-Life

This meant, said Mr. Cooke, pushing matters to their logical conclusion, that the origin of life was "no more supernatural than the origin of mountains," and might well be of such natural causation as the interplay of sunlight on water in a rock.

Compared with this pronouncement, Mr. Cooke observed, Darwin's *Origin of Species* was a mere religious text book! What, then, in the face of this newly publicised disaster, would be the attitude of the Churches? It might well be, he remarked, "Man the barricades!"

## Truth Catches Up

Now this official declaration of biologists may certainly be a striking event of such eminence as to be selected by Mr. Cooke as the event of the year with the longest range of influence. But so far as the freethought movement is concerned what is even *more* striking is that the report should be voiced over the air. For the "news" that life has evolved from the interaction of material forces is not new to us. It is not new to science, and has been the sober prediction of biochemists and organic chemists for many decades. The expectation that life would be proved to have come from matter without supernatural help was commonly held in freethought and scientific circles over fifty years ago, and was taken up by FREETHINKER contributors of the time, such as A. B. Moss and Walter Mann. Outside the actual sphere of science itself, however, THE FREETHINKER was probably a lone voice and largely unheard.

Julian Huxley many years ago echoed the general belief of experts that "there is every reason to suppose, and no reason to doubt, that life, which we know to be composed of the same material elements, and to work by the same energy as non-living matter, actually arose from it." (*Essays*.) The chief religious scientist of the time was Sir Oliver Lodge, and even he had to admit that for science "the evolution of live creatures from inorganic material must be accepted as inevitable." (*Beyond Physics*.) According to Prof. R. Beutner, "Life, in spite of its com-

plexity, seems to be no more than one of the innumerable properties of carbon." (*The Physical Chemistry of Living Tissues and Life Processes*.) For Beutner's school of biological thought, life begins with the formation of enzymes, but whatever its actual mode of origin its evolution from inanimate matter is fatal to religious teaching.

## VIEWS and OPINIONS

# Truth Will Out

By G. H. TAYLOR

into the sort of processes characteristic of the inorganic world.

"The great majority of biologists," we read in that great authoritative work *The Science of Life* (Wells and Huxley), are agreed that "all the life upon the earth had its origin from the matter of the earth at a definite time in the earth's history."

## Life in the Laboratory

Confronted with the materialistic evolution of life, the usual Christian reply is to demand that scientists make life forthwith in their test tubes. Failing this, the triumphant conclusion must be that "only God can do it."

The Christian "logic" here is quite infantile. It proceeds as follows:

- (a) Life must be made either by God or by scientists.
- (b) Scientists have not made it.
- (c) Therefore it can only be done by God.

The first premise is false, the second without foundation, and the conclusion thus hopeless.

The question is not, Can *scientists* make life? but, Can *nature* make it? If nature can, and has done, then the religious case is nothing more than the assertion that scientists have so far been unsuccessful in their efforts to imitate nature in this direction.

In any case, chemists have for many years been producing phenomena regarded as characteristic of life. The influence of light on the green cells of some plants in converting inorganic matter into more complex varieties has long been known.

## No Room for "God"

Various theories have been considered by biologists to explain how life first became possible in matter. None of these theories calls on God for help. In the words of one biochemist, "When matter has reached a certain complexity in structure and become tenanted by certain types of energy life must come, and having come must evolve into higher and higher forms." (Prof. B. Moore: *The Origin and Nature of Life*.) Any "single, unrelated act of creation," he concludes, is quite unthinkable.

Thus "God," his occupation gone, sinks more and more into futility. Even the creation of life, once his main stock-

in-trade, is removed to the realm of materialistic science.

### "Man the Barricades"

We do not for one moment assume that the declaration of the biologists will stop Christian propaganda about the "death" of materialism, even though it proves exactly the opposite. We have no doubt that Christian apologists will retreat gracefully and then declare that no conflict exists between their creed and science. Unable to demonstrate the existence of God on the empirical plane, all sorts of metaphysical reasons will be advanced to retain "God" as a sort of back-room boy behind the whole business of evolution. It has all been tried before, and the net result, as Chapman Cohen used to say, is that no new reasons are put forward for retaining the belief in God, but merely some excuses for not giving it up.

## The Victorious Pig

By R. READER

JOURNALISM DOES IT AGAIN — this time by reporting the British Association discussion on overpopulation. The opening is strong and lusty. Without a vestige of evidence or reasoning, Malthus is dismissed in the first two lines by the statement that "the truth is more cheerful" and "families of low fertility but otherwise good qualities are more likely to survive." Also "Man's fertility may be lowered by natural selection."

We note, in passing, the subtle implication of the clause "otherwise good qualities," which suggests that low fertility is a bad thing, but we cannot deny the incontestable truth of the main statement. The less active and spry among us are being eliminated on the roads. Those with weak lungs are despatched by smog. Artificial foods weed out weak stomachs. Everything — whether the irritation and fretting in office, factory, or crawling bus — is dead against the inferior nervous system. Or the "selective process" may work through slow attrition, as in the case of the family, earlier this year, which, unable to pay rent, and turned off the landing on which it had been sleeping for weeks, committed suicide.

Clearly, a selective process is here at work. But are we sure that it is preserving the best types? May it not be eliminating the simple folk ("honest" used to be the word) and protecting those endowed with the cunning of sewer rats? And, above all, how comes it that such a selective process is tolerated in a Christian society? Surely, such things should not be possible while one Christian remains alive!

