

The Freethinker

Vol. LXXVLL—No. 23

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Fivepence

ACTUALLY, Pentecost is a Jewish festival—though, strangely enough, the word does not occur in the Old Testament, and only twice in the New. Its origin is quite unknown, but like so many religious festivals in general, this “feast of weeks,” as it is also called, was probably a fertility rite of some kind in Palestine long before the Israelites overran the country. When it was made into a Jewish ritual, the magic number seven was artfully interwoven into it—for it is exactly seven weeks from Easter Sunday to Whit Sunday, or 49 days ($7 \times 7 = 49$).

Who first called the feast “Pentecost” is also quite unknown, but the name was in use when the Book of Acts was finally compiled.

That is, the festival was so called by the early Christians who had been converted from Judaism. But when exactly did this happen? Nobody knows. According to Acts, it was during Pentecost that the disciples of Jesus were assembled in Jerusalem—but unfortunately the Jewish historian Josephus knows nothing whatever of this assembly. He knows nothing at all of any part of the story in Acts.

For example, Josephus hasn't a word to say about Jesus as recorded in Acts addressing his disciples—“And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” (Acts, 1, 9.) Nor does he record the speech Peter made “in those days” which followed the aerial flight of Jesus to Heaven. There were, we are told, “one hundred and twenty disciples,” quite a number, but though their names were all known, there isn't a hint of them in Josephus. Although he has quite a lot to say about what happened in Palestine in the year 33 A.D., he certainly knew nothing whatever of the eleven Apostles (Judas was dead) and the election of Matthias.

Tongues of Fire

When they had all assembled again, “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . . and there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

This story is soberly recounted, and is unequivocally believed by every true Christian. In the course of a long experience with believers, I have never found one who had the slightest difficulty in swallowing the “cloven tongues,” the “Holy Ghost,” and “the Spirit.” It is true, of course, that our bishops and priests much prefer to talk about the “our Lord” going about “doing good” than refer to the Book of Acts. How can they describe a “cloven tongue of fire”? When artists, particularly when working for the Church, have to depict a “hellish” dragon, they find there are few things more frightening than the animal's “cloven tongue of fire.” It is a great pity that we are not told what must have been the reactions of the Apostles when they felt a fiery cloven tongue settling upon them. Were they

frightened? Did the fire burn them or what?

But more astonishing things were to happen on or after this marvellous Day of Pentecost. We are told that at the time “there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven”!! It seems incredible that such hopeless nonsense could have been written down and believed. Fancy God's Holy Writ telling us that there were Jews in “every nation under heaven” and that they

had managed to come to Jerusalem at that particular time! How did they get to Jerusalem, say, from America, or Siberia, or even Australia?

Paul or Jesus?

Acts is supposed to have been (mostly at least) written by Luke as a continuation

of his Gospel, though written much later. It gives the only so-called contemporary account of the way the Apostles and disciples of Jesus and converts acted in the days following the death of Jesus. When Ernest Renan finished his famous *Life of Jesus*, he followed it up with *The Apostles*, in which he set out to describe “the organisation of the Church of Jerusalem, its first trials, etc.” His extraordinary adulation of Jesus made him indignantly deny, as so many Christians affirm, that Paul was the real founder of Christianity; and he points out that in Acts, Paul is not even considered an “Apostle.” “Jesus alone is its true founder,” he insists. And he adds that neither the much-quoted Papias nor even Justin mentions Paul. Yet Acts is mostly concerned with Paul—and, of course, Peter. How much of what is recorded for us is “history”?

Well, Renan himself, though in *The Apostles* he is always quoting Acts, is forced to admit that “the historical value of Acts is open to grave objections.” He is ready to admit that the dates given for the events in this book “are only approximate.” Naturally, he does not think this matters much. All you need do is to speculate about it, and it must be “approximately” true. Even the “discrepancies, however unsolvable they may appear, should be at least held in suspense.” It was very hard for Renan to give up anything whatever in his beloved Christianity—except *perhaps* the miracles.

Acts does not really give us the story of the Apostles but mostly of Peter and Paul, and the author does his best to show how alike they are in many things. Even the speeches which he puts into their mouths are alike. They are purely imaginative and were *never* uttered. The book itself must have been written late in the second century, and there is no doubt that the author went to Josephus for some of his material which he used to describe purely mythical events. If the Epistles of Paul are genuine and really describe that Apostle's adventures, then the Book of Acts must be a work of imagination, for it contradicts almost everything the Epistles ascribe to Paul. Take, for example, the assertion in Romans 11, 13, where he says, “I am the Apostle of the Gentiles.” In the same Epistle, 15, 16, he says, “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.” Yet in Acts, from the beginning to

VIEWS and OPINIONS

Pentecost

By H. CUTNER

the end, he continually preached to the Jews in their synagogues.

No Historical Proof

There is not a scrap of contemporary history which mentions Paul or Peter or any of the Apostles. There is not a scrap of evidence for the stoning of Stephen. Nobody has yet proved that the Saul or Paul of Acts ever wrote a line of the Epistles.

Moreover, quite a good deal of the so-called early history of Christianity must actually have been seen by Josephus if it happened. He must have heard Peter and Paul preach in the Jewish synagogues. He must have met Jewish converts to Christianity and even argued with them. Yet his detailed history of the Jews and of Palestine knows *nothing of them whatever*.