However, this selective process, according to the report, is not the only cheerful refutation of Malthus. Certain animals are living proofs that Malthus was wrong. "The woman who has had 10 or 15 children is considered highly fertile. But the domestic pig produces as many every year."

Well, to be sure! "Pig," we think, should have been "sow," but honest British parents must have been utterly charmed, both by the gallantry of the substitution and the delicacy of the comparison.

Nor is this all. "Civilisation; the qualities necessary for success; and a high standard of living—all might be potent factors in reducing man's fertility." "We should not interfere with nature." Whereupon someone made the tactless remark that Ireland's population, a century after the potato famine, was still only half what it was in 1840. Stung to madness by this, a Protestant Irish bachelor rose to say that "Ireland's greatest period was when boys and girls of

17 got married, and went right ahead with six, seven, eight, nine and ten children. Given atomic energy, Ireland would astonish the world again."

On this note of genial delirium, the report ends, and we are left to pick up the pieces as best we can. What are we to make of this disconnected hotch-potch of the sayings and doings of a world-famous learned society? Did the British Association really spend its time discussing such inanities? Was the journalist who reported the meeting hopelessly incompetent, and a *guffeur* into the bargain? Of course not. No collection of learned men, fatuous though it may be at times, descends to this level. And no newspaper employs incompetent journalists. The fact is that the reporter was working under orders — and he carried them out with considerable ability.

Whatever else was said and done at the Association meeting, only the non-Malthusian aspect of overpopulation must be allowed to appear in the newspaper. At the same time, facts could not be falsified, or invented. Only actual sayings could be reported. And the importance of the Association is such that it could not be entirely ignored. Only one thing was possible — a careful sifting and selection of all that was said and done. And the moment this is realised, everything falls into place. The double restriction had cramped the reporter's style: he had to make the best of the material that presented itself. Hence the curious disconnectedness, the impression that the meeting was that of an assembly of rather low-grade minds. Also, the blatant dismissal of Malthus and unsupported contentions of the opening become immediately understandable; something was urgently needed to bind the whole thing together — to give it some appearance of coherence.

The reporter who turned out this work was clever, and employed by clever people. But not to have done so would have been cleverer still. For that report is a complete answer to those many people who, although they are sympathetic to the Malthusian cause, feel that control of population is impractical and impossible. They will say "Yes, I agree with the principles, but you cannot control such an intimate thing as the sexual lives of individuals."

No? But surely, in this report we have a concrete example of the sexual lives of individuals being controlled — and pushed in the *wrong* direction. It is proof of the practicability of control.

There may be others who, while admitting the possibility of control, would vigorously oppose it as being an unwarrantable interference in what has always hitherto been regarded as the inalienable rights of the individual. They should reflect. A Bill of Human Rights exists, upon which all men agree. Yet scarcely a day passes but these rights are outraged and flouted. Why? Because that Bill of Rights is mute upon one subject; it tacitly admits the right of every individual to procreate. And until this fundamental is revised — and the "right" becomes the *right to earn the right*, not in pounds, shillings and pence, but according to the inflexible considerations of heredity, desirability, and the resources of the earth, then it is quite hopeless for us to protest at the millions of *other* irksome controls that make so much of contemporary unhappiness. The existing controls are only the natural outcome of humanity's failure to control that one fundamental: its own procreation.

—NEXT WEEK—

**CONTROVERSY: HUNGARY**  
PAUL VARNEY and COLIN McCALL

# The Religion of Ancient Mexico

By F. A. RIDLEY

RECENTLY the Third Programme broadcast a most interesting talk on ancient Mexican poetry. Most of us probably recall only vaguely the bloodstained saga of the conquest of Mexico by Cortez as narrated in that masterpiece, *The Conquest of Mexico* by W. H. Prescott. If we recall the Aztecs at all it is probably in connection with the sanguinary rites of human sacrifice characteristic of their ubiquitous religious activities. The poems translated for the Third Programme had a strongly religious character and one stamped by that deep pessimism which arose from Aztec theology itself.

It is only in recent years that the Spanish conquest of Mexico, along with the other Americas, has been put into an accurate historical focus. The early Spanish historians of the epoch-making event naturally glorified the epic of the conquest, much as do other imperialist authors for their own flag and conquests. The Spanish conquest of the Americas brought out, indeed, epic qualities of courage, endurance and intrepidity in face of overwhelming numerical odds. None the less, all conquest is brutal and all empires repose ultimately on barbaric violence, however much they may later seek to disguise the fact. The Spanish "heroes" of the conquest were no more saint-like than were their English anti-types in India — such men as Clive and Warren Hastings. But if no better, they were no worse than, say, the famous hero of the *Revenge*, Sir Richard Grenville, who fed his bloodhounds with captured North American Indians. The Liberal historians of more recent times, justifiably incensed by the horrors of the Inquisition, tended to substitute one fiction for another, and to represent the Spanish conquerors as the world's worst monsters of cruelty and their "Indian victims" as "noble savages," mild and inoffensive exponents of aboriginal innocence.

Such is, of course, as wide of the mark as its imperialist predecessor! The two leading "empires" which the Spaniards discovered and conquered in, respectively, South and Central America, the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico, were themselves recent arrivals in their respective areas and were themselves imperialist regimes, owing their dominant position to the ruthless use of force. Moreover, both the Aztec warlords of Mexico and the "children of the sun," the Incas of Peru, were, equally with their Spanish conquerors, in their own estimation religious crusaders spreading the cult of their gods by military force. The differences between the strategic outlook of, say, the Aztec "emperor" Montezuma and that of his Spanish conquerors lay in the *technical* field. The bronze weapons and terrifying make-up of the Indian warriors could not compete with the firearms, iron weapons and horses of their European antagonists.

The Aztecs, like the Incas, though with, in some respects, a radically different technique, were a theocracy. Their whole conception of life centred round the "sacred war," fought daily and nightly by the Sun and his fellow deities for their own survival and for that of their human worshippers. To nourish them in their unceasing struggle for celestial survival against the dark forces of night and annihilation, the gods, like humbler species, required an ever-renewed supply of human blood. Only when so fed — so believed the great Aztec theologians — could the gods fight on, only thus could their own life and the derivative life of mankind continue. Reasoning from these premises with the iron logic of deduction in which both they and their Catholic conquerors excelled, the Mexican metaphysicians constructed *human* society according to the inexor-

able requirements of the Divine plan; the sacred war in the heavens was reproduced here on earth, and the Aztec warriors waged perpetual war with their neighbours not, at least primarily, for land or booty, but for the never-ceasing streams of human sacrificial victims, whose freshly shed blood and whose throbbing torn-out hearts could nourish the gods in their Divine war and thus alone preserve their human followers. One could say the Aztec pattern of life and of civilisation represented a vicious and bloody circle, or more generally a metaphysical madhouse. If one realises what in fact this social pattern was, it can hardly be disputed that despite their own fanaticism and cupidity the victory of the Spaniards was actually that of the *superior race* — and not only technically superior!

In the Aztec "Calendar Stone," itself a work of great religious art, the above metaphysical pattern of the Aztec universe is graven indelibly in stone; apparently the Aztec religion even included a perverted form of evolutionary theory. (Though newcomers to Mexico, the Aztecs inherited an older civilisation very advanced in its way. The eminent Italian historian of astronomy, Prof. Abetti, has stated that the Maya predecessors of the Aztecs had a more accurate knowledge of astronomy than had any people in the old or new worlds before the discovery of the telescope.) But its cult of war and of unceasing human sacrifice (in 1488 twenty thousand victims are computed to have died at a single ceremony at the opening of the temple of the war god in Mexico City) imparted a tone of sombre pessimism to Aztec life and literature. Most of the poems in the BBC broadcast are laments on the brevity of human life and on the inevitability of death and dissolution. The announcer compared their tone with that of ancient Buddhist sages, to whom life was transitory, and Nirvana, self-annihilation, the overshadowing end of all. This note of pessimism is present in an otherwise stirring essay on a famous Aztec warrior, brother of the emperor Montezuma, who had sped to "the land of the fleshless." Apparently among the initiates in Indian Mexico, as in parallel cases in India and ancient Egypt, a cult of esoteric monotheism existed. Among the poems was a disquisition by a famous personality in the pre-Columbian America, King Nezahualcoyotle (died 1472), whom Prescott has described as the greatest man ever produced by the Amerindian race and whom the BBC announcer compared with the poet King of Egypt Akhnaton, "the first monotheist in human annals." In the religion of ancient Mexico a mystical and symbolic strain appears to have existed with the bloodthirsty rites practised by the Aztec state and people. This may perhaps be ascribed to the older and more humane cults of the Mayas and Toltecs, and the later Aztecs, perhaps barbarised the cults which they found on their arrival in Mexico about two centuries before the Spanish conquest. The Aztecs have been termed the "Prussians of the New World." Like their European antitypes they probably debased the existing standards of culture in the lands where they settled.

The most interesting of the gods of old Mexico was Quetzalcoatl, the plumed serpent, the god of learning, sometimes depicted as a white man. Fanciful theories have postulated an historical prototype for this god; an ancient Viking has even been suggested; while our modern "diffusionists" have even hailed him as an ancient Egyptian. Actually, excluding the question of his historicity, he appears to have been an ancient Maya, or Toltec god, the

(Concluded on next page)

## This Believing World

According to Mr. Alistair Cooke's famous BBC "Letter from America" recently, a staggering piece of news came out at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It was a declaration that "spontaneous generation," so long dismissed by all Christians — and also by a good many scientists — was not only possible, but was actually the cause of the beginning of life on earth. No supernatural intervention is needed to explain it. Sunlight and water playing on some magnetic rock were enough to produce it. Mr. Cooke foreshadowed a terrific controversy — but he claimed it as the greatest piece of news from the year 1956.

★

A gentleman called the Rev. G. May has written a booklet, *The Christmas Story*, in which he shows even more than the usual credulity and superstition which is dished out at this period to all the sheep. He believes everything — Angels, Devil, Miracles, the whole caboodle. He has a special reverence for Gabriel, the Heavenly Messenger — who obviously had no difficulty in making the Heavenly Journey to Earth, not as detailed in science and spaceship fiction, but by merely flapping his Heavenly Wings. And here and there is slipped in what can only be called a downright prevarication of the truth — as when Mr. May claims that the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary. It is nothing of the kind, as anyone can see reading it.