Josephus even went to Rome about the year 62 A.D., just at the time when Paul was also there—and he obviously never met this fiery preacher who filled the synagogues with his new religion and who must have made

hundreds, probably thousands, of converts. Josephus knew nothing whatever about Peter, who was Bishop of Rome and the first Pope from about 42 to 65 A.D. If these heads of a thriving new religion had been alive, it was simply impossible for Josephus to have omitted writing about them.

No Evidence

The truth, however unpalatable it will be to all Christians, is that we have no genuine clue at all to the beginnings of their religion. It may well have begun as a small sect away from Judaism *before* the Christian era—as many suspect since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The history of early Christianity was then later written up with hints from the Old Testament and Josephus by Greeks who, in addition, invented a "Christ" about the second century. Whether this is so or not, we can rest assured that the story in Acts is pure fiction. There was no more a Peter or a Paul than there was a Jesus.

God in the Rockies

By G. H. TAYLOR

IN THE course of a long letter the Rev. Roland H. Meyer writes:—

"Permit me to give the testimony of one of your own number. H. Musgrave Reade, an out and out atheist, was Secretary of the National Secular Society when Charles Bradlaugh was its (*sic.*) President. He says 'I read eagerly Strauss' *Life of Christ* in which he contended that the Gospel account was on par with the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome and that Christ was simply a myth probably taken from the Hindu God Krishna . . . I became what is termed a freethinker. Why a rejector of Christianity should have a monopoly of this title I have never been able to understand.

"In 1900 Musgrave Reade was appointed by his employer to undertake a long journey in America during which he was privileged to see some of the breathtaking beauty of that Continent's scenery. In a railway car he was climbing the wonderful rocky mountains and his soul was so awed that he asked himself, 'Surely all this is not the result of fortuitous circumstances, blind chance matter and force. Might I, after all have been mistaken? I felt I must face the question. I fell on my knees and cried, "O God, if Thou dost exist reveal Thyself". I asked for light and it came like a flood! The whole car seemed full of light. It was the veil torn off my mind by the Spirit of God. I arose from my knees filled with joy, saying "God is!" . . . And I knew I beheld the glory of God and his wondrous works.'"

Well, one might start by pointing out the discrepancy of about ten years between the date of the "conversion" and the date of "being the Secretary of the NSS in Bradlaugh's time." Perhaps this difficulty could be got over in some way, but there is no need to pursue the problem further because no one called "Musgrave Reade" was ever Secretary of the National Secular Society, either in Bradlaugh's time or any other time.

No Secretary of the NSS has ever suddenly gone to earth in adoration of Mr. Meyer's God or any other God. The only prominent member of the NSS who ever took up a religion was Annie Besant, and it was not Christianity that attracted her but Theosophy. (And it is worth pointing out that among the readers of THE FREETHINKER today are Theosophists who claim that Theosophy is not a religion at all! We have letters from them to this effect.)

If Mr. Meyer would like to contact a real NSS Secretary instead of an imaginary one, we suggest, as he is near London, that he should endeavour to meet the present one, Mr. McCall, in debate. He would probably learn

more that way than from hearsay.

The possibility remains that the chameleon Musgrave Reade could have been a branch secretary, but Mr. Meyer will not expect any voluntary organization to keep track on the vicissitudes of every minor official away from headquarters. Of one thing we are certain. Musgrave Reade, if we are to go by his own words as quoted, was not an atheist. He may have *called* himself an atheist, or he may not, but that is another matter.

In any case, his "conversion", if it existed, is easily discounted. Prior to becoming a freethinker and atheist, I was myself a minor official of the Unitarian Church, as a youth. Once you start calling individual cases in evidence, they cancel one another out, and the argument is taken no farther.

The claim of Musgrave Reade to be an atheist will not stand examination. The "wonderful rocky mountains" which convinced him there must be a God have been the cause of violent deaths to both man and beast. The "beautiful scenery" which captured his imagination was only beautiful in contrast to some of the ugly places Mr. Meyer's Mr. Reade had been in. If "God's world" was all beautiful, every bit of it, through and through, with no squalor, no ugliness anywhere, the beauty of the mountains could not have made the same impact.

Beauty exists because ugliness exists. It is a matter of contrast. If "God" accounts for beauty then he cannot escape responsibility for the other side of the medal. If the sight of mountain beauty made Mr. Reade believe in a Supreme Being, then he was logically bound, the next time he saw a lamb with its side ripped out by an eagle, to conclude that the Supreme Being was an Almighty Devil. Every argument for God is, in reverse, an argument for a Devil. And if it is Mr. Meyer's God, or Mr. Meyer's Mr. Reade's God, then he is also responsible for the Devil.

No atheist could possibly be taken in by such means, or, to put it another way, anyone who *could* be so deceived, would not, by definition, be an atheist, for he could never have understood the implications of atheism.

Finally, we are fascinated by the statement: "I felt I must face the question. I fell on my knees . . ." But that is not facing the question at all. It is being bowled over by it.

A Great Rationalist

By COLIN McCALL

GEORGE Gilbert Aimé Murray was born of Irish Catholic parents in Australia on January 2nd, 1866. He died on May 20th 1957, at the age of ninety-one, one of the most revered and respected of Rationalists. Unfortunately, there has been a distinct tendency to play down his rationalism in some of the obituaries. The *Daily Telegraph*, indeed, never mentioned it. True, the *Manchester Guardian* called him "the greatest humanist of our generation", and indicated that "Having broken away from Catholicism in his boyhood, he remained steadily aloof from all Christian connections . . ." But a begrudging note may be detected in the final part of the sentence — "often co-operating with Rationalists." And the next one informs us that Dr. Murray was "deeply spiritual, constantly concerned about the purpose of human existence."