★

The fact is that Jesus had to be the "Messiah" who was, we are told, expected by the Jews and who therefore had to be descended from David. As, however, the writers of the Gospels forgot this, and made the father of Jesus God Almighty, either through the Holy Ghost or a Heavenly Messenger — it is by no means clear which — a genealogy was invented for him in Matthew which, alas, made Joseph *not* Jesus descended from David. So does the genealogy in Luke, and this has upset people like Mr. May, who calmly tells his sheep that it was Mary whose ancestor was David. There is nothing whatever in Luke which confirms this impudent assertion.

★

The city of Houston in Texas has two wonderful records — with a population of 700,000, it has 729 churches of all denominations, that is, about one church to every thousand citizens and it is known throughout the U.S.A. as "the murder capital of the nation." This means, of course, that in the most church-ridden town in the States, there are also more murders committed than in any other town. Will this mean anything to our pious Christians? Certainly not. They will still preach Christ and him crucified, and hope for the best. And, at least in Houston, a poorer best can hardly be imagined.

★

Christmas and Easter are not so much now an orgy of gluttony as one of words about them. The clergy and their followers let themselves go in one long riot of Jesus this and Christ that. As an example, we have the *Daily Mail* ushering in the Christmas story with the Babe of Bethlehem as being the Herald of tolerance, justice, mercy, and all the other secular qualities which it approves of. We have them all now because of "his death and Resurrection." In fact, when the Dark Ages came as a blight across Europe, "it was the Christian Church alone which kept alive the spark of civilisation."

★

We just love that word "alone." According to the *Daily Mail's* historical expert then, it was not Christianity which gave us the Dark Ages, as pretty nearly every other his-

torian would claim; it was Christianity "alone" which fought and conquered them, and ushered in an era of love, blessed tolerance, joy and happiness for everybody. The Crusades, the Massacres of the Albigenses, the Jews, and Waldenses, the Inquisition horrors, the devastating religious wars of the Middle Ages — these were not because of Christianity, the Blessed Babe of Bethlehem saw to that! Thus is history "wrote" for the masses.

## On Bulgaria

ALTHOUGH my Bulgarian correspondent asserts that "there are few believers in this country" and the "Law of the Churches" (17/2/1949) disestablished the National Church (Eastern Orthodox Church), it is nevertheless described officially as "the traditional church of the Bulgarian people," also, "in form, substance and spirit a People's Democratic Church." (*Statesman's Year-Book*, 1956.)

When the latest available census was taken in 1934 the National Orthodox Church had over five million members. An estimation in 1950 was six million Orthodox out of 7.2 million population. On 10/5/1953 the Bulgarian Patriarchate was re-established and Metropolitan Kiril became the first Bulgarian Patriarch since the end of the 14th century (1393). In 1955 the authorities disbanded the "Union of Clergy Brotherhood" which was a Communist-backed body of great influence among the Orthodox priests. In 1949 an official estimate counted 56,000 R.C.s; Armeno-Greeks, 23,000; Jews, 20,000; Protestants, 15,744; Bulgaro-Moslems (Pomaks), 123,000; Moslems (Turks), 638,000.

If we add the 1950 estimate of six million adherents of the Eastern Orthodox Church the figures might seem, on the surface, to contradict the assertion that "there are few believers in this country." D.S.

## The Church awakes at MIDDAY

HAVING DENOUNCED birth control in season and out of season, the Catholic Church has at last discovered that there is a population problem in the world. Here it is influenced by that substantial section of the Faithful whom God has not enlightened on this question but who find the obligation to pay family allowances very trying. The Catholic Institute of Social Study at Geneva is paying a prize of 5,000 dollars for the best solution to the current problems of overpopulation.

It is fantastic. One day we may have to assist at the rehabilitation by the Church of Rome of the infamous Malthus, who had been foolish enough to open up this problem before family allowances were thought of. Be that as it may, Catholics who voted both for the 1920 law and for the fierce repression of neo-Malthusianism are having second thoughts.

[Translated by F.A.R. from *Defense de l'homme*, November.]

## RELIGION OF ANCIENT MEXICO

(Concluded from previous page)

relic of what was probably a more advanced and pacifist culture than that of the Aztec "Prussian militarists." It is on record how the Spanish conquerors used the legend of the White God to further their schemes. Today Mexico is still, ethnologically, largely an "Indian" land. History displays strange turns! Today the descendants of the Aztecs have created what is perhaps the most advanced *secular* state in the New World.

Friday

THE I  
Office  
£1  
OrdersCorr  
prin  
stillMajor  
Many  
S. Tr  
muchEdinb  
noc  
Manc  
day  
Sun  
Mers  
the  
Ho  
North  
Ev  
Notti  
p.n  
West  
froBrad  
13  
Cent  
Ed  
Fr  
Conv  
Tu  
lar  
Leice  
13  
Nott  
Pa  
W  
Orpi  
Re  
Et  
Sout  
W  
"VTHI  
helo  
16tl  
Lor  
a d  
fun  
are  
Swi  
HoSor  
pos  
cre  
the  
tak

# THE FREETHINKER

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

THE FREETHINKER will be forwarded direct from the Publishing Office at the following rates (Home and Abroad): One year, £1 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.

Major J. N. SHAIRP, C. J. LITTLE, E. BANNER and W. STELFOX.—Many thanks for your *obiter dicta* on the articles.  
S. TRENT and W. J. MCILROY.—Your methods of propaganda are much appreciated by us. See also today's "Notes and News."

## Lecture Notices, Etc.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.  
Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitz Site).—Every weekday, 1 p.m.: Messrs. WOODCOCK, SMITH, CORSAIR and FINKEL. Sundays, 7.15 p.m.: Messrs. MILLS, WOODCOCK, and SMITH.  
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).—Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE and R. MORRELL.  
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, January 13th, 6.45 p.m.: W. SHEPPARD, "Thinker or Believer."  
Central London Branch N.S.S. (Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, off Edgware Road).—Sunday, January 13th: G. H. TAYLOR, "World Freethought Press."  
Conway Discussions (Conway Hall), Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Tuesday, January 15th, 7.15 p.m.: COLIN McCALL, "A Secularist Looks at Humanism."  
Leicester Secular Society (Humberstone Gate).—Sunday, January 13th, 6.30 p.m.: E. WRIGHT, "World Disarmament."  
Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society (Co-operative Hall, Parliament Street).—Sunday, January 13th, 2.30 p.m.: Rev. K. WAIGHTS, "Citizenship."  
Orpington Humanist Group.—Sunday, January 13th (Sherry's Restaurant).—7 p.m.: Dr. K. McDONALD, "Medicine and Ethics."  
South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1).—Sunday, January 13th, 11 a.m.: CEDRIC DOVER, "What's Happening to Culture?"

## Notes and News

THE Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society will be held at the same venue as last year, on Saturday, February 16th, in the Mecca Restaurant, 11/12 Blomfield Street, London, E.C.2. It will, also like last year, be followed by a dance. We have every reason to believe that this year's function will be as enjoyable as was last year's. Tickets are 17s. 6d., and early reservation is desirable. Mr. Stephen Swinger, M.P., has kindly consented to be the Guest of Honour.

★

SOME time ago a member of the N.S.S. investigated the possibility of conducting secular services in Bournemouth crematoria. Little or nothing seemed to be known about the matter, though he was informed that many cremations take place without a service of any kind. He was persistent,

## The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £158 13s. 2d.; Wm. Adams (Canada), 10s.; A. V. Peries (Ceylon), £2 7s. 6d.; Wm. Forsyth, £1; J. W. M. Ward, 5s.; F. Newell, 5s.; R. Reader (Belgium), 2s. 6d.; A. G. Bedane, £1; Mrs. M. L. Rupp, 10s.; W. Everett, 5s.; R. C. Bosso-maier, £2; A. Hancock, 2s.—Total to date, January 4th, 1957, £167 0s. 2d.

## Appreciations

IN RECEIVING SUBSCRIPTIONS to the Fund, we usually also get appreciative comments on THE FREETHINKER. These are always received with gratitude, if not with acknowledgment. The following are among those lately to hand:

"Where I live—in a country district—there are not many unbelievers, though I know of many in Belfast. The few there are will not let their unbelief become known too widely. . . . I leave back copies of THE FREETHINKER in public vehicles, etc.—(N. Ireland.)

"Week after week it is borne upon me that THE FREETHINKER is the very last paper I shall ever give up taking."  
—(O.A.P., London.)

"I am a reader of only a few months, but look forward to it with anticipation every week. One fault—there is not enough of it."—(Liverpool.)

"I wish I could afford to deliver THE FREETHINKER into the hand of every believer who still has the intelligence to profit from it."—(Birmingham.)

however, and eventually successful. After much correspondence with the Town Clerk, he reports that the Council, at its meeting of December 4th resolved "That having considered correspondence hereon and a report by the Town Clerk, subject to all arrangements being made to the satisfaction of the Parks Superintendent, permission be granted as and when necessary for the holding of Secular Services in the Chapel of the Bournemouth Crematorium."

★

MR. W. J. MCILROY, of Highgate, London, has taken advantage of a useful method of publicising the National Secular Society. He pays a weekly sum to have the Society's address and aims exhibited in a shop window in a popular thoroughfare. We thank Mr. McIlroy and commend the idea to others who are able to rent space in shop window-cases.

★

THE Bishop of Bristol's appeal for subscriptions from the public of the Bristol Diocese for an amount of £240,000 to enable our religious "leaders" to "take the Church to the people," has reached the half-way mark. The phrase used by the Bishop, "taking the Church to the people," is a theological expression meaning that business is bad: in plain language, the people won't come to church. The intention, in this "city of churches," is to build yet more churches, this time on the new housing estates. The Bishop is pleased to note that "responsible heads of companies readily recognise the claim made on them by the fact that their employees living on the housing estates are among those for whom the churches and halls are needed." These "responsible heads" have already donated some goodly sums from the profits they have gained from their workers—Bristol Aeroplane Co. Ltd. and Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd., £10,000 each. How generous and considerate of our religious masters to "take the Church to the people"—once the people have paid for it out of their own pockets!

# Truth and the New Testament - 1

By H. CUTNER

FOR SHEER IGNORANT FATUITY, it would be difficult to surpass the series of articles published recently in London and provincial newspapers under the general title, "The Bible was Right," dealing mainly with the so-called "Life" of Jesus.

The author (I believe) is a converted Jew, Dr. H. J. Schonfield, who spent 30 years translating the Greek New Testament into English; and his book has been published under the title of the *Authentic New Testament*—the word "Authentic" no doubt being the operative word. On the strength of this, he is referred to as a "scholar," and this might well have been allowed if he had not tried now to prove that the Bible was right. It is to his credit, however, that he does not insist, as did Dr. Werner Keller, that it is "Science" which proves it. This is a great pity, all the same, for it would have been most intriguing to get a list of scientists who believe in the Virgin Birth and can prove from Science that it must have happened exactly as described in God's Precious Word.