It was good to turn to *The New Statesman and Nation* (May 25th), where "Critic" (Mr. Kingsley Martin) said quite openly: "One of the things I valued most about him was that he maintained his rationalism. Murray, thank goodness, did not get softer or more gentle to irrational beliefs as he got older." This — to a non-classicist at any rate — seemed to be the essential Dr. Gilbert Murray. Pleasing, too, to find his grandson, Mr. Philip Toynbee, writing of "the firm rationalism in which he never wavered even when times were very bad." (*The Observer*, May 26th). "Only two months ago", added Mr. Toynbee, "I was asking him whether his present state — he was not a man for soft or dishonest treatment — had at all affected his convictions about the finality of death. He said that it had not."

A letter in front of me now, confirms that he remained an active Rationalist to the end. Written to his dictation in August last year, it expresses "proper sympathy" with the Humanist Council's BBC Protest Meeting and "gladly" gives his name to the list of supporters. He signed the letter himself.

Dr. Murray has given his own story of his path to Rationalism in the Preface to *Stoic, Christian and Humanist*. It was, he tells us, the miracle of the Gadarene swine that first shocked him, before he left Australia at the age of eleven. "It seemed to me so monstrously cruel", he said, "to drive — or be indirectly responsible for driving — a lot of unoffending pigs over a precipice. It was just the sort of thing I could imagine being done by very wicked boys, the kind of boys that tortured animals and loved bullying." "The germ of criticism once admitted", he continued, "I began in my teens to be uneasy about other elements in the New Testament: the unreasonable cursing of the fig-tree, the doctrine of eternal damnation, and the whole conception of vicarious atonement." His first revolt was thus moral. Later, study of comparative religion and anthropology afforded "intellectual reasons for disbelief". Finding that each successive civilisation has had its own explanation of the world; that each has "claimed to be alone and exclusively, the Way, the Truth and the Life"; he considered it "improbable that the particular country and age in which I happened to be born had received an exclusive revelation of the truth." And, though acquaintance with cultured clergymen like Bishop Gore dispelled his anti-clericalism, Dr. Murray said: "I did not seriously change my beliefs or disbeliefs." He must be classed with the minority about whom he wrote, who, in the more civilized communities such as in ancient Greece, "have tried to keep their sense of the duty of man towards his neigh-

bour and his own highest powers clear of the confusing and sometimes perverting mythology on which it is traditionally said to be based." "Its real basis", he added, "is the rock of human experience."

Professor of Greek at Glasgow at the age of twenty-three, and later Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, Dr. Murray never lost interest in the world outside. On the contrary he worked patiently and continuously for world peace — through the League of Nations, through UNO, by disseminating a genuine liberalism. He was assuredly one of the great humanitarians, one of the great men of our time.

Leicester Log

RELYING on the obsolete Sunday Observance Act of 1780 which prohibits "the holding of public entertainment in any house, room or other place to which persons are admitted by payment of money or by tickets sold for money on a Sunday", the Leicester organiser for the Lord's Day Observance Society registered a protest against Sunday motor racing at Mallory Park near Leicester. This Act of 1780 is so outdated that not only do the police ignore it but, as occasion demands, even assist in the regulation of the crowds. But there is always the chance for some pious "informer" to come along and invoke the law, as in the present instance.

The first reaction of the owner of the racing circuit was to offer the LDOS half an hour for a religious service on the track, with any collection for charity. The LDOS insisted on complete cancellation of the meeting, however. In face of this, the owner proceeded to hold the meeting as arranged, thus to defy the obsolete law—which is, as everyone knows defied regularly in countless places Sunday after Sunday. The owner told the reporters that he thought it was high time the archaic law of 1780 was rescinded," and asked, "Where is the M.P. to tackle this problem with an urgent Private Bill?" He further described the law as "a relic of feudal times and a barbaric age."

The *Leicester Mercury* leading article commented, in some spirited opposition to the LDOS, "People should be free to entertain, exercise or enlighten themselves on a Sunday as they please so long as they are not a nuisance to others. When the laws are exploited by one set of people against this principle then it is time something was done about bringing the law into line with present social behaviour."

The race meeting, naturally, took place, but the police, due to the LDOS intervention, were given the extra trouble of seeing that various conditions were fulfilled. They took photographs at the turnstiles and questioned officials. The police contingent included plain clothes men. The owner had been warned that if he charged for admission he would be prosecuted. The only charge was for some car parking. He also made an appeal on the public address system on the course inviting people to take up the matter with their M.P.'s.

We shall be watching for any further developments.

FOSSE.

NEXT WEEK

ROME AND CANTERBURY

By F. A. RIDLEY

This Believing World

Again we must register our accord with the clergy. They simply will not marry divorced persons in church, and quite rightly too. What Jesus said, or is supposed to have said nearly 2,000 years ago on marriage and divorce, must stand for ever. His views on Hell and the Devil are just as faultless. Moreover, the most astonishing thing about the matter is that so many divorced people, whether they are in the right or in the wrong, appear to want the blessing of the Church. They simply can't do without Jesus.

★

Everybody, whether divorced or not, has to be married by the State to make it legal. Unless a church is state-registered for marriage, it cannot perform a legal ceremony; and the blessing of the Church is of no more value than the blessing of a cinema. The clergy seem never to put the matter this way but it should be emphasised on every possible occasion.

★

Our old friend, the Rev. B. Graham, after his phenomenal success in bringing over 49 millions of the inhabitants of England to Christ, is now having a shot at converting New York, including the 3 million Jews living there. This should be easy. We learn that he planned his campaign for seven years, and there are 900,000 dollars behind it. That sum has got to come back from the converts, and he will of course get it. And probably as much more.

★

Needless to add, Billy senses something far more in New York than he did in effete old Britain. "I sense," he said, "a moving of the spirit of God that I didn't see in London or Glasgow." Of course. The people of New York would be less likely to cough up the necessary if told bluntly that the moving spirit of God hadn't a chance in New York. Anyway, there will be quite a reception awaiting the converts. There will be 2,000 ushers, a chorus of 4,000 voices, and 4,000 counsellors all ready to welcome all those who "pledge themselves to Christ." That ought to fetch 'em in.

★

By the way, it is rather interesting to learn what is the Jewish reaction to the campaign. Some rabbis don't seem to be worried, but others — according to the *New York Times* are very critical. One of them said — and he may suffer the pains of eternal fire for saying it — that "one does not find heaven on earth in the short walk down the aisle in a spirit of ecstasy." And his conclusion was that "the materialism of our age will not have given way to Mr. Graham's spiritual battalions." This rabbi does not know the power of Christ.

★

One characteristic which distinguished the late Dr. Gilbert Murray was — as his grandson, Mr. Philip Toynbee testified in *The Observer* — "the firm rationalism in which he never wavered even when times were very bad." And of Christianity, he said that "it had reduced the gods to one which made it that much easier to get rid of them all at a single thrust." And he was just as assured "about the finality of death." This is particularly interesting because he certainly believed in telepathy — a belief which *Psychic News* would have liked to equate with a belief in "survival." But Dr. Murray did not believe in survival.

★

Another "soap box" orator for Christianity was introduced by ITV the other Sunday. He was Dr. Frank Sheed who has been addressing all sorts of audiences in parks and at street corners for 36 years. What has surprised him most, was the almost complete absence, these latter days, of Atheists. Atheism, in fact, he was glad to say, had almost completely disappeared from our public life. It never oc-

curred to Dr. Sheed that Atheists have long since discovered the utter futility of asking questions of a man like him who knows all about God — what God thinks, and wants and hopes. They would prefer rather to see TV or listen to the radio that be fobbed off with the slick answers he generally gives questioners.

★

Dr. Sheed actually told his listeners that anybody who thought the Gospel stories were "fairy tales" proved that he had never properly read the Gospels! The story of Jesus being carried about by a Devil was not a fairy tale, nor that of Jesus walking on water, or feeding thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes. But as usual the questions asked showed a lamentable lack of knowledge of religion in general, and of the Gospels in particular. Our ITV would never allow an instructed Atheist to address a crowd of Christians.

The Rising Generation

XXII — HEAVEN

CHILDREN AT school are taught that Heaven is a real "place" where they will go, when dead, if they are good — "good" meaning absolute belief in God and Jesus Christ, and doing their will whatever that means. If you ask your teacher where is Heaven, he will at once point upwards to the sky, and you will be severely admonished if you don't believe him.

For of course there is no such thing as "Heaven" up in the sky. What you see is part of the immense space which contains all the stars, suns, etc., which we call the "Universe." The idea that in it is also something in which God Almighty sits with Jesus (and for that matter, Abraham and other Bible worthies) at his side is just sheer credulity and superstition.

Of course, it is the Bible more than any other book which has fostered this nonsense. In its pages you will find the story of Elijah going up in a chariot "like a whirlwind." And there is no doubt whatever that this yarn was used by the writer of Luke when he said that after the Resurrection Jesus was parted from his disciples "and carried up into Heaven." Mark tells us that Jesus "was received up into Heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

The truth is that the Bible writers hadn't the least idea of what was above them, no doubt imagining it was just a few miles "high". Jacob, for example, dreamt that you could set up a ladder reaching to Heaven, and that angels could go up and down it; and the writer of the Tower of Babel described how its builders could reach Heaven if they only built it high enough. For both Matthew and Mark, "the Heavens opened," and the "voice" of God was heard; even "angels" came down from Heaven to help good Christians.

The Christian Heaven is just another version of the Greek Olympus, the seat of the Greek Gods, just as Jesus the "Lamb" of God, is just another version of Adonis, who was also the "Lamb" of God. Just as there is no evidence whatever for the real existence of Adonis, so there is no evidence for the real existence of Jesus — except as a "verbal expression." And Heaven itself is also nothing but a "verbal expression."

H.C.

A CHRISTIAN PUNCH

Speaking to Sydney (Australia) Grammar School boys, the Governor-General (Sir William Slim) told them: "If you are saying your prayers in a barracks and some oaf laughs at you, finish your prayers and then walk across and punch him in the nose." All in the spirit of Christian brotherly love, we presume.

THE FREETHINKER

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All Articles and Correspondence should be addressed to THE EDITOR at the above address and not to individuals.

THE FREETHINKER can be obtained through any newsagent or 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.

Details of membership of the National Secular Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, 41 Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C.1. Members and visitors are always welcome at the Office.