And how does Mr. Schonfield prove the Virgin Birth? He completely ignores it! He does *not* show how the Bible was right when it detailed the way an Angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream to tell him his wife was going to have a Babe by the Holy Ghost. It would not be unfair to say that even the Editor of the *Evening News* or the other Editors who are so sure the Bible was right would not care to tackle a story that is difficult to read without laughing. How does an Angel, a *real* Angel, not just a trumpery dream angel, appear to anybody in a dream?

Mr. Schonfield, however, plunges straight away into the story of a family of "humble origin" having a child "born to be king" — a phrase so very reminiscent of a series of plays by that distinguished all-believer, Miss Dorothy Sayers, triumphantly produced by the BBC. There is not a scrap of proof — if words have any meaning — even if there really was a Jesus, that he ever became a "king." Nor, if the Gospels are true or "right," that his father and mother were "of the family of David." All Christians (and this must include Mr. Schonfield) insist that Jesus was God Almighty, born of the Holy Ghost and Mary. He had no more to do with the family of David than he had with the moon. But as he was once a Jew, Mr. Schonfield knew that the expected Messiah who was to lead the Jews to freedom and prosperity was to be of the House of David; and as he was completely unable to deal with the contradictory genealogies of Matthew and Luke, which proved conclusively that it was Joseph and not Jesus who was descended from David; and proved just as strongly that Joseph, unlike all other men, had *two* fathers he very quietly skipped discussing whether the Bible was right here, and went off to quite another subject. This is one I have often mentioned here — when did the birth of Jesus happen?

If Jesus was born before Herod died, then the date *must* have been before 4 B.C. But according to Luke, it took place when Cyrenius (or Quirinius) was Roman Legate of Syria, and that was *after* 6 A.D. because he ordered a census about that time. It has been supposed that Quirinius had been Legate also about 6 B.C.; so to square that with Luke (who gives no date) Christians have tried to make out that there must have been *two* censuses. Even for Mr. Schonfield this is too much, for history knows of only one — that mentioned by Josephus. How does Mr. Schonfield show us here that the Bible was right? Very simply. It appears that Joseph (of Nazareth) *thought* there was to be

a census in 6 B.C., so he went with his wife to his "ancestral home" — Bethlehem, and there Jesus was born. Or rather, as Mr. Schonfield puts it, "the king was born." Not in a cave like so many gods, or in a house as Matthew implies, but in a manger.

The reader will see how, with a flick of the pen, so to speak, the eminent scholar can "prove" that the Bible was right. Almost every statement in the New Testament indicates that Jesus was of "Nazareth," that is, he was *born* there; but as the Jewish Messiah had to be of the family of David, and David was of Bethlehem, Jesus had to be made to be born in Bethlehem — though, unlike all Jews whose "surname" indicated the place of their birth, he was always called "of Nazareth."

It was Mr. Schonfield's duty to prove that there really was a Nazareth in those days. There is not a scrap of historical evidence for this — all the evidence we have proves that Nazareth was completely unknown then. Still, this is one of those points that a Jewish convert most conveniently can forget after he has accepted Christ as his Saviour. And it was his duty also to deal in detail with his claim that Jesus was descended from David — as he would have had to be if he were really the expected Jewish Messiah. Mr. Schonfield skips every difficulty though, to his credit, he has managed in this way to hoodwink nearly all his readers, including not a few hard-headed editors.

We don't get either any discussion on the wonderful "prophecies" from the Old Testament which filled and still fill so much of Christian apologetic literature. We have all met Christians almost in tears pointing out how "our Lord" was "foreshadowed" in various parts of the Old Testament, the writers of which could have no idea that they were "prophesying" the Saviour of Mankind a thousand years before his miraculous birth. Mr. Schonfield discreetly avoids any discussion of such a dangerous — for him — topic. To prove the Bible was right, it is much easier to copy the incidents of the life of Jesus given in the Bible in slightly different words — and, hey, presto! the Bible was right! Mr. Schonfield sometimes gives his own version of the Greek as if that made an incredible yarn any more credible. In this delightful, if primitive and incompetent method, I am sure he could prove that the story of Aladdin was true or "right."

Of course, we were bound to come to John the Baptist, the "forerunner" of Jesus, especially as he is mentioned by Josephus; though I may as well add here that this is no proof of his "authenticity"; for the Christians who forged the bits about Jesus in the work of Josephus would have no qualms about forging a bit about John. In any case, the two accounts completely contradict one another. But the way Mr. Schonfield slides over the difficulties connected with John compels my admiration.

Jesus was baptised by John, and he saw "the heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him; and there came a voice from heaven *saying*, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness." What a magnificent chance our eminent scholar had in bringing this wonderful proof straight from God Almighty himself that Jesus was not only God "Incarnated," but also his "Beloved Son." Yet there is not a word about it. We get here the "heavens opened," a Spirit — it is not clear whether this is the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost — and a Dove, to say nothing of a Voice from Heaven. And I hope it is not rash of me to ask the Editor of the *Evening News*,

and any other Editor, whether they believe this beautiful story apart from Mr. Schonfield, and whether they can explain why he did not deal with it?

When we are told that Jesus — or Mary or John — took a walk in a garden, or addressed some people, or went to a synagogue, or had a meal, the question as to whether these are true or "right" does not really matter. Merely to copy such incidents from a book, even from the Bible, does not guarantee their authenticity; but they are not incredible in themselves, any more than some of the adventures of Aladdin are incredible. But when we come to

Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp, we certainly do question that story, and the same thing with Jesus and his Divine Miracles.