TO CORRESPONDENTS

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

CORRECTION

We must apologise for faulty proofing of Mr. Wolfgang's article, "Are Jews really Necessary?" On p. 168, line 20 "of" should be "on", and then the lines 21-23 are misplaced: line 23 should follow line 20. The sentence reads:

"The Jewish 'kosher' rites based on the belief that dangerous 'life spirits' dwell in the blood bent on vengeance for the slaughter of the animal whose flesh is prepared for food; food taboos have nothing in common with modern knowledge of hygienics, but are as primitive a superstition as the *mesusah* and *tephillim* are means of exorcism, as crude as any found in Central Africa (where similar genital symbols are used to ward off evil forces.)"

R. GORMAN.—There is no better book against the Bible than our *Bible Handbook* which has been a best seller since Foote and Ball devised it. It quotes as far as possible the Bible itself against the Bible.

Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch N.S.S. (The Mound).—Every Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MURRAY and SLEMEN.

Leicester Secular Society (Market Place) — Sunday, June 9th, 6.15 p.m.: NSS Conference Outdoor Demonstration. Various Speakers.

Manchester Branch N.S.S. (Deansgate Blitzed 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.

Nottingham Branch N.S.S. (Old Market Square) — Thursday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE. Friday, 1 p.m.: R. POWE.

INDOOR

Orpington Humanist Group (Sherry's Restaurant) — Sunday, June 9th, 7 p.m.: R. BENJAMIN, "The Technique of Democracy".

Notes and News

FROM ARUNDEL, SUSSEX, comes exciting news of a competitive grab for children by rival Sunday Schools. "The Baptists," laments the vicar, "are enticing children away from my Sunday School. I don't pinch their children. Why should they take mine? I hear that the Baptists have a van going around the council estate on Sunday which takes children to their Sunday School. Some children have said they prefer the Chapel because the Baptists have treats and give prizes." There is obviously an opening for some enterprising competitor to oust both claimants by organising Sunday trips to Bognor and Littlehampton. This would be further evidence of the great religious revival.

BILLY GRAHAM, opening his latest campaign, had an almost full Madison Square Garden in New York.

The Freethinker Sustentation Fund

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £224 19s. 5d.; A. Hancock, 2s.; W. Keane, 5s.; W. Scott, 10s.; Anon., 2s. 6d.; H. Howard, 5s.; Anon., 4s.; Total to Date. May 31st 1957, £226 7s. 11d.

After charging his listeners with being sinful citizens of a modern Sodom and Gomorrah, 458 penitent heathens were persuaded to walk to his rostrum and declare themselves "converted for Christ". Billy asserted that there was "more boredom in America per square inch than any other place in the world." Perhaps that is because there are also more religious quack-doctors to the square mile.

* * *

FOLLOWING THE BELGIAN Government's cutting of subsidies to Catholic schools, His Eminence Cardinal Van Roey, Archbishop of Malines, accused the governmental authorities of adopting atheist-Communist principles in an attempt to destroy Christian education, and complained, "In the field of education the present Government imposed upon the country a nefarious and unjust law which hurts freedom of conscience and violates equality among citizens." Democracy must be preserved at all costs! At least, until the Catholics gain power.

* * *

DR. JOSEPH RUDDERHAM, R.C. Bishop of Clifton (Bristol), speaking to the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, said: "Our aim is the conversion of every single man, woman and child in this country. Even one single conversion is a triumph, and for the fact that there were 14,000 last year we should thank God."

"Our job is to see that Anglicans get God's truth. Even some of us R.C.s say 'Why not leave them alone? They are good people. They are of good faith.' Of course they are: but we must carry out the charter given to us. We cannot, and we shall not, rest until not one person remains outside the Catholic Church." Following this declaration of perfect tolerance for opposing beliefs, Douglas Hyde, ex-news editor of the *Daily Worker*, spoke. He explained that the 7,000 Communists who had left the party needed spiritual help and it was a duty for Catholics to bring them to peaceful and quiet minds in the Christian faith. Not only the Communists but millions of people in Britain were spiritually starving and needed to be fed. He neglected to say that the Catholic Church, when in power, believes in forcible feeding.

N.S.S. Executive Report

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22nd — Present: Messrs. F. A. Ridley (Chairman), Alexander, Barker, Cleaver, Corstorphine, Gordon, Johnson, Shepherd, Taylor, Warner, Mrs. Grant, Mrs. Venton, the Treasurer (Mr. Griffiths) and the Secretary. Mr. P. G. Young also attended as observer at the invitation of the Committee. Apologies from Messrs. Ebury and Hornibrook. The new Portsmouth Branch was officially and unanimously approved. New members were admitted to Bradford, Kingston, Nottingham and Parent Branches (8 in all). Recent correspondence with the two West Indies Branches was reported and a gift of badges was authorised. The imminent dissolution of the Humanist Council and proposals for future co-operation with its former member societies were considered. The Annual report was read and adopted with slight modifications. Conference arrangements were discussed. It was agreed to send a donation to the Christian Action Fund for the defence in the South African Treason Trials. The next meeting was fixed for June 19th.

OBITUARY

It was with deep regret that we learned of the death of Mrs. Emily Grout, the wife of our contributor Mr. E. H. Grout.

Mrs. Grout was herself an active worker in the freethought cause for many years. She was known for a time as a speaker at Brockwell Park, Victoria Park, and North London. Her parents had attended the famous freethought Hall of Science.

Mr. Grout was cremated at Wolverhampton, without any ceremony or service.

St. George and the Dragon

By F. A. RIDLEY

ON APRIL 23RD EACH YEAR the English people celebrate the Feast Day of their patron saint, "St. George for Merry England." The adjective "English" should be carefully noted, for the other nations which inhabit the British Isles (sic), enjoy respectively the patronage of other members of the celestial hierarchy, Andrew (Scotland), David (Wales), not to mention St. Patrick for the no longer "British" Emerald Isle! We have never yet heard that English Jews converted to Christianity have ever claimed a patron saint of their own. Perhaps they do not really need one, since the Jewish Founder of Christianity may reasonably be expected to look after his own countrymen.

Is our patron saint an historical character? The assertion, we believe, has been disputed. Perhaps he really was a Shakespearean myth written up by the Immortal Bard, who gave him the same birthday as himself, April 23rd. After all, Christ was given the same birthday—December 25th—as an older god, Mithra! But if St. George was really historical who was he and where and how did he live and die? Even the Tory patriots who annually meet to celebrate "our" patron saint, do not claim that in his earthly existence our national saint was an *Englishman*! As England is still a Christian country—or so, at least, the BBC keeps on assuring us—the existence, whereabouts and the mortal achievements of our national saint ought, or so it appears to us, to be a matter of heartfelt interest to every right- and left-thinking Englishman. And then there was St. George's inseparable better—or worse—half, the Dragon: who was he, where did he live, and upon what, since, at least if the commonly received tale is true, he so notably failed to live on St. George?

In searching for the origin and nature of historical legends, the best thing to do is always to begin with the *known* rather than with the unknown. It was the method preferred by Sherlock Holmes, and what was good enough for the sage of Baker Street is surely good enough for us. "Elementary, my dear Watson." Let us apply this method to the quest for St. George and the Dragon. Now, beginning with the known *facts*, this initial one is indisputable: St. George was *not* the original patron saint of England. That much is quite certain whatever may have been the case with his saintly coadjutors Saints David, Andrew, Patrick, not to mention St. Denis of France and St. James of Spain. The *original* patron saint of England was an *historical* character, none other than our old friend, Edward the Confessor, the last but one of the Saxon Kings; actually he was half a Norman as his successor Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, was actually half a Dane—whose death at the start of the melancholy year 1066 was the beginning of "all that" happened in that famous and bloody year. St. Edward the Confessor, the Founder *inter alia* of Westminster Abbey, was specially canonised by the Church for his transcendent piety, and from the eleventh to the fourteenth century seems to have been pretty generally regarded as the patron saint of the land over which he had once so piously reigned. St. George, with the inevitable Dragon, had not yet arrived upon the English scene.

The cult of St. Edward was undoubtedly pleasing to the Anglo-Saxon masses, who still made up the bulk of the common people of England. But it was not so agreeable to the haughty Norman knights who, under the ruthless leadership of William the Conqueror in 1066, had become the rulers of England by right of conquest. The Norman

Barons did not relish a patron saint—or so we may perhaps presume—drawn from the same race as their despised Saxon serfs. They looked elsewhere for a patron saint and they found him in the romantic East. For the two centuries that followed the Norman Conquest formed the era of the Crusades, in the course of which the Norman Knights, armed with the blessing of the Church, performed fabulous deeds of knightly heroism and even set up ephemeral Christian kingdoms in the Muslim East. It was in the course of these daring expeditions that the Normans picked up St. George in the course of their Holy War against the Dragon of infidelity. The cult of St. George seems always to have been a *military* cult. Long before he emigrated to the West, St. George was the celestial patron of the Byzantine army. St. George represented the principal "invisible import" brought home by the Crusaders. When King Edward III, in the middle of the 14th century, founded England's premier order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter, and dedicated it to the *oriental* St. George and *not* to his own predecessor St. Edward, one can say that "St. George for England" had finally superseded Edward the Confessor as the patron saint of England. Since then, neither St. George nor the Dragon has ever looked back!

Our search for any individual St. George is still shrouded in mystery. But at least we have now discovered his whereabouts and have at least a clue as to his possible nationality. St. George was *not* an Englishman—that at least is certain, nor does any tradition ever associated with him represent him as ever visiting the land which was later to adopt him as its patron saint. St. George was, also, neither an Anglican nor even a Roman Catholic. Contrarily, he was a *bona fide* canonised saint of the Orthodox Eastern Church and he, or whoever may have been his historical prototype, was a Greek or rather a Byzantine, a member of one of the hotch-potch of Levantine nationalities which made up the Byzantine Empire. This much seems quite certain about the knightly Oriental cuckoo in the English nest!

We must repeat that the Crusaders did not *invent* St. George, they only *discovered* him. St. George was known by repute in the West long before the Crusades began, at the very end of the 11th century. The Anglo-Saxon historian, the Venerable Bede (c. 700 A.D.) gives the Feast of the Martyr as at present, on April 23rd. In the East his cult can be traced back even further. An inscription from Syria, dated by Mr. G. J. Marcus in the fourth century, and certainly not later than the sixth, refers to "the cherished relics of 'The glorious Victor, the Holy Martyr, George.'" Mr. Marcus concludes his learned inquiry into the sources of the Georgian legend by indicating that all the oldest records converge on the pagan persecution of the Church at the beginning of the fourth century by the Emperors Diocletian and Galerius for the starting point of the legend. George, our author comments, is always depicted as a martyr and "victor" over death. One account depicts George as a soldier in the Imperial Guard who tore down Galerius's Imperial Decree forbidding Christianity. In that case, the famous Dragon would have been one of the persecutors, perhaps the Emperor Galerius himself, depicted as a dragon like his predecessor, Nero, in the Biblical Apocalypse. A contemporary Christian account refers to Galerius as "the Dragon of the Abyss." Gibbon preferred a different version: his George was a dishonest contractor of Alexandria, justly punished by the last pagan