Mr. Schonfield runs away from "miracles" as fast as he can. Not for him are the Angels singing Christmas carols at the birth of Jesus, or the Spirit descending like a Dove from the "opened" Heavens. It is much easier to explain what the road to Bethlehem now looks like, or why Jesus spoke in parables. And that people can be found who do not see this is a real tribute to the power of Christianity to dope them with superstition, fear, and credulity.

## Rate Relief for the Clergy

By COLIN McCALL

ON AUGUST 2ND, 1956, the *Daily Mirror* reported (under the headline "Parsons Go Rate Free") that the cost of living for every vicar, priest and minister in Huddersfield was going down. The previous evening, the Town Council had decided to exempt all vicarages, presbyteries and manse from rate charges, an Alderman remarking that this was an opportunity to do something more than pay lip-service to the Church. Since then, other Councils have followed suit, though not always without opposition from some Councillors. Mr. F. Palmer (of Market Harborough Rural Council), for instance, protested that rate-payers were generally being called upon to pay a heavy increase in rates, and yet church ministers were now being made a "special class" who were going to enjoy rate relief. He thought — according to a *Reynolds News* report — that "it was all wrong."

Still — as the Market Harborough Chairman indicated — "it was accepted that minister's homes were legally eligible for such relief." This, we regret to say, must be accepted. The relevant "Rating and Valuation (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1955," amended the law "as respects rating and valuation for rating." And Chapter 9, Section 8 (1) a, covers "any hereditament occupied for the purposes of an organisation (whether corporate or unincorporate) which is not established or conducted for profit and whose main objects are charitable or are otherwise concerned with the advancement of religion, education or social welfare."

It seems to us — as it seemed to Councillor Palmer — grossly unfair that ministers of religion should be made a "special class" who were to enjoy rate relief. Indeed, it is invidious that there should be any distinctions in connection with the paying of rates: the only fair method is that all should pay. But the law has been passed making it possible to grant relief. As the official jargon has it, "Be it enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by authority of the same . . ." Without wasting time doubting the advisability of the "advice and consent" that Her Most Excellent Majesty received, and without dwelling on the rather special interest of the Lords Spiritual in this affair, what can be done about it?

As we read the Act, the Market Harborough Chairman was incorrect when he stated that "there was nothing the Council could do about it." The Council — as we see it — can do everything about it. Section 8 (4) specifies that "The rating authority for a rating area shall have the power to reduce or remit the payment of any rate charged in respect of a hereditament to which this section applies for the first year of the the new list or any subsequent year . . ." The power, then, to reduce or remit any rate rests with the

rating authority concerned: this, surely, includes the power *not* to reduce or remit.

On this basis, individuals and organisations should protest to their local authority and, in fact, try to prevent the exemption of vicarages and the like.

If this course fails, application for exemption should be made by every organisation "not established or conducted for profit" whose objects may be defined as advancing education or social welfare. To gain similar exemption to that being enjoyed by an increasing number of religious "hereditaments" is not likely to prove easy, but it should be tried. Co-operative Guild halls, Workers' Educational Association offices, Trade Union premises, come to mind as candidates for relief.

As a test case, the National Secular Society applied for such relief. It seemed to fulfil the requirements of the Act. It is not established for profit and its main objects aim to advance education and social welfare. Certainly our offices are more concerned with the promotion of these than is the average vicarage, presbytery or manse; but, of course, the exemption of these is not on grounds of educational or social value, it is specifically on religious grounds.

At 41 Gray's Inn Road, there is a library for the use of members of the Society: there is a collection of journals from many parts of the world which may be read on the premises: study classes are being held there weekly; and money is regularly being spent on the organisation of lectures in many parts of the country. At the present time, an American graduate who is preparing a doctorate thesis spends many hours a week in one of our offices, consulting old copies of the *National Reformer* and similar records. Conceivably, these activities may not seem educational or of social value to some Christians, any more than the activities of the Roman Catholic Church would seem so to the Protestant Truth Society, or the activities of the latter to the Catholic Truth Society.

The law, however, *should* be above such matters, and should be administered impartially. We regard ourselves as a Society concerned with education and social welfare. As such, we applied for exemption from rating. The reply from the Town Clerk of the Borough of Holborn read as follows:

"With reference to your application for relief from rates under the above Act, this has been carefully considered by the appropriate Committee of my Council, who are of the opinion that your Society does not come within the provisions of the Section.

"I regret, therefore, that your application under Section 8 must be refused."

It becomes ever more clear that Councillor Palmer was correct in saying that the clergy were now being made a "special class" enjoying rate relief while ratepayers were

generally being called upon to pay heavy increases. What possible justification can there be for this? There is a legal one but there is assuredly no moral one.

Take two similar houses, side-by-side, one occupied by a parson or priest, the other by a layman who is buying or renting. On what grounds can one justify the former's relief from rates? We can see no valid reason for such unfair discrimination. The law permits it, but local authorities do not have to enforce it. We should like to see local authorities refusing to do so, and we call on individual voters, councillors, owner-occupier associations and the like, to urge their councils to do precisely this.

## Impressions of Eire

MY LAST two annual holidays have been spent in Eire. I was first there in 1904, and I have been interested in reading travel and other books dealing with this country. The latest is *Irish Journey* by Dr. H. Sutherland, from which I learn that a book by this author, *Laws of Life*, being a popular account of love, marriage, divorce, birth control, contraception, the safe period, the law of growth, sterilisation of the unfit and euthanasia, was banned.

It seems that in 1926 the Government of Eire appointed a Commission to advise on Evil Literature. The Commission advised the banning of books "written with a corrupt intent or aiming at corruption by reason of their appeal to sensual or corrupt instincts and passion." The result of the Commission led to the Act for the Censorship of Publications which became law in 1929. Under this Act the Minister of Justice may ban the sale of any book condemned by the Board of Censors. Incidentally, Dr. Sutherland describes the law on this subject in Britain.

In 1946 the Government of Eire set out an Appeal Board under the chairmanship of a Judge of the High Court, to which authors and publishers whose works had been banned could appeal.

The first edition of *Laws of Life* was published in 1935. In Eire on October 10th, 1941, the Minister of Justice banned the sale of the book on the grounds that it was "indecent and obscene."

Several facts emerge. The book had been on sale in Eire for about six years. Dr. Sutherland says, "I understand that this book is now accepted by the Eire Customs and the second edition may be imported without let or hindrance."

In 1942 the Senate had a long debate about the Board of Censorship and Sir John Keane moved a vote of censure on the Board. The debate continued for four days and the result was: For the motion, 2; against the motion, 34.

As showing the intricacy of the Roman Catholic control over the thinking of the people of Eire, I give below further extracts from the book:

"I do not believe that *Laws of Life* was banned for the chapter on the Safe Period. A larger book, *Control of Life*, was published in September 1944. This book has two chapters on the Safe Period. It also received the *Imprimatur* from the *Westminster Diocese Board of Censorship*. The publishers, Burns, Oates and Washbourne, London, publishers to the *Holy See*, were excused from printing the ecclesiastical approval. Nevertheless this book was not banned in Eire, where the fifth edition is now selling.

"I believe that *Laws of Life* was banned because I had written in the cold language of physiology an account of the function of sex. This could harm no one from the age of puberty upwards. In Eire, too, many people, including clerics, regard ignorance as synonymous with innocence. *These persons should inquire how many Children of Mary from Eire are now prostitutes in Piccadilly.*"

In one book I read that a photo of monkeys could not be published because it might be used as a proof of evolution! I think this is a splendid illustration of the mental control exercised by the Roman Catholic Church not only in Eire but other countries.

T. D. SMITH.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### BULWARK AGAINST CATHOLICISM?

I was astonished to read the letter of Mr. Howard Ehalt, an American, advocating Monarchy as a bulwark against Catholicism. Evidently he is unaware that Roman Catholicism is making headway in this country and is the only section of the Christian religion that is growing. The B.B.C. in the past always put forward the excuse that this is a Protestant country when rejecting claims for Free thought to be on the air but have had to capitulate to the Roman Catholics, who have now dug themselves in and have a director of broadcasting. What would Mr. Ehalt and the majority of Americans say if they had a Mr. Edinburgh touring the world in a Royal Yacht costing 2½ millions and £2,500 per day to run, using enough electricity to supply a small town and employing 200 men permanently, while at the same time the people are asked in the national interest to save?

The power of the Court is notorious and the basis of the rampant snobbery in the country with its toadies and hangers-on. If the Monarchy is the best form of constitution, then we must advocate as desirable the House of Lords and all other forms of hereditary succession. The growing power of Roman Catholicism will not be curbed by a Monarchy but by free expression of Free thought ideas on Radio, T.V., etc.

W. MORRIS.

### A POSER

Why does the Christian religion "get into a sorry mess without the Jews" (H. Cutner, December 7th)? Is it possible that Roman Catholicism, from which Christianity here appears to stem, came from Egypt when that land was overrun by the Romans?

C. J. LITTLE.

[But so was Palestine overrun by the Romans.—H.C.]

## NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY 51st ANNUAL DINNER

*followed by a Dance*

All SATURDAY, 16th FEBRUARY, 1957  
Welcome at the MECCA RESTAURANT

11 - 12 BLOMFIELD STREET, E.C.2  
(Near Liverpool St. and Broad St. Stations)

RECEPTION 6.30 P.M. DINNER 7.0 P.M.

Vegetarians Catered for Evening Dress Optional

Guest of Honour: STEPHEN SWINGLER, M.P.

TICKETS 17/6 each from the Sec., 41 Gray's Inn Rd., W.C.1

## THE GREAT MYSTERY

The survival of the soul or spirit after death is one of the greatest mysteries of man's existence. Even the rationalist finds it hard to be convinced that human personality is finally extinguished.

Christian religion is not alone in preaching of a life to come. But what do we mean by Heaven and Hell? Or by "the resurrection of the body"?

The SUNDAY TIMES has invited a number of eminent people of different persuasions to tell what they believe about the mystery of life hereafter.

Next Sunday, 13th January,

BERTRAND RUSSELL

(EARL RUSSELL), O.M., F.R.S.,

GIVES A RATIONALIST'S VIEW OF  
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE

Future contributors will include:

H.H. The Aga Khan The Abbot of Downside  
Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding Sir Basil Henriques  
Mr. Christmas Humphreys, Q.C. Bishop Wand  
The Rev. W. E. Sangster

In view of the ever-increasing demand for the

**SUNDAY TIMES**

you are advised to order your copy in advance