Emperor, Julian the Apostate. But, even if Gibbon was right, we must still look to the fourth century and the last pagan persecution of Christianity, for the origin of George or his prototype. Be that as it may, the Middle Ages were not interested in the niceties of historical criticism, and in any case anyone rash enough to query the existence of England's immensely popular patron saint would have probably quitted this mortal scene in some unpleasant manner. Besides, they *knew* that St. George existed. Did not Henry VII and his whole court turn out on March 27th, 1504, with all the Knights of the Garter in full regalia to receive, if not the saint *in toto* at least a priceless relic in the shape of his saintly leg? We have a contemporary menu of the junketings which followed the arrival of the holy relic in which pickled oysters appear to have figured largely. Nowadays the Order of the Garter still perpetuates the memory of the "Glorious Victor," England's patron saint. A long line of illustrious Knights have been enrolled under St. George's banner, from Edward the Black Prince, the hero of Crecy, to Clement, Earl Attlee of Walthamstow. But we believe we are correct in stating that no relic has yet been found of the Dragon.

The Qumran "Bible"

By J. MARTIN ALEXANDER

(*Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect*, by Theodore Gaster, Secker and Warburg, 30/-, paper cover 10/6.

PROFESSOR Gaster has made available for the first time in the English language the principal sacred scrolls of the Qumran Sect from the shores of the Dead Sea.

Everyone can now read the text of their Manual of Discipline, the hymns and psalms they chanted, the curious "War of the Sons of Light against the hordes of Darkness" so reminiscent of the Book of Revelation, and the commentary to the Book of Habakkuk, with its references to their Messianic "Teacher of Righteousness" the identity of whom has aroused such speculation. A study of these sectarian texts is of first importance for Freethinkers, because, having recovered from the initial shock these documents gave to Christian orthodoxy, the scholars (both Christian and Jewish) are now attempting to explain them away and play down their fundamental challenge to accepted beliefs. In the dilemma which arises from having to attempt a reconciliation between the facts and Christian mythology Prof. Gaster, like J. M. Allegro and others before him, performs some interesting intellectual somersaults in his "interpretation." Faced with the difficulty of a sect with "Christian" beliefs and ritual, at least a century prior to Christ, he resorts to dubious argument without the least shred of evidence.

Because the Christ myth must not be attacked, and in view of the simple fact that the existence of the Qumran community explains in a satisfactory manner the organisational origins of the Christian church, we find such suggestions as James, the brother of Jesus, being the "teacher of righteousness"—this despite the fact that the community had revered their alleged martyred teacher for more than a century. Because of the organisational and ritual similarities, including the leadership, discipline, and services; we are offered the idea, without any explanation, that the early church drew its bishops and presbyters from these monastics. There is even a hint that Jesus himself was a member and received his early training at Qumran!

The apologists for Christianity, facing facts which completely undermine the Gospel story, are confronted with this problem of explaining the ideas of the authors of the scrolls and yet still retaining the belief in the Christ myth. Prof. Gaster, in his assessment of the relations between the

sect and Christianity, falls into the error of others in trying to equate the teacher with an actual historical person. He cannot say that he is identical with Jesus, so goes half way, suggesting he is his brother (or should it be half-brother?) In doing this he clashes with others, some of whom see the teacher as a symbolic figure, and some who identify him with a much earlier period. To quote from *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Allegro), "Jesus is much more of a flesh and blood character than the Qumran teacher could ever be."

The argument is obvious. The Jesus story is true, every miracle of it, the Qumran story a vague messianic myth. On the other hand, Dr. A. Powell Davies, a very liberal minded Christian scholar, in his work *The Meaning of the Scrolls* is convinced that the teacher was a real person and has this to say: "Did he then exist? It cannot seriously be doubted. The fact that there is no account of him by secular historians is no more impressive in his case than in that of Jesus. Was Jesus himself the Teacher? The possibility has been considered but has had to be discarded; *the Teacher and Jesus are separated by at least a century.* What we can be reasonably sure of is that the Teacher of Righteousness was a priest, perhaps a high priest of the Temple, who lived in either the first or second century B.C." These contradictory views are enlightening. The attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable take us nowhere, because it is too much of a shock to devout Christians to accept the fact that in these scrolls lie the most probable origins of Christianity.

What a chance for a straightforward freethought interpretation of the scrolls as the organisational basis of the church, and the messiah of Qumran as the figure around which the Christ legend has been built! Despite his desire not to upset orthodoxy too much, Prof. Gaster has given us a very fine and scholarly translation of the documents and thereby given us the first real opportunity of understanding what the Dead Sea Community believed and taught.

Science Front

In the American *Science Digest* for April there is an interesting theory of how life began, formulated by Dr. I. M. Levitt. He starts with dust particles of infinite variety shot from volcanoes to heights at which they become exposed to the intense ultra-violet radiation of the primitive sun. The steps are traced—always without departure from the language of materialistic evolution—by which the first carbon compounds were synthesised. Through æons of time the next stages follow—from organic compounds to protein molecules, and thence to the first cells, the tiniest units of life. Next, for the cell to grow it must "feed," i.e. absorb matter from its environment, or, to use his arresting phrase, "drink deeply of the concentrated chemical soup."

It is no steady unbroken "upward" trend that he proposes. It is not such a simple tendency towards greater complexity and efficiency as would give some hope to holistic or vitalistic theories. Sometimes the food sparked the cell to survive by growth; in other cases death would result.

No Supreme Scientist, as it were, is seen bending over Nature's crucible.

In the story of evolution, size, beyond a certain point, can well become a handicap, a fact any schoolboy can understand on a visit to see the giant prehistoric specimens in the Natural History Museum.

To return to the theory, it was from powerful cosmic rays (which are still bombarding the earth) that the energy was found for transforming the "colloids" into reproductive

organisms. When size became a handicap fissioning took place. The daughter cells would loosely repeat the structure (without any question of the imposed Pattern so loved by opponents of biological materialism). At first only the nucleus would have a protective sheath, but the final stage came when the primitive cell acquired a comprehensive covering, thus to imprison its characters for ever.

★

The last meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science discussed the Malthusian problem of whether food production can keep pace with population increase. The scientists were pessimistic as to the prospect of improved techniques ever compensating for the increasing number to feed. According to Prof. Osborn, speaking of U.S.A., he was of opinion that "such benefits as may come to our country through a much larger population will be outweighed by the disadvantages and problems that will arise."

★

A California rocket expert, Dr. Zwicky, foresees the possible creation of new planets by man, using the forces unleashed by the H-bomb. He regards as possible the transference of huge masses from the smaller planets to the larger, and in this way the earth's moon could be enlarged. This would (by increasing its gravitational pull) enable it to hold an atmosphere dense enough for human purposes.

We wonder if this is one answer to the Malthusian problem!
G. H. TAYLOR.

CORRESPONDENCE

RELIGION AND CRIME

THE *Evening Standard* of May 13th contains an account of the suicide of a girl of sixteen the day after the funeral of her fiancé. Her brother in giving evidence is reported as saying: "All she could speak of was her young man. She asked us if there was a world hereafter. We said 'Yes'". It is not often that such direct evidence is given of the results of the belief in another world which is the basis of such religious thought. But there can be no doubt that many of the familiar crimes are due to the belief that there is a better world somewhere in the skies. Other types of suicide can also be traced to this superstition. If this superstition were not so widespread, it is not so likely that the mass of people would tolerate the slaughter of the young and middle-aged in wars.

C. H. NORMAN

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY ANNUAL CONFERENCE LEICESTER . WHITSUN 1957

RECEPTION AND SOCIAL

The N.S.S. Executive Committee cordially invites delegates and friends to the above at the

SECULAR HALL, 75 HUMBERSTONE GATE
at 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8TH

THE CONFERENCE

will be held at the
SECULAR HALL on SUNDAY, JUNE 9TH
at 10.30 — 12.30; 2.30 — 4.30. Lunch at 1 p.m.

OUTDOOR DEMONSTRATION

SUNDAY EVENING, 6.15 p.m. MARKET PLACE,
LEICESTER

(If wet, in the Secular Hall, Leicester)

AN OUTING

will be arranged for WHIT MONDAY

NATIONALISM

I agree heartily with Mr. Macfarlane that local nationalism is not the highest ideal, but he is not the first Freethinker to discover it. Paine claimed the world as his country about a couple of centuries ago. There is no logical reason why one should be more sympathetic towards a man who happens to have been born in the same geographical locality as oneself. I always felt more sympathy for Persian peasants than for British Burra sahibs. Although they were far from being angels, the peasantry had simple virtues not to be found in the Burra sahib-log.

Nevertheless, there are a large number of people to whom love of country appears to be the acme of virtue, and some of them may be Secularists. There is already an army of genuine Secularists who are kept out of the N.S.S. because of its political activities. Is it proposed to add to them?
W. E. HUXLEY

RELIGION IN THE U.S.A.

HAVING lived in the United States myself, I was very much interested in the rather sharp differences which the Gallup Poll established between typical British and American attitudes toward religion.

I would suggest, however, that the widely voiced feeling in the United States that religion *per se* is a good thing can be accounted for less by the advertising of particular churches than in a general advertising campaign (sponsored by a non-profit Advertising Council) which has gone on for several years urging people to go to church on Sunday. Not to a specific church, mind you — that would be a sign of intolerance — but to *any* church (or synagogue) preaching *any* religion. Similar stress is laid upon the importance of having faith, *any* faith, as long as it is expressed in sufficiently vague and symbolic terms. Needless to say, such a campaign is not an easy one to battle. When precision in explaining their doctrines is frowned upon even among the most religiously minded, to bring a critical mind to bear upon these subjects is considered the acme of bad taste.
E. W. HAMILTON

FREETHINKERS AND POLITICS

PERSONALLY, I do not think that any freethinker should interest himself in a general way in political parties.

The freethinker should be active in a special way by forming public opinion.

Throughout history, no political party has ever passed an act until it was forced to do so by public opinion. This force has been generated by the intelligent minority of the public, who by hard work have created public opinion.

When men of any political belief get their legs well under the mahogany tables, there is a tendency to remain static, unless it be a man of the character of Charles Bradlaugh, and he was one in a million.

Thomas Paine was the first man to advocate old age pensions, yet it took over a century of hard work in creating a strong public opinion before the politicians gave way. It took over a century of agitation, often with violence, before politicians granted the right to vote.

Freethinkers throughout history have always taken the lead in forming public opinion. All reforms are brought about by the creation of public opinion, which is a reflex of scientific development. All governments and their jackals in the Christian church make a terrific resistance to change, and they have to be fought from outside.
PAUL VARNNEY

